

Elaine Heath steps down as Duke Divinity dean; Greg Jones steps in

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by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [August 29, 2018](#) issue



Elaine A. Heath (left). Photo by Les Todd / Duke University. L. Gregory Jones (right). Photo courtesy of Duke University.

After two years as dean of Duke Divinity School, Elaine A. Heath stepped down on August 2, the school announced.

While on sabbatical until January, she will continue as professor of missional and pastoral theology. She is also a strategist for a pilot project at Duke Divinity called the Neighborhood Seminary, a two-year program in lay theological education.

“I am delighted to now be able to resume research, teaching, mentoring, and service,” she wrote in an email. “In particular I am eager to develop more courses that integrate spiritual formation, pastoral theology, and missional theology, which will help our students as they prepare for complex ministries. I have a strong interest in the theory and practice of Christian community as a means of healing societal and individual wounds.”

During Heath's tenure the school faced conflict with some students and faculty related to racial diversity and sexuality. During her 2018 State of the School speech, a group of students walked out to demand a queer theology course and more affirmation from the faculty for LGBTQ students, Religion News Service reported.

In 2017 [a professor objected to a racial equity training event paid for and hosted by the school](#), an event Heath supported. After the Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee emailed all faculty to invite them, Paul J. Griffiths, then professor of Catholic theology, responded to the whole list that the event was "definitively anti-intellectual" and had "totalitarian tendencies." Later, after announcing that Heath had initiated disciplinary action against him for inappropriate behavior in faculty meetings and refusal to meet, Griffiths resigned.

With Heath stepping down, L. Gregory Jones, professor of theology and Christian ministry, who was dean of the divinity school from 1997 to 2010, reentered the position.

Ellen F. Davis wrote on behalf of the academic council's executive committee at Duke that Jones will be in the role "for several years, in order to guide the school through an important period of transition, address major challenges in theological education, and help us prepare the ground for a national search for a new dean."

Since his time as dean, Jones served as a senior administrator at Duke and Baylor universities.

"I enter this role with fresh eyes and a renewed sense of vocation," he said. "We have important challenges to address, including continuing the work of diversifying the faculty, staff, and student body, and building an ever-more inclusive and welcoming environment for all, so that we may have a richer common life."

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "People: Elaine A. Heath, L. Gregory Jones."