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Diversity, equity,  
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Honoring LSTC's  
visionary leaders



# epistle

SPRING 2024

*The magazine of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

## REFLECTING ON SEMINEX

WHY IT'S STILL RELEVANT TODAY

How today's theologians can draw on Seminex's enduring lessons  
to navigate the complexities of faith in our modern society.



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# epistle

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The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, forms visionary leaders to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

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ON THE COVER  
Faculty and student walking out of Christ Seminary – Seminex.

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Lutheran School of  
Theology at Chicago

## Effective history

Seminaries and the churches that sponsor them are deeply conservatizing. I refer here not to politics but to history. In a time when the latest meme displaces all that came before, we are a school that remembers. For us, the past is neither idol nor curse but a gift, a source, an encounter. You would expect that from a place that still listens to ancient texts and holds bygone thoughts in the present tense. Gadamer called it *Wirkungsgeschichte* – “effective history,” the past that bears upon the present, shaping us with its force and value. This *Epistle* is all about that.

Fifty years ago this season, almost all the students of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis walked off the grounds of that school into an uncertain future, drawing in their wake the bulk of the school's faculty and staff. For many months beforehand, the school's governing board fiercely accused the seminary faculty of teaching false doctrine, giving no specific charges or substantial proof, and then finally terminated them. Frustrated by the unfairness, in January the students called a moratorium on classes until the board formalized charges or dropped them.

When the board did nothing, the students voted to leave the school and continue instruction under the terminated faculty in another location, continuing their seminary in exile. That signal move led to the formation of Christ Seminary – Seminex, which settled in various sites in St. Louis for a time until many faculty moved to Hyde Park as the sixth predecessor school of LSTC. Today, of course, we cannot directly taste what they endured, bold and difficult as it was. But their story is still part of our story, a story we gratefully remember now.

Fifty years seems so long, and the relation between then and now feels scant. What do those folks back then have to do with us? Was theirs but a fleeting moment in time? Are we just building monuments to some lost, heroic era? Can such a heritage ever enlighten our challenges? These are serious questions to face not only now but during the Seminex reunion on campus this spring. For this brief moment, though, let me name just a few ways those actions by our forebearers a half century ago still resonate with the school we have become.

- One is how our commitment to a more public church is the fruit of something planted during the walkout. We still recognize that a life lived faithfully has visible consequences and faces genuine peril. As a Seminex grad once puckishly said about our public church curriculum, “Public church – I didn't know there was any other kind!”
- Another link is how the critical reading of scripture that cost the 1970s faculty their jobs is also still our commitment, seen in how we readily read biblical texts from womanist, postcolonial, intersectional, and other perspectives. God's wide mercy in scripture begins with openness to hear what it is fully, deeply saying – another Seminex gift.
- A final bond between then and now is the liberating power of the gospel so clearly spoken and lived by those who went into exile. It is easy now to doubt the value of a Lutheran confessional voice. But it is that voice that relentlessly holds to God's promise, urges us to trust this gift, and opens us to love our neighbor. This also we share.

There's one more chapter to this “effective history” – a personal favorite for me. Saturated by God's grace and justice, those brave ones long ago showed us how to have the nerve to **risk**. It's not about being foolhardy. It's about seeing and acting when the moment is right and the step is needed and the change embraced. In bold white on red, the old Seminex movement protest sticker declared, “Risk with Grace.” Let that be our witness today at LSTC, the effective history we bear to those who come after us – that God's love is enough for the risks yet ahead. 🌿



James Nieman  
LSTC President

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## A JOURNEY IN LEADERSHIP AND LATIN MINISTRY

Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla was retired for less than 3 months. Exploring new possibilities for LSTC brought him back to work.

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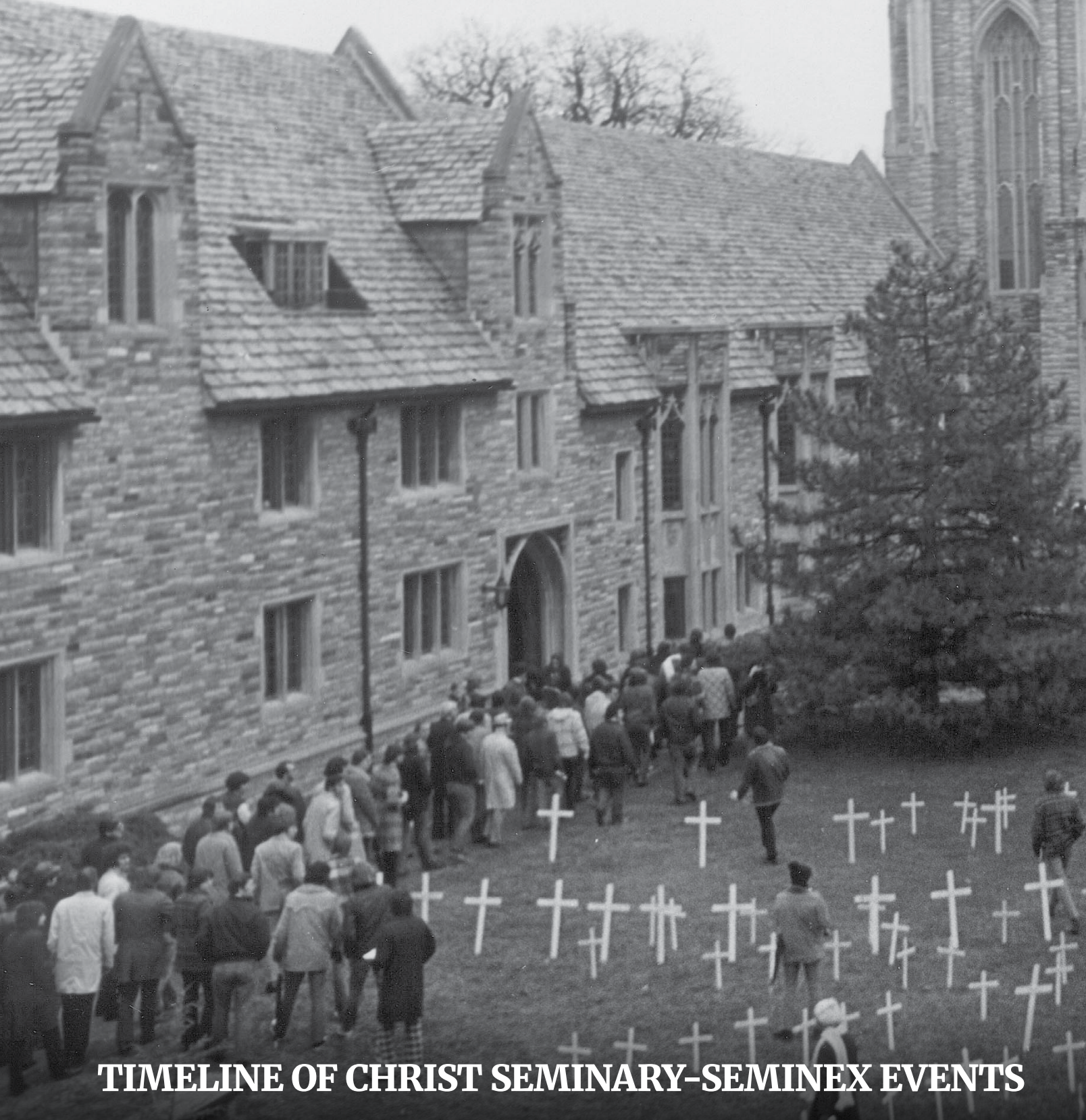
## VISIONARY LEADERS

LSTC honors four exceptional leaders at the 2024 LSTC Alumni Awards.

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## TIMELINE OF CHRIST SEMINARY-SEMINEX EVENTS

1970

**JULY 12, 1969**

Jacob A. O. Preus elected president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

**MAY 19, 1969**

John H. Tietjen elected president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

1971

**SEPT. 9, 1970**

Preus announces the appointment of a Fact Finding Committee to investigate the Concordia Seminary faculty

1972

**DEC. 31, 1971**

Board of Control of Concordia Seminary rejects the reappointment of Arlis J. Ehlen as a seminary faculty member



# REFLECTING ON SEMINEX

Dr. Kurt Hendel reflects on the movement's legacy and its enduring relevance today

By Keisha Dyson

In the history of American Lutheranism, the name “Christ Seminary-Seminex” resonates as a symbol of theological and ecclesiastical upheaval, courage, and enduring relevance. Its legacy serves as a living testament to the importance of diligent biblical study and persistent theological exploration.

Now, as LSTC commemorates the 50th anniversary of this movement, we are taking the time to reflect on Seminex—not merely as a historical lesson, but also by reflecting on its contemporary significance for modern-day theologians who face the complex challenges of a global society and of fulfilling Christ's call to be Christ's faithful witnesses in the world half a century later.

**JAN. 15, 1973**  
Seminary board completes interviews with faculty members and confirms that none teach false doctrine

**FEB. 17, 1974**  
Seminary Board requires the faculty to resume teaching and warns that refusal will result in breach of contract

**AUG. 13, 1973**  
Seminary Board of Control suspends Tietjen as president and faculty member but delays its action

**JAN. 20, 1974**  
Seminary Board suspends Tietjen

**FEB. 18, 1974**  
Faculty takes no action regarding the Board demand

**FEB. 19, 1974**  
Students decide to join the faculty in resuming instruction “in exile”; faculty, staff, and students walk off the campus after a worship service

**OCT. 12, 1974**  
Concordia Seminary Board removes Tietjen from office as president and faculty member

**JULY 12, 1973**  
New Orleans Convention of the LCMS condemns Concordia Seminary faculty members for teaching false doctrine

**AUG. 28, 1973**  
Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM) is organized

**JAN. 21, 1974**  
Concordia Seminary student body declares a moratorium on classes; Seminary Board suspends the faculty

**MARCH 10, 1974**  
Seminex classes begin at St. Louis University and Eden Seminary

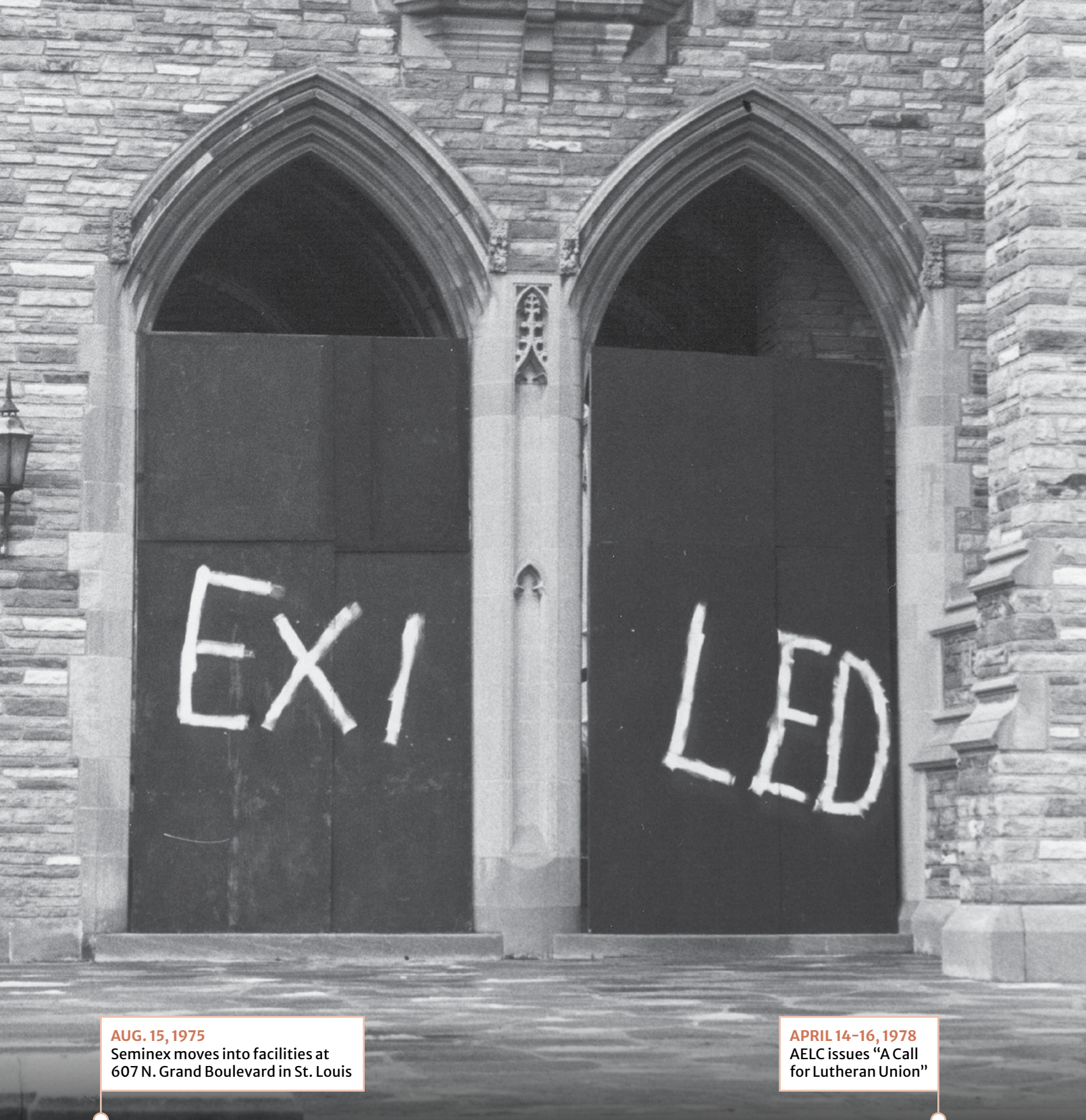
**JUNE 21, 1974**  
Concordia Seminary in Exile is legally incorporated

**MAY 24, 1974**  
First Seminex commencement

**FEB. 1, 1975**  
Seminex Board elects Tietjen as president

**JUNE 29, 1975**  
Missouri District official, Oscar Gerken, clears Tietjen of charges of false doctrine





**AUG. 15, 1975**

Seminex moves into facilities at 607 N. Grand Boulevard in St. Louis

**APRIL 14-16, 1978**

AELC issues "A Call for Lutheran Union"

1976

1977

1978

**JULY 4-11, 1975**

Anaheim Convention of the LCMS condemns ELIM, censures eight district president for ordaining Seminex graduates, and authorizes Preus to remove the synodical presidents from office

**DEC. 3-4, 1976**

Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches is organized with five synods

**MAY 12, 1977**

Seminex board decides to implement staff reduction

**OCT. 28, 1977**

The name of the seminary is changed to Christ-Seminary-Seminex after threats of legal action





Dr. Kurt Hendel



Lucille Hager



Paul Manz

*Ahead of LSTC's Seminex Conference, April 16–18, 2024, we asked Dr. Kurt Hendel, a former faculty member of Christ-Seminary-Seminex and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's Bernard Fischer, Westberg Distinguished Ministry Professor Emeritus of Reformation History, to explain the enduring relevance of Christ Seminary-Seminex and why it still matters today.*

#### DR. KURT HENDEL REFLECTS

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, a conservative Lutheran church body, witnessed a seismic rift over conflicting theological methodologies and theological perspectives. At the heart of the schism was the use of the historical-critical method—a scholarly approach of interpreting scripture within its historical contexts. The Missouri Synod, resistant to this method, clashed with theologians who saw it as essential for a faithful and rich

understanding of the Bible.

Dr. Kurt Hendel, then a seminarian at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, recalls this as a time of crucial vocational introspection. “I pondered whether I was called to serve the church both as a pastor and an academic theologian,” he reminisced. He decided to pursue a doctorate in church history and was invited to return to his alma mater as a visiting instructor in 1973.

The theological and ecclesiastical conflict within the Missouri Synod reached a crucial tipping point in 1974 when the President of Concordia Seminary was suspended, and the students called a moratorium of classes because the church body had charged the president and the majority of faculty members with teaching false doctrine. When the seminary leadership demanded that classes resume, the majority of students and faculty members of Concordia

Seminary, including Dr. Hendel, decided to leave the seminary and continue instruction in other locations, thereby giving birth to Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminex), which was eventually renamed Christ Seminary-Seminex. This new institution and movement, born out of a desire for faithful scriptural exploration, social justice, and ecumenical engagement, would become a beacon for those seeking a more faithful, critical, and nuanced approach to understanding of Scripture and their vocations as Christ's disciples.

According to Dr. Hendel, in addition to faithfulness to Christ and the gospel, the commitment to social justice became a defining pillar of Seminex's ethos. The Vietnam War, civil rights struggles, and nascent movements for gender equality were particular foci of the faculty's and students' commitment to address

## EXPLAINING SEMINEX

Seminex, an abbreviation for “Seminary in Exile,” stands as an important and relevant chapter in the narrative of North American Lutheran theological education during the latter half of the 20th century. Originating from deep-seated theological and ideological conflicts within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Seminex was the result of the growing tensions over matters of biblical interpretation, theological perspectives, ecumenism, and social justice.

The movement took root in the early 1970s when a group of faculty and students at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, affiliated with the LCMS, found themselves embroiled in disputes that ultimately led to the suspension of the seminary president and the accusation of heresy against theologically more moderate faculty members. In defiance of this conservative shift on the part of the LCMS, a significant cohort of students and faculty departed Concordia Seminary in 1974, establishing a new institution named Concordia Seminary in Exile-Seminex, signifying their status as a “Seminary in Exile.” Because of the threat of legal action, the name of the seminary was changed to Christ Seminary-Seminex in 1977. This exiled seminary aimed to cultivate a more open and inclusive approach to biblical interpretation, Lutheran confessional identity, ecumenism, and justice issues. 🌱

1979

**JAN. 22–23, 1979**  
AELC joins the American Lutheran Church–Lutheran Church in America Committee on Lutheran Unity

1980

**DEC. 14, 1979**  
AELC invited to join the ALC–LCA Consultation on Theological Education

1981

**NOV. 30, 1981**  
Representatives of LSTC and Seminex boards discuss proposals for closer relationships between the two seminaries





Rev. Dr. Everett Kalin

societal challenges. “Our goal was to make a faithful witness of the gospel and to live out the teachings of Christ in the contemporary world, actively participating in the pursuit of justice and equity,” Dr. Hendel noted.



Rev. Dr. Mary Konpka

**COMMITTED TO ECUMENISM** Furthermore, Seminex’s commitment to ecumenism set it apart in a landscape marked by denominational rigidity. Although the Missouri Synod began to tentatively explore



Rosemary Lipka

connections with other Lutheran communities, it eventually retreated from its ecumenical commitment. However, Seminex embraced the pursuit of dialogue and fellowship with fellow Lutherans as well as other

Christian communities. “Our commitment to ecumenism was a manifestation of our desire to break down barriers and foster unity within the larger body of Christ,” Dr. Hendel said.

## A TEACHABLE MOMENT LESSONS TO LEARN FROM SEMINEX

### SEMINEX TEACHES THEOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

Facing ecclesiastical opposition, Seminex demonstrated resilience. It teaches theologians to navigate challenges with

conviction, even when it means diverging from traditional paths and taking risks.

### SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT AS A THEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

Seminex’s commitment to addressing societal challenges—from the Vietnam War to civil rights, including the rights of women—inspires theologians to embrace the imperative of societal engagement. Theology, it asserts, should not exist in an ivory tower but resonate with the world’s struggles.

### UNITY BEYOND DENOMINATIONAL BOUNDARIES

The movement’s commitment to ecumenism remains relevant today. In a fractured world, theologians can learn from Seminex’s call for unity, encouraging dialogue and understanding across denominational lines.

### SEMINEX’S CALL FOR JUSTICE

The movement’s quest for justice—addressing racism, social inequities, and cultural challenges—is a beacon for contemporary theologians. It challenges them to recognize that justice is integral to faithful witness.

### THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION IN SERVICE OF JUSTICE

Seminex’s boldness in intertwining theological exploration with justice work challenges contemporary theologians. It teaches that faith is always active in loving service of God and the neighbor and that theology devoid of justice is incomplete.

### COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Seminex’s emphasis on communal identity in an era of increasing individualism resonates today. Dr. Hendel encourages theologians to foster community amidst digital isolation and rampant individualism.

**MAY 1982**  
LSTC, Wartburg,  
PLTS, and Seminex  
boards agree to deploy  
Seminex resources to  
the three locations

1982

**JAN. 14, 1982**  
Seminex  
moves to  
facilities at  
539 N. Grand  
Boulevard

**SEPT. 1982**  
Commission  
for a New  
Lutheran  
Church (CNLC)  
begins its work

1983

**SEPT. 8, 1982**  
AELC, ALC, and LCA  
conventions agree to  
unite the three church  
bodies and authorize  
a union process

**SUMMER 1983**  
Seminex faculty, staff, and  
resources move to three locations

1984

**MAY 1983**  
Final Seminex commencement







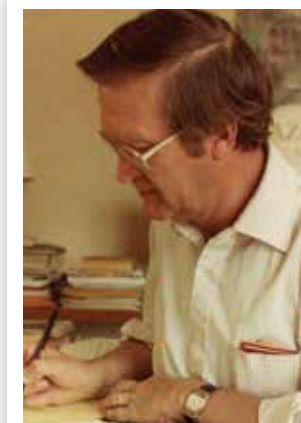
President John T. Tietjen

With the initial support of a grass-roots movement within the Missouri Synod, which named itself Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM), and eventually of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran

#### RELEVANCE FOR TODAY'S THEOLOGIAN

As theologians grapple with issues ranging from social justice to interfaith dialogue, Christ Seminary-Seminex beckons as a guide. Dr. Hendel urges contemporary theologians to embrace the movement's call—to be witnesses of Christ and to foster service in a world hungry for justice, compassion, and a theology that transcends ecclesiastical boundaries and recognizes the catholicity of the Christian heritage. ✝

Churches (AELC), Seminex was able to pursue its mission of preparing future leaders of the Church for nine years. However, the seminary also faced significant challenges. Among them were the recruitment and placement of students and the need to reduce the size of the faculty. Some parishes and districts of the Missouri Synod, congregations of AELC, and a few congregations called Seminex graduates. However, finding calls was often challenging, and it was painful to see graduates wait for calls, often for extended periods of time. The difficulty in finding ministry positions contributed to the decline of enrollment. As the student body decreased, the size of the faculty also had to be reduced. "We had to make difficult community decisions. The contracts of some faculty colleagues were



Rev. Dr. Robert Conrad

not renewed. Other colleagues sought and accepted calls to pastoral or other teaching positions, and it was painful to see dear friends leave the seminary community," Dr. Hendel reflected.

#### ENDURING RELEVANCE

Now, as Dr. Hendel looks back, he is absolutely convinced of Seminex's enduring relevance. Hendel says the movement's faithful dedication to Christ and the gospel, to the quest for justice, to diligent scholarly exploration of Scripture and the Christian heritage, and to fostering a clear communal identity continues to reverberate in the ethos of ELCA and beyond.

"The apostolic imperative to bear witness to Christ is as relevant today as it was during the Seminex years. The Church, in all its forms, must also recognize that its mission extends beyond doctrinal



Rev. Dr. Herbert Mayer

debates. It involves active participation in addressing contemporary ecclesiastical and global challenges, fostering a sense of community, and manifesting the individual believer's and the community's faith in loving service of the neighbor," Dr. Hendel emphasized.

The relevance of Seminex, he argues, lay in its ability to inspire a new generation of theologians and believers to engage with scripture critically, to champion justice boldly, and to foster communities of compassion and care.

In a world grappling with challenges, Dr. Kurt Hendel's reflections on the enduring legacy of Christ Seminary-Seminex serve as a compass—guiding the church toward a future where faith, justice, and community remain interwoven, vibrant, and profoundly relevant. ✝

1985

1986

1987

1988



**AUG. 29, 1986**  
AELC, ALC, and LCA conventions vote to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

**DEC. 31, 1987**  
Seminex ceases to exist as an educational institution

**JAN. 1, 1988**  
Beginning of the ELCA

From left: Rev. Dr. Alfred Von Rohr Sauer, Rev. Dr. Arthur Repp, and Rev. Dr. Robert W. Bertram.





## HOMEcoming AND SEMINEX 50TH ANNIVERSARY

# A Celebration of Legacy and Learning

Get ready for three extraordinary days as the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago hosts a unique blend of Homecoming and commemorates the 50th Anniversary of Seminex from April 16-18, 2024. The event will take place both in person at LSTC's new campus and online, offering participants a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

### CONFERENCE PACKAGES

**\$200** **ATTENDING – IN PERSON**  
Live interactions, hands-on experiences, and immersion in the on-site energy of the event.

**\$150** **ATTENDING – ASYNCHRONOUS**  
Flexibility to access conference content at your own pace, accommodating individual schedules.

**\$150** **ATTENDING – VIRTUALLY**  
Virtual participation, allowing attendees to join the conference from the comfort of their own space.

### ADDITIONAL DINNER OPTIONS

**\$75** **DINNER ON TUESDAY**  
Networking & camaraderie over a delightful meal.

**\$150** **DINNER ON WEDNESDAY**  
An additional opportunity to connect over dinner.

### EVENT SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS

**DAY 1**  
Witnessing Christ, Alumni Awards, Reception, and Seminex 50 Year Grad and Homecoming Banquet Celebration with speaker Peter Marty.



**DAY 2**  
Engage in sessions on Biblical Hermeneutics, Lutheran Confessional Heritage, Alumni Class Reunions, and Faith Active in Love. Enjoy dinner at Grace Lutheran and a Hymn Fest.

**DAY 3**  
Explore sessions on Singing the Word, Witnessing Christ in a Multicultural and Multi-Religious World, and Closing Worship with Bishop Yehiel Curry.

## PRESENTERS



Fred Niedner



Douglas Oakman



Kathryn Kleinhans



David Beckmann



Martin Seltz



James Thomas





# SHAPING THE EDUCATION OF TOMORROW

LSTC kicks off asynchronous learning project: Project Starling

By Keisha Dyson

In this ever-evolving digital age, technology has emerged not just as a tool but as an indispensable force in shaping how knowledge is acquired and disseminated. As brick-and-mortar institutions grapple with the demands of a changing world, LSTC recognizes that while the essence of theological education remains timeless, its delivery must evolve.

Driven by this need, LSTC's Board of Directors passed three resolutions in November 2023, signaling a paradigm shift at the seminary.

These resolutions jumpstarted an Asynchronous Learning Project that LSTC, dubbed "Project Starling." They allowed for funding during the early stages of the initiative, establishing a task force and research and

development.

The Asynchronous Learning Task Force, now called the Oversight Board, met for the first time in late January 2023. The group includes board members Mark Bartusch, DeWayne Cook, and Kristi Ferguson, along with LSTC faculty members Drs. Rafael Malpica-Padilla, Brooke Petersen, and Marvin Wickware. President James Nieman and BOD chair Terry Goff serve as co-chairs.

To ensure student voices are included, a student enrolled in TEEM or an alum and a student representative from MSA will be invited to join the Oversight Board, which meets monthly.

During the inaugural Oversight Board meeting,

an operational team was authorized to translate a vision into action. The team comprises LSTC's executive leader, Dr. James Nieman, Interim Dean Dr. Linda Thomas, faculty member Dr. Candace Kohli, and LSTC administrators Keisha Dyson, Rhiannon Koehler, and Richard Vivian.

An instructional designer will soon join the team to provide informed direction. This "operational team" currently meets weekly to drive the detailed implementation of the project.

This Board action sets the stage for LSTC to engage new and diverse audiences through a digital platform barrier, while catering to individuals with varied schedules and commitments. It represents a seismic shift to a theological education that is more accessible, inclusive and adaptive to the needs of a global audience. 🌱

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**THIS BOARD ACTION ... REPRESENTS A SEISMIC SHIFT TO A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION THAT IS MORE ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE AND ADAPTIVE TO THE NEEDS OF A GLOBAL AUDIENCE.**





# PIONEERING TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Dr. Linda Thomas is the first woman of color on LSTC's faculty and the inaugural Black female Dean

By Keisha Dyson

**D**r. Linda Thomas stands as a luminary figure in the ever-evolving landscape of theological education. Her transformative leadership at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago continues to reshape the narrative through diversity, equity, justice, inclusion and intersectionality.

Dr. Thomas has recently been appointed Interim Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs, alongside her role as the Director of the Albert "Pete" Pero, Jr. and Cheryl Stewart Pero Center for Intersectionality Studies. In these roles, she has come to symbolize change at LSTC, holding the dual distinction of the first woman of color on LSTC's faculty and the inaugural Black female Dean.

A guiding force in theological education, Dr. Thomas has made significant contributions to the LSTC in her scholarly work and to the institution itself.

From mentoring students to contributing to the public church curriculum and leading institutional diversity initiatives, Thomas is revered by her colleagues for shaping an inclusive and forward-thinking educational landscape while embodying the principles of justice and equity in theological academia.

#### A UNIQUE ACADEMIC JOURNEY

Dr. Thomas's academic journey is marked by her distinctive background. She holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from American University and a MDiv in Theology from Union Seminary (UTS). Her interdisciplinary foundation bridges the gap between the scholarly and spiritual, positioning Thomas as a formidable force in navigating the complexities of theological education.

At UTS, Dr. Thomas studied under distinguished scholars, Drs. James H. Cone and Cornell West. However, a Hebrew Bible class taught by Dr. Phyllis Tribble became a crucible of enlightenment for Thomas.

Most Old Testament classes start with Genesis, but Dr. Tribble began her class with Exodus. When they moved on to Genesis, Dr. Tribble revealed that there are two creation stories: Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

Dr. Tribble's interpretation of Genesis 1: 26-27 unraveled a fundamental misinterpretation that had previously shaped Dr. Thomas's worldview. The mistranslation of the Hebrew word 'hadam' had perpetuated gender hierarchies. Stunned by this revelation, Dr. Thomas began to challenge the church's narrative that women were subservient to men.

The Hebrew word "hadam" is translated as "man" and means humankind or a human. Thomas realized that by revising the verse with this newfound interpretation, the passage read, "God created a human. Male and female, God created them."

"Up to that point, I understood from Genesis 2:21-22 that 'man' was

created first," Thomas said. "Therefore, women were subservient to men, and I had lived my life accordingly."

Another pivotal moment in Dr. Thomas's academic development was when her advisor suggested that she choose between focusing on Black theology or feminist theology. Driven by an unwavering commitment to her identity as both a Black person and a woman, Thomas refused to accept a binary choice and embraced her "woman self," rising above societal expectations.

Her time at Union also exposed her to the challenges within her own community, where Black men questioned the role of women in ministry. This environment fueled Dr. Thomas's research on Black women in history who were preachers. Sojourner Truth became the focus of her thesis, standing as a powerful example of an abolitionist and women's rights advocate.

#### LEADERSHIP IN DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND JUSTICE

In 2000, Dr. Thomas became a crucial part of LSTC's faculty during a transformative period. With seasoned faculty members retiring, a door was opening for new, more diverse hires.

Under the leadership of then-Dean Kadi Billman, the existing faculty recognized the importance of a more



Dr. Linda Thomas speaking in LSTC's chapel during Black History Month.

inclusive space. In response, they spearheaded initiatives to expand representation, cultivating an environment that welcomed a spectrum of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

During this shift, Dr. Thomas emerged as the first African American woman to join the faculty ranks at LSTC.

Shortly after Thomas was hired, a significant incident unfolded that underscored the pressing need for addressing issues of diversity and inclusion within the institution.

Three Black women walked out of a class led by a well-respected professor after experiencing racial insensitivity. This event highlighted a racial divide among the students. Many white students defended the professor, intensifying the racial tensions.

Dr. Thomas immediately recognized the gravity of the situation and approached Dean Kadi Billman. She emphasized the necessity of forming a diversity committee to address ongoing challenges, particularly related to race, even agreeing to chair the committee.

The Diversity committee quickly became a platform for addressing racism and inequity directly. Committee members became engaged in advocacy, organized anti-







Dr. Linda Thomas was named the director of the The Albert “Pete” Pero, Jr. Multicultural Center in March 2021.

racism and anti-sexism programs, and provided a space for addressing issues of power and inequity. The students, both Black and white, joined forces, ultimately leading to petitions for anti-racism classes and training.

Becoming Director of the The Albert “Pete” Pero, Jr. Multicultural Center in March 2021, Dr. Thomas’s proactive approach to diversity continued to expand as she brought forth an intersectional perspective to the Center.

A year later, the Center was renamed The Albert “Pete” Pero, Jr. and Cheryl Stewart Pero Center for Intersectionality Studies. The new name reflected a shift in the center’s focus, one that captures the nuanced experiences of intersecting oppressions faced by marginalized groups.

Thomas understood the value of the word intersectionality, coined by legal theorist Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989 because it acknowledges and analyzes the multiple layers of discrimination individuals may face based on race,

gender, sexuality, ability, and socio-economic status.

As the Director of the Center, Dr. Thomas embraces intersectionality as a guiding principle. Departing from conventional multicultural approaches, she insists on addressing issues of power by challenging systemic inequities and fostering an inclusive environment. This includes organizing impactful events, including forums, seminars, conferences, and panel discussions, all centered around theological intersectionality.

In February 2023, during the seminary’s celebration of Black History Month, the Center led a series of conversations on reparations. These discussions, amongst others, caused the LTSC to reflect on its need for reparative work in the wake of the sale of its building at 1100 E. 55th Street. A Reparations Initiative was swiftly enacted by the board of directors. As part of this initiative, Dr. Thomas plans to launch a reparations studies program.

In addition to her work with diversity, equity,

inclusion, and justice, Thomas takes pride in her work developing the Public Church Curriculum at LSTC. A member of the original curriculum committee that laid its foundation, she is the only remaining faculty member of that influential committee.

In this role, Dr. Thomas continues the visionary spirit that fueled the curriculum’s initial goals of equipping those called to ministry with a comprehensive skillset designed to navigate the diverse contexts in which they will engage in. Rooted in the convictions of the Protestant Reformation, the curriculum extends Luther’s legacy by challenging corruption, embodying a theology of grace and actively participating in multiple intersecting publics.

The Public Church Curriculum has earned recognition among North American seminaries, and its competency-based, interdisciplinary and experiential approach remains one of the key attractions drawing seminary students to enroll at LSTC.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Beyond administrative roles, Dr. Thomas’s mentorship emerges as a transformative force. Her humility and immediate support of students create a safe space for them, whether they face difficulty with their advisors or navigating complex theological questions. Her mentorship transcends conventional boundaries, reaching across demographics and fostering a sense of belonging for students from various backgrounds.

Dr. Thomas also remains committed to continuing her mission of ensuring the history of Black women is acknowledged and celebrated. As both an advisor and mentor, she dedicates herself to helping women of color connect with the past, encouraging them to explore their cultural roots and discover the remarkable women who have been ignored by those in power.

Now, in her role as the Interim Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Thomas is surveying the educational landscape with foresight. Her future initiatives include addressing immediate challenges and envisioning long-term solutions.

Her continued enthusiasm for theological studies stems from her collaboration with the seminary’s dedicated faculty, who are instrumental in shaping the next generation of leaders. With a keen focus on impacting students’ lives, Dr. Thomas aims to leave an indelible imprint.

“God calls us to help people thrive,” said Thomas. “That means putting our lives into God’s hands and living up to our potential.” 🌸



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# PREPARING LEADERS FOR THE CHURCH WE ARE BECOMING

Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla was retired for less than 3 months. Exploring new possibilities for LSTC brought him back to work.

**By Keisha Dyson**

**D**r. Rafael Malpica Padilla joined LSTC last fall as the newly appointed DAMM Chair in Leadership and Director of the Latine Ministry and Theology Program. This post follows a brief retirement from the ELCA, where he previously served as the Executive Director of Service and Justice Home Area.

In his previous role, Dr. Malpica Padilla led a wide range of programming, including Global Mission, advocacy initiatives, the Washington office, 18 state

public offices, the Office of the United Nations, ethnic-specific programs and relief and development work.

His responsibilities have spanned the spectrum of programmatic areas within the church, overseeing both international and domestic efforts, which includes Lutheran Disaster Response and world hunger initiatives. In his position, Dr. Malpica Padilla was able to demonstrate administrative prowess and resource management, while emphasizing the importance of establishing, developing and sustaining vast networks and relationships.

His visionary work at the ELCA focused on preparing leaders for the evolving nature of the church and aligns seamlessly with LSTC's commitment to understanding and adapting to the emerging church of the future.

The challenge, as Dr. Malpica Padilla sees it, involves journeying through the unknown towards the kind of church that is evolving and the leaders it will require. As he frequently says, "We need to prepare leaders for the church we are becoming, not the church we used to be."

In a recent conversation









Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla is conducting an assessment of LSTC's existing leadership offerings, including courses and centers, with the goal of evaluating what has been accomplished, identifying areas for improvement, and deepening understanding of leadership within the framework of the public church and the ministry of all those baptized.

with Dr. Malpica Padilla, we asked him to reflect on his new roles at LSTC and to share his visionary perspective on cultivating a more inclusive, diverse, and adaptive church. Here's what he had to say:

## WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO LSTC?

**A:** I have always viewed LSTC as a theological space important for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, one that we need to safeguard and expand. This conviction stems from the unique history of LSTC and the valuable contributions it makes to the broader church. The location of LSTC, situated in close collaboration with

other theological schools on the South Side of Chicago, particularly in Hyde Park, distinguishes it as a singular space for theological reflection.

The decision to join LSTC was driven by my belief in preserving and building upon this unique identity. The ongoing transition LSTC is undergoing provides an interesting opportunity to rethink our approach and potentially make significant changes. The physical move to a new location is a notable example of this shift.

Beyond just relocating, the prospect of three theological schools coexisting and wisely sharing resources holds the potential for something transformative. It prompts

us to consider how we can innovatively shape the formation of leaders for the Church of Jesus Christ within the challenging and divisive context of the United States. This isn't about returning to past practices; rather, it's an opportunity for us to collaboratively envision a new way forward.

I don't anticipate a return to the way things were for any of our theological schools, including LSTC. Instead, I see this as an occasion for us to come together, reflect, and collectively explore what new possibilities lie ahead. This overarching motivation led me to join LSTC, even after enjoying two and a half months of retirement following 30

years at the churchwide level. The prospect of engaging in meaningful conversations with the faculty, staff and student body about the future direction of LSTC was a compelling incentive for me.

## CAN YOU SHARE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS THE INAUGURAL DAMM CHAIR IN LEADERSHIP?

**A:** Regarding the DAMM chair, a group worked on developing a framework for the role, specifically focusing on working with students in the area of leadership. The position was initially offered to





within LSTC's emphasis on public church across all its programs. Leadership, being a multifaceted concept, prompts us to consider how it fits within the context of being a public church.

The third aspect revolves around our Lutheran identity. How do we comprehend leadership within the framework of the ministry of all the baptized?

I am conducting an assessment of LSTC's existing leadership offerings, including courses and centers. The goal is to evaluate what has been accomplished, identify areas for improvement, and deepen our understanding of leadership within the framework of the public church and the ministry of all those baptized.

## Q DESCRIBE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS THE DIRECTOR OF LATINE MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY.

**A:** Historically, LSTC has placed a significant emphasis on Latine ministry, boasting a faculty proficient in teaching in Spanish and engaging in the formation of members from the Latine community. However, transitions, such as the retirement of Dr. Jose Rodriguez and the untimely death of Dr. Vitor Westhelle, have left us with a faculty deficit in teaching Spanish or bilingual courses.

In my current assessment of LSTC, I am exploring collaborative opportunities. By moving into a shared space with Catholic Theological Union and McCormick Seminary, we aim to collectively consider and create a program for the formation of leaders—both ordained and lay—for the Latine community.

LSTC has also strategically aligned with institutions like

the Seminario Evangelico de Puerto Rico. We need to evaluate and strengthen these partnerships to enhance offerings and facilitate cross-registration for our students. However, a notable challenge lies in increasing the number of students from the Latine community, both those enrolling in degree programs and leaders in congregations participating in other leadership opportunities, such as Learning Communities.

## Q FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WHAT IS THE VALUE OF LSTC, CTU, AND MTS CO-LOCATING IN THE SAME SPACE?

**A:** I am continuing to contemplate the possibilities, wondering if there's a greater purpose beyond merely sharing space. Take the Latine program, for instance. It's no secret that the Lutherans' track record with Latinos is not so favorable, as most Latino populations are predominantly affiliated with Pentecostal or Roman Catholic Churches. These two denominations have deep historical connections and had been involved in the historical struggles within the Latino community, experiences Lutherans have not actively participated in.

As we find ourselves together in this shared space, I consider whether the Holy Spirit is urging us to bring these three schools together for a more expansive purpose. It goes beyond the narrow focus of training leaders for specific denominations like the Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, or Roman Catholic Church; instead, the fundamental question is how we prepare leaders for the Church of Jesus Christ today. 🌿



**BEYOND JUST RELOCATING, THE PROSPECT OF THREE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS COEXISTING AND WISELY SHARING RESOURCES HOLDS THE POTENTIAL FOR SOMETHING TRANSFORMATIVE. IT PROMPTS US TO CONSIDER HOW WE CAN INNOVATIVELY SHAPE THE FORMATION OF LEADERS FOR THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST WITHIN THE CHALLENGING AND DIVISIVE CONTEXT OF THE UNITED STATES.**

DR. RAFAEL MALPICA PADILLA

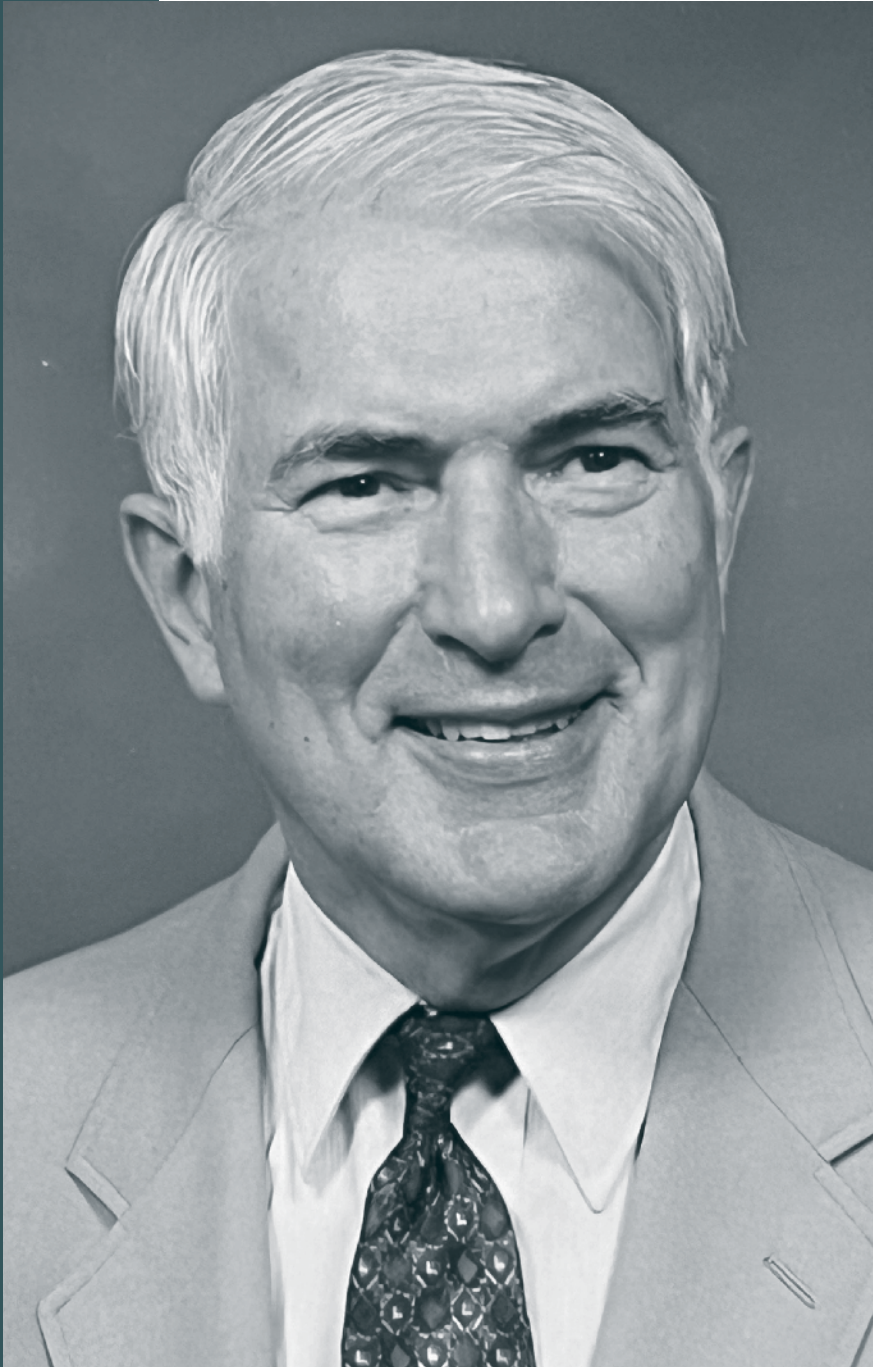
someone unable to relocate to Chicago, leading to a vacancy. Subsequently, discussions with LSTC revolved around what I could bring to the role.

In my perspective, teaching leadership shouldn't be confined to one individual. My vision is to actively involve the faculty and administration in contemplating how leadership is embedded in the formation of individuals at LSTC. That starts with three main pillars for understanding leadership here at LSTC.

The first pillar includes exploring how leadership intersects with other subject matters taught at the school.

The second step involves understanding leadership





By Keisha Dyson

**D**r. James A. Scherer, the venerable Lutheran missionary, church historian and pioneer in the academic study of missiology, died Wednesday December 20, 2023, in North Riverside, IL. At 97, he left a legacy of theological scholarship, Christian missions and a long life richly textured with faith, service and intellectual pursuits.

#### SHERER'S EARLY LIFE

Born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, James A. Scherer was an early scholar of Lutheran parochial schools. These teachings paved the way for a Yale education during wartime, where he majored in history and emerged as a distinguished member of Timothy Dwight College.

Life took an international turn for Scherer when he became a "Yale Bachelor," teaching English at the Yali Middle School in Changsha, Hunan, China. This experience fueled his lifelong passion for missions. It is also when he met his future wife, Frances E. Schlosser, a Yale-in-China nurse who was serving as the Dean of the Xiang-Ya Nursing School. They married on Easter Day in 1948 and returned to the United States in 1949.

The couple settled in New York City, where Dr. Scherer pursued a Master of Divinity degree at Union

# REMEMBERING DR. JAMES A. SCHERER

*September 1, 1926 – December 20, 2023*



Theological Seminary (UTS). Commissioned as Lutheran missionaries in 1952, the Scherers set off on a profound expedition to Tokyo, Japan with their two young children.

In the years that followed, the family navigated the complexities of a nation emerging from occupation.

Dr. Scherer's tenure in Japan involved intensive language study, grassroots evangelism and contributions to literature and radio outreach.

In 1956, The Scherers returned to the United States and Dr. Scherer assumed the role of Dean at the Lutheran School of Missions in Maywood, Illinois. His academic pursuits continued, culminating in a Th.D. from Union Theological Seminary (UTS) and Columbia University in 1968. Scherer's doctoral dissertation, titled "Mission and Unity in Lutheranism," was published in that same year, laying the foundation for his scholarly impact.

#### THE SCHERER LECTURE SERIES

As Professor of World Mission and Church History at the LSTC, Dr. Scherer delved into ecumenism and world religions, while taking part in missionary conferences.

He authored four books and contributed to numerous others, with his best-seller, *Missionary, Go Home!* (1964), addressing criticisms of foreign mission activities.

His leadership extended globally as he chaired the international Commission on Church Cooperation of the Lutheran World Federation from 1977 to 1984, based in Geneva, Switzerland.

In 1989, Dr. James Scherer established an endowment fund in loving memory of his parents, Eleanor and Arnold Scherer. He initially designed the fund to promote scholarships for international students

and assist in other worthy mission-related causes. The fund's priorities shifted in 1992 "to endow an annual lectureship at LSTC dealing with some aspect of the church's worldwide mission, missiology, or the life of the world Christian community."

Now entering its 32nd year, The Scherer Lecture Series, and hosts world renowned scholars who cover a range of issues encountered in global Christianity, from worker justice to peacemaking, from international relations to care for the earth.

Dr. Peter Vethanayagamony, Professor of Modern Church History at LSTC, now oversees the lecture series and the annual World Mission Institute that is also supported by the endowment and is jointly sponsored by Catholic Theological Union and McCormick Theological Seminary and Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Vethanayagamony enrolled at LSTC as a doctoral student because of Dr. Scherer's international reputation as an ecumenist, leading Lutheran missiologists, and well-published scholar in the academics. When he arrived at LSTC Vethanayagamony was delighted to learn that Scherer would serve as his mentor.

Dr. Scherer played a key role in shaping Vethanayagamony's doctoral dissertation and subsequent research in World Christianity.

"Because of my admiration for Dr. Scherer," says Vethanayagamony, "I continue to carry out mission events he had initiated way back in 1992 in collaboration with Catholic and Presbyterian missiologists."

#### SHERER'S IMPACT AT LSTC

Even after Dr. Scherer's retirement from LSTC in 1992, his commitment to missiology, mentorship and

LSTC persisted.

Dr. Mark Swanson, professor of Christian-Muslim Studies and Interfaith Relations and Associate Director of The Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice, remembers Dr. Scherer for the direct impact Scherer made on his career.

"After I had been called to join the LSTC faculty in 2005, Jim wrote me a long, carefully argued letter, urging me to accept the call," said Swanson. "I was moved by the thought and care he put into that letter – and will always be grateful for it."

Scherer's dedication to



### THE LOSS OF DR. SCHERER'S MISSIOLOGICAL EXPERTISE IS KEENLY FELT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

DR. KURT HENDEL

international mission work, scholarly pursuits, and mentorship endeared him to a vast network of students and missionaries, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of theological education and global engagement.

His passing on December 20, 2023, leaves a void in the world of missiology and the hearts of those who knew him.

Dr. James A. Scherer is survived by his second wife, Liene Sorenson, his son, James D. Scherer, his daughter, Dr. Susan M. Scherer, five grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. He will be remembered not only for his academic prowess but also for the enduring contributions he made to Christian missions.

In the days following

his passing, the echoes of admiration and gratitude from his colleagues reverberated, painting a poignant portrait of a remarkable man whose life was an indelible tapestry woven with threads of faith, service and intellectual brilliance.

Former colleague, Dr. Kurt Hendel remembers Scherer with deep reverence, characterizing him as an excellent scholar, empathic teacher and gracious colleague and friend. Hendel further emphasizes Dr. Scherer's exemplary role as a servant of God, faithfully witnessing Christ's teachings as both a missionary and professor of missions.

"The loss of Dr. Scherer's missiological expertise is keenly felt within the community of faith," said Hendel. "It's a testament to the profound impact he had on all those who crossed his path."

Former LSTC dean, Dr. Kadi Billman, recalled, "Even after his official retirement, Dr. Scherer remained a steadfast presence at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, actively engaging with ecumenical colleagues in missiology."

In her reflections on Dr. Scherer's life, Billman underscored his commitment to initiating deep conversations about World Christianity and global ministry, noting his active participation in numerous LSTC worship services and special events.

Dr. Scherer, Billman contends, "Was not only a faithful servant of Christ but also a devoted citizen of the world and of LSTC, leaving an indelible mark on the institution."

A funeral service celebrating Dr. Scherer's life was held at Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, IL, on Saturday, December 30. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. 🌿



A photograph of a man with a backpack looking out at a snowy mountain valley. The man is in the foreground, seen from the back, wearing a dark jacket and a large backpack. He is looking towards a vast, snow-covered valley with evergreen trees and distant mountains under a cloudy sky.

# INTENTIONAL TIME APART

Students travel to Holden  
Village to study liturgy  
and the cycles of creation

By Lyndsay Monsen

Dr. Benjamin Stewart looking  
out at Railroad Creek Valley.





During the month of January, a group from LSTC traveled to Holden Village in Chelan, Washington. Twelve students, under the leadership of Dr. Benjamin Stewart, the Gordon A. Braatz Associate Professor of Worship, gathered daily for prayer, fellowship, and study of liturgy during the various cycles of creation—including the four seasons and different times of day.

Holden Village is a remote Lutheran retreat center, nestled in the North Cascade mountains of Washington state. For years, the village has been welcoming students for intentional time apart to learn, grow, and play, and this year's J-term excursion was no different. The days were filled to the brim by contributing to life in the

village, romping around in the nearly 150 inches of snow that had accumulated there throughout the winter, and growing closer in community, all punctuated by morning, evening, and night prayer.

Together, students wrestled with what it means to rise as leaders in the church in the era of climate change. How might our liturgies reflect the present moment of crisis? What does it mean to care for creation well? Students discussed their greatest dreams and deepest fears of the future. They found hope, joy, and grief.

When asked about what he hopes seminarians will carry forward in their ministry, Stewart said, "I think the course generates a love for worship and at the same time a sense of humility that humans are latecomers to the

cosmic choir practice — that the stars and the trees and the ravens have been singing hymns of praise long before we were ever here, and now it's our job to learn from them and join the unending hymn."

Alongside the study of worship and creation, the group bonded through moments of hilarity. Games in the dining hall, synchronized dance routines for the village's winter Olympics, and singing hymn after hymn all drew them closer together as a group.

"There were too many moments to single out just one," Stewart said, about his favorite memory from the trip. "But on that last morning together, when we had been wrestling intensely for weeks with questions of despair and hope in the struggle for climate justice, and then we stood high up on Chalet Hill,

and as the sun was rising over the mountains, and we were singing what was now mostly memorized and in harmony, 'the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace,' I was just so blown away and thankful. I could feel God's promise in Zechariah's song coming true among us."

Although the time at Holden was only two and a half weeks, the special memories they contained will remain with the students for the journey to come. As the prayer of good courage reads—which Holden staff often read to bless departing guests—we do not know where we go, but only that God's hand is leading us and God's love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. 🌿





Students attend book fair and book signing during Black History Month. Pictured (from left): Rev. Otis Moss, student and spouse.



Attendees viewing the World Mission Institute panel and lecture.



Rev. Dr. James Thomas, preaching and presiding during the 50th Anniversary of the Seminex Walkout Worship Service at LSTC.



M.Div. senior Sharei Green during her senior sermon at this Service of the Word.

The Rev. Traci Blackmon, preaching & presiding over LSTC's Service of Holy Communion during Black History Month.







Prospective students traveled from University of Maryland to visit LSTC to experience seminary learning.



Freddy Sanchez (left) and Mark Swanson in discussion groups about Project Starling during the asynchronous learning workshop.



Students and guests gather for discussion in lounge space at LSTC.



Keith Hampton and choir singing during the ecumenical MLK Day celebration.



Students pose for picture after the Bring Chicago Home Townhall at LSTC.





# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND JUSTICE AT LSTC





By Keisha Dyson

At LSTC, we're committed to fostering a community reflective of God's boundless love. Here, DEIJ isn't just an important component of our operational success; it is the heartbeat of our institution, interwoven through every facet of our theological journey.

In the stories in the section to come, we will explore life at LSTC through the lens of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ). We recognize that our dedication to these principles is not merely a continuing and evolving pursuit but also a foundational aspect of our institution's identity.

Embedded within the core of our strategic plan, DEIJ is a pivotal focus area that shapes the ethos of LSTC. We are a

community where diversity is celebrated, equity is upheld, and inclusion is a lived reality. This commitment stems from the profound understanding that theological education is enriched when it embraces the multiplicity of voices and experiences within the body of Christ.

As we walk this imperfect path toward justice and equity, we acknowledge each step as an integral component of an ongoing journey. We strive to be an antiracist campus community, and yet we know we have faltered in the past and understand that we may falter again. However, it is in these moments of recognition and recommitment to our pursuit that our commitment shines brightest. Our dedication to improvement fuels our journey toward becoming a more inclusive and just institution.

As you read on, you'll encounter narratives that embody these values, from news of our Reparations Initiative to stories and insights from our esteemed alums who continue to grow with us in this transformative process. Each story is a testament to our collective effort to rectify historical injustices, challenge systemic barriers, and forge a path toward a more equitable future. As you peruse these pages, we invite you to join us in embracing the imperfections, learning from our missteps, and celebrating the strides we make together on the shared path of justice and inclusion.

Together, we are crafting a narrative of hope, resilience, and commitment to building a theological community that mirrors the diverse and transformative love of God. ✿





## LSTC REPARATIONS INITIATIVE WEBSITE GOES LIVE IN A STEP TOWARDS HEALING AND JUSTICE

By Keisha Dyson

**L**STC reached a significant milestone in its commitment to addressing historical injustices and promoting healing within its community.

The LSTC Reparations Initiative website ([lstc.edu/reparations](http://lstc.edu/reparations)) launched on February 1. This online platform will showcase the ongoing efforts of the LSTC





Reparations Task Force, along with real-time updates of the group's progress, insights gained through research and discussions and, in the near future, a vision for redress.

The Reparations Initiative Website is designed to be a comprehensive resource, providing a space for community engagement, educational programs and

collaborations with external organizations. By offering insight into the ongoing work of the task force, LSTC aims to encourage open dialogue and understanding among its community members.

All members of the LSTC community and the public at large are invited to explore the Reparations Initiative Website to stay informed on this transformational

undertaking. Regular updates will continue to be posted about the developments and milestones achieved by the team.

Established in April 2023, the task force continues to work towards creating a multifaceted reparations proposal linked to the sale and relocation of its former building at 1100 E 55th Street. This proposal will

be presented to the board at-large this year. Their plan will encompass community engagement, educational programs, collaboration with external organizations and more.

Members of the group include President James Nieman, Board chair Terry Goff, and board members Morgan Gates, Greg Lewis, and Kristi Ferguson. 🌱





By Rhiannon Koehler

When Michelle Townsend de López, MDiv '09, stepped foot in the halls of ELCA in 2004 alongside several other students of color, she had high hopes that she was entering a bastion of progressive diversity.

In some ways, she was. But in others, a considerable amount of work remained.

Back in 1998, Rev. Frederick E.N. Rajan, executive director of the ELCA's Commission for Multicultural Ministries, called racism "the misuse of God's gift of diversity."

His words held great importance for the leadership of the ELCA, keenly aware at that time that while 28% of the population of the United States self-identified as people of color, 98% of the ELCA was white.

The discrepancy in numbers was only part of the problem. As outlined in the ELCA's Multicultural

Ministry Strategy document, "A Strategy for Proclamation of the Gospel" (1991) and the "Recommitment to a Strategy for Proclamation of the Gospel" (1997), it was widely understood that for the seminary to achieve authentic diversity it would require more than just demographic remodeling. It would require a new approach to thinking about race, class, and lived experience and a commitment to honoring the values that people of all different backgrounds brought to the table as they sought God and life through faithful expression.

Rajan and his colleagues devised a plan. They would begin offering anti-racism trainings across synods, providing additional education and support to communities, both inside and outside the Church. They hoped this support would start a conversation that was desperately needed to align the values of the ELCA with the experiences of people in various congregations.

Such an alignment was desperately needed. Many people of color, including Rev. López, were converting to ELCA Lutheranism precisely because of the stated values of diversity, equity and justice that defined the denomination.

As Rev. López made the decision to serve the ELCA, she knew the practice of such values were more important than the promise of them.

"It goes beyond social statements," she said. "It's more important to see people actually living out our values, not just having them on a piece of paper we can point to."

Rev. López decided to attend LSTC because she knew she would be part of a seminary that upheld the Christ-centered values of being responsive to context, committed to excellence and attentive to diversity through lived experience.

LSTC was a place of great personal transformation and growth for Rev. López, It's where she became a Womanist theologian,

following in the footsteps of one of her many mentors, Dr. Linda E. Thomas. It's where she built a community of scholars and leaders in faith who continue to support her today.

LTSC allowed Rev. López to chart her own path with an emphasis in Hispanic/Latino ministries by reinstating programmatic elements that had been discontinued prior to her enrollment. It's a place where she made lifelong friends and memories.

But LTSC was a place of pain, too. Rev. López remembers participating in a protest in class that ultimately stopped a professor from showing racist and lascivious art as openings to students.

She remembers witnessing the children of other students playing with her young boys in Creation Courtyard and noticing that the Brown and Black children often ended up in fictitious "jail." She took note that the play never seemed to include



# UNITY & CHANGE

When it comes to diversity, equity and justice,  
**Michelle Townsend de López** is focused more on practice than promise

the adopted children of a gay couple on campus.

At LTSC, Rev. López had personal friends, other women of color, who had dropped out rather than face four years of fighting for the respect they deserved in seminary.

Those experiences are the reason that four years later, in 2013, when a classmate approached Rev. Lopez to suggest she serve on the alumni board, she took pause.

She had to think about it.

"I always thought I didn't have a place at the table," Rev. López admitted. "Here was somebody inviting me to the table, so I thought I better take a seat. And that's what I did."

Thankfully, LSTC was ripe for change, and her work as an advocate for justice was welcomed by the administration, faculty and staff at LSTC, many of whom experienced discrimination themselves as students that had an impact on them or their careers.

Rev. López saw unlimited opportunities at LTSC to

make lasting change.

The many diverse facilities continue to provide invaluable resources for LTSC's diverse student body, including A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice (CCME); the Albert "Pete" Pero Jr. and Cheryl Stewart Pero Center for Intersectionality Studies; the Zygon Center for Religion and Science; and the LSTC Leadership Development Initiatives; as well as offerings from other ACTS consortium schools and the University of Chicago.

Learning about the unique lived experiences of the global student body helped Rev. López understand that the stated values of LSTC. She quickly realized these values, espoused and lived out by leadership, faculty, staff and students, were worth fighting for.

"The support of the dean, professors, and President Echols, then later President Nieman encouraged everyone not to give up," Rev. López

said. "People owned their mistakes as they worked for something better."

She continued, "In my work, I wanted to figure out where we could enter together and do the divine creator's work together."

Rev. López's vision to transform pain into power and possibility served not only the interests of LSTC and the Church, but also provided a framework for managing other difficult situations like mergers, sales, and changes in ministry leadership.

Her favorite lesson? "My experiences speak a lot to the reality of LSTC wanting to live into our social values... that has been a solid thing for LSTC. We haven't stayed immobilized. When there was a problem, we did something. We were always willing to bite the bullet and do the thing."

LSTC continues to work towards a future that clearly and intentionally aligns with our stated values. Over half of the 2023 Strategic Plan focused on Diversity, Equity,

Inclusion, and Justice with an emphasis on seeking equity, BIPOC student recruitment and retention and authentic diversity, tenants borne out of the commitments adopted by the ELCA in the 2019 Churchwide Assembly meeting.

Together, we are convening a reparations task force, engaging with the student body around the needs of our BIPOC community members, and making best use of the Albert "Pete" Pero, Jr. and Cheryl Stewart Pero Center for Intersectionality Studies directed by Dr. Linda Thomas.

LSTC – and Rev. López – look forward to facing the challenges of the future with an open heart and a willingness to do the work.

"Thanks to what I went through in seminary, I'm well-equipped to face these challenges," Rev. López says. "I would never trade it in for something different because it has shaped the way that I've pastored and the things that I've learned." 🌱



# EMBRACING COURAGE AND LOVE THROUGH GLOBAL MINISTRY

By Rhiannon Koehler

Pastor Heidi Torgerson, MDiv '06, was 13 years old when she delivered her first sermon.

"I'm one of those people who doesn't really remember a time when I didn't feel a call to ministry," she says about her journey which began at a strong congregation she was a part of growing up in rural North Dakota.

The early encouragement she received from pastors and church leaders has led Pastor Torgerson to a calling that has taken her from rural North Dakota to the heart of global communities, making a profound impact and building a network of advocates who have also dedicated their lives to the mission and vision of public service rooted in faith.

Pastor Torgerson's commitment to working in the Church has strengthened over time. She completed an intensive apprenticeship in community organizing before applying to LSTC, a decision influenced by a desire to explore urban congregations with a social justice orientation.

She chose LSTC for what is

now referred to as its "public church curriculum," drawn to the seminary's commitment to understanding the ways faith intersects with public life. Her education at LSTC set the foundation for Pastor Torgerson's unique and impactful ministry journey.

After graduation, Pastor Torgerson quickly crossed traditional boundaries as she embarked on a mission to Mexico.

"One of the great surprises of my life in ministry is that it led me to serve in sanctuaries that don't look at all like the ones most of us anticipate serving in," Pastor Torgerson said.

In her four years in Mexico, she engaged with communities and fostered relationships with local organizations, human rights advocates and women's cooperatives. Her work there included initiating the Young Adults in Global Mission program which continues to provide transformative experiences for young volunteers.

Elevating her commitment to global ministry, Pastor Torgerson was then called to direct the global program for Young Adults in Global

Mission. In her 11 years with the organization, she mentored and learned from young volunteers, building relationships that still feed her spiritual growth and cultivate her community involvement today.

The orientation sessions she developed became spaces of profound community-building, reflecting the Holy Spirit's presence and the transformative power of shared experiences.

Pastor Torgerson's journey came full circle as she transitioned to a local ministry at Grace Lutheran in La Grange, Illinois. She was drawn to the congregation's courage and openness to change, even during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 lockdown.

More recently, she has led the congregation's courageous and compassionate response to the call to host Venezuelan asylum seekers. Tending to the needs of a Venezuelan family in crisis presented an opportunity for Pastor Torgerson to enact the values of the public church curriculum she studied at LSTC.

She was able, as the institution defines it, to lead a congregation to living

out a theology of grace and to move into multiple, intersecting publics.

In practice, living these values is less about approaching the situation from the perspective of duty and more about embracing the love the privilege she and her congregation were afforded to serve the family in this time and place.

"Our discernment conversations were not if we should or could afford to help. There was none of that," she explained. "The congregation asked hard questions, all in the service of receiving this family into our community."

Pastor Torgerson says the experience has been transformation for the congregation and has exemplified the values of kindness, courage, and generosity in action for everyone involved.

In reflecting on her own path to the seminary and her ongoing role in ministry, Pastor Torgerson emphasizes the importance of courage and love.

"Seminarians are encouraged to embrace the courage needed to live the gospel in a world often indifferent to discussions about the divine," she said. "Grounding ministry in a love for people and communities, especially those different from your own, can become the cornerstone for authentic and impactful service."

As she looks ahead, Pastor Torgerson is hopeful that she will continue to serve her congregation during a time of rapid change in the church. She remains focused on Grace Lutheran, where she imagines the gospel unfolding in new and meaningful ways, ultimately contributing to a more vibrant marriage between faith and service. 🌱





Heidi Torgerson listens to the Lutheran Word Federation-Nepal field staff describe a water resource management project funded in part by ELCA World Hunger in Marbu, Nepal. Photo by Yoshitaka Franklin Ishida.



Pastor Heidi holding vigil at the border.



Heidi Torgerson greeting villagers in Marbu and discussing ongoing Dalit empowerment work happening there through LWF-Nepal. Photo by Yoshitaka Franklin Ishida.

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**I'M ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO DOESN'T REALLY REMEMBER A TIME WHEN I DIDN'T FEEL A CALL TO MINISTRY.**

PASTOR HEIDI TORGERSON







Darcy Tillman participates in the IWalk for ACTS, an organization that offers hope, provides relief, and promotes self-sufficiency for Prince William area neighbors in crisis.



Darcy Tillman and her congregation at Lutheran Church of the Covenant pack free meals to feed people around the world for the organization Rise Against Hunger in partnership with the Woodbridge Rotary Club.

# A JOURNEY OF FAITH, SERVICE, AND CURIOSITY

By Rhiannon Koehler

**D**arcy Tillman, MDiv '99, took an unconventional path to congregational ministry.

"I grew up in a time when you didn't see a lot of women in ministry, but I'd always been active in the church," she said. "The first time I seriously considered seminary was after I moved to Washington DC, and the pastor of my church asked if I had ever thought about ministry."

Though Rev. Tillman had long been passionate about service and international work, it was the conversation with her pastor that helped her realize her true calling.

Rev. Tillman embarked on her theological education,

guided by a sense of purpose and curiosity. She chose the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago because of Chicago's welcoming atmosphere and the potential for connections with international communities within the city.

Once at LSTC, "My focus became mission and evangelism," Rev. Tillman said. "Seminary was eye-opening. It was challenging. It was nurturing."

Rev. Tillman's commitment to international service became clear during her seminary internship in the Central African Republic.

One of the best and most challenging years of her life, Rev. Tillman says the experience exposed her to raw realities, including the

HIV/AIDS crisis and extreme poverty. It also helped her understand the importance of being present with people as they walk through difficult moments.

After earning her MDiv, Rev. Tillman accepted the Associate Pastor role at Lord of Life Lutheran in Northern Virginia. There she continued to serve international communities in need, most notably in Haiti, an invaluable and rewarding experience that lasted three years.

In 2002, she was called by LSTC to direct a Lilly grant-funded program to encourage high school youth to explore ministry as a vocation.

As Director of Youth in Mission, Rev. Tillman spearheaded the marketing program, directed the

development of a youth center, and initiated a program for youth that included service trips to Mexico City.

"It was fun to see the young people realize a broader context of faith and begin to understand that they, too, have a calling," Rev. Tillman said about her experience with the teens.

After laying a foundation of success for the program, Rev. Tillman felt called to return to a congregational setting. She spent six years as the Pastor for Nativity Lutheran Church in Alexandria, Virginia, then 10 years at Lutheran Church of the Covenant in Dale City, Virginia, before being called to a unique opportunity to serve as Pastor/President at Lord of Life Lutheran Church and Adult & Child Services in





Darcy Tillman celebrates the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC.

Depew, New York.

Here, Rev. Tillman is both the pastor of a congregation and the president of a separate nonprofit that operates an adult day health center and child development center.

“The work excites me and has opened a window for me to seeing God at work,” she said. “It allows me to continuing helping people see and connect with God.”

For students starting their own journeys of discernment, Rev. Tillman offers this advice: “Pray a lot. Be curious and talk to others who are in ministry to hear about the different ways people are being called to ministry. And when you’re ready to take that leap of faith, I think that no matter what, you can get something from it.” 🌿





By Rhiannon Koehler

Rev. Dr. Walter May Jr. was serving as a youth director when his wife's words changed his life forever.

"Out of the blue, she said, 'You're going to be an ordained minister,'" Dr. May, MDiv '87, DMin '96, remembers. "I laughed and said, 'Really? Do you know me?'"

As he considered this unexpected call to ministry, Dr. May had his doubts. He felt like he needed an experience similar to Martin Luther's calling to be sure. But shortly after his wife's proclamation, the bishop's assistant, Cy Warnerman invited him to consider seminary – before it was too late.

"We've had our eye on you, and you're not getting any younger," Warnerman candidly told him. This forthcoming admission caught Dr. May's attention and forced him to reconsider his long-held beliefs about what a divine calling should be.

Before making his final decision, Dr. May sought advice from Grover Wright, a prominent figure in the African American Lutheran community, and a staff member at the ELCA national church office in Philadelphia. The meeting with Grover further reshaped Walter's perspective on the nature of God's call.

"How many people have said that you need to be a pastor?" Wright asked him.

"Quite a few," Dr. May admitted.

Wright leaned in. "You don't see that as God calling you?"

His conversation with Wright was enough to inspire Dr. May to attend a seminary weekend at the Lutheran School of Theology of Chicago. There, he immersed himself in seminary life, attending classes, meeting staff and

# FINDING JOY IN COMMUNITY

Rev. Dr. Walter May Jr.'s hands-on experiences at LSTC opened his eyes to the diversity within Lutheranism and helped to prepare him for a multifaceted pastoral journey

spending time with professors.

That weekend, Dr. May felt sense of belonging that solidified his decision.

Dr. May's academic focus and experiences at LSTC extended beyond the classroom. Under the guidance of his advisor, Dr. Albert "Pete" Pero, he participated in weekend immersions exploring African American, Latino, and Asian communities.

These hands-on experiences opened his eyes to the diversity within Lutheranism and helped to prepare him for the multifaceted pastoral journey he embarked on after graduation.

"When I graduated, I accepted a call at Christ the Mediator in Chicago," Dr. May remembers. "There were eight candidates ahead of me and I eventually learned that the other eight candidates couldn't chant the liturgy!"

Well-versed in liturgical prayer and practice, Dr. May easily impressed the community and stayed at Christ the Mediator until he was called again to First Lutheran in Cedar Rapids, IA.

Going from a 300-member congregation to one that had over 3,000 members proved to be a significant change for Dr. May, who was eager to embrace this new challenge.

To set him up for success, First Lutheran supported Dr. May in returning to LSTC to earn a MM in pastoral care and counseling.

"For the most part, LSTC was the same when I went back," Dr. May said, "Even though there was a ten-year difference from the first time I attended seminary."

While earning his DMin, under advisor and John H. Tietjen Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Pastoral Theology, and Emerita Professor Kadi Billman, Dr. May continued to build his community, building lifelong connections with his peers there.

Dr. May's connection to LSTC has continued to grow over time. After graduation he became a member of the Alumni Senate, staying aligned with the institution's growth and changes. He was nominated to the LSTC Board of Directors in 1996 and was a member of the committee that selected and welcomed James Echols as president.

Eventually, Dr. May transitioned to the role of assistant to the bishop in the Southeast Iowa Synod where he continued to make a meaningful impact. Over his 12 years of service there, he engaged with pastors,

interviewed new candidates, and navigated the rich tapestry of Lutheranism in the region.

Dr. May oversaw a staff of 12 people, who worked closely in the synod office. Together, the group was able to forge connections with congregations across the synod, problem solve and provide support for the synod as a whole.

"When we weren't in the office, we were traveling," Dr. May remembers. "It was a collective, if you will, of outgoing people who met on a regular basis and formed a kind of family."

Dr. May's work as assistant to the bishop continued to keep him close to his roots at LSTC.

"I got the chance to interact with a lot of pastors, and many of them were graduates of LSTC, serving congregations," he shared.

Dr. May was also in charge of interviewing new pastors who came into the synod. "I was happy to interview quite a few LSTC alumni and see that many of their congregations employed LSTC student interns."

Dr. May's ongoing partnership with LSTC alumni let him see firsthand the ways in the LSTC student body is committed to living their values in the world. 🌱





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**“HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE SAID THAT YOU NEED TO BE A PASTOR?” GROVER WRIGHT ASKED.**

**“QUITE A FEW,” DR. MAY ADMITTED.**

**WRIGHT LEANED IN. “YOU DON’T SEE THAT AS GOD CALLING YOU?”**



## LSTC honors four exceptional leaders at the 2024 LSTC Alumni Awards

By Rhiannon Koehler

The LSTC community will gather at this year's Seminex/Homecoming event, held April 16-18, to honor four exceptional individuals who have left an enduring mark on our institution and the world.

The 2024 Alumni Award winners represent the pinnacle of achievement and service within their respective fields. They embody the values of excellence, leadership and compassion.

From groundbreaking research to community engagement, these distinguished alumni prove that an LSTC education not only shapes a person's career trajectory, but can have a lasting impact on the broader landscape of higher education, theology and pastoral care.

This year's winners include:

- **Dr. Christine Helmer**, winner of the 2024 Specialized Ministry Award, who is being celebrated for her contributions to the academy and evolving our global understanding of Martin Luther.
- **Rev. Cheryl Peterson**, recipient of the Faithful Servant Award, who is being acknowledged for her legacy as a steadfast servant throughout her career.
- **Dr. Syafaatun Almirzanah**, recipient of the Witness to the World Award, who is being honored for her academic achievements and interfaith leadership.
- **Rev. Kimberly Vaughn**, winner of the Called to Lead Award, is being recognized for her ministry of leadership within the greater Church.

Each of these remarkable individuals represent the very essence of the LSTC legacy, inspiring future generations to strive for excellence in service and leadership. Read on to learn more about their journeys toward distinction. 🌿

### THE SPECIALIZED MINISTRY AWARD DR. CHRISTINE HELMER MA '89

Dr. Christine Helmer is a Peter B. Ritzma Professor of the Humanities and Professor of German and Religious Studies at Northwestern University. She is being honored with LSTC 2024's Specialized Ministry Award for her significant contributions to the study of theology in the academy, her work on the philosophy and theology of both Martin Luther and Friedrich Schleiermacher, and her international leadership in Luther scholarship.

Dr. Helmer earned an MA in 1989 from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, setting the stage for her 1997 PhD in

Religious Studies from Yale University. She also has an honorary doctorate from the University of Helsinki's Theology Faculty.

Dr. Helmer has reshaped the understanding of Martin Luther's theology and its subsequent reception in German intellectual history. Her groundbreaking scholarship has uncovered Luther's profound engagement with medieval philosophy and revealed Luther as a late medieval Catholic theologian.

Throughout her career, Dr. Helmer worked internationally, connecting with scholars from around the world on numerous interdisciplinary projects,





most recently as founder of the Lutheran Scholars Network and the monthly “Logic & Luther” webinar.

Dr. Helmer’s intellectual commitment is in securing a viable place for the study of theology in the university. Her knowledge of and appreciation for the robust intellectual Lutheran tradition has framed this commitment.

In her recent book, *Ordinary Faith in Polarized Times: Justification and the Pursuit of Justice*, co-written with Lutheran theologian Amy Carr, she extends her Schleiermacherian perspective on promoting and fostering discourse and understanding to bridge academy and church. In it, she uses her decades-long studies of Luther as a theologian of



grace to address pressing issues in American politics, notably abortion and faith in politics, thereby showcasing Dr. Helmer’s dedication to creating dialogues that

transcend ideological divides.

Receiving the Specialized Ministry Award is a testament to Dr. Helmer’s transformative scholarship. It illustrates the importance

of her work in reshaping the narrative around Martin Luther and fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of Christian theology. ✿

**“MY INTEREST HAS PRIMARILY BEEN IN THE LATER LUTHER RATHER THAN IN THE ‘SEARCH FOR THE REFORMATION BREAKTHROUGH’ OF THE EARLY LUTHER. THE LATER LUTHER WAS VERY INTERESTED IN THE SPECULATIVE THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY THAT HE ARTICULATED IN THE DISPUTATIONS. SINCE MY TRINITY AND LUTHER BOOK WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1999, MY PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS OF HOW LUTHER CONNECTED LANGUAGE AND GENRE TO MAKE THEOLOGICAL CLAIMS HAVE BECOME THE CONSENSUS IN STUDIES OF LUTHER.**

DR. CHRISTINE HELMER

## THE WITNESS TO THE WORLD AWARD

DR. SYAFAATUN ALMIRZANAH PHD '08

A distinguished scholar and expert in the field of interreligious studies, Dr. Syafaatun Almirzanah has made significant contributions to fostering understanding and dialogue among diverse religious communities.

Dr. Almirzanah’s profound insights and commitment to

promoting inclusivity have transformed how scholars today perceive and engage in religious diversity.

In her dissertation, “When Mystic Masters Meet: Toward a New Matrix for Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” Dr. Almirzanah explored the intersection of Christian and Muslim perspectives, paving the way for a more nuanced

understanding of religious discourse.

As a scholar, Dr. Almirzanah has investigated various aspects of religion, spirituality, and interfaith dialogue, as evidenced by her extensive publications and conference presentations. The upcoming release of her books, *Sayyid Qutb, al-Qaeda Franchais and Terrorism* and *Religion and Biotechnology Revolution*, reflects Dr. Almirzanah’s continued dedication to exploring

diverse aspects of religion and its intersection with contemporary issues.

Dr. Almirzanah’s influence extends beyond her research. As a Fulbright awardee and former Visiting Associate Professor at Georgetown University, she has actively shaped the minds of future leaders, cultivating a spirit of global understanding and cooperation.

LTSC looks forward to honoring Dr. Syafaatun Almirzanah, her significant contributions to the academic landscape and all the ways she works to create understanding and respect among various religious traditions. ✿

**“DR. ALMIRZANAH’S INFLUENCE EXTENDS BEYOND HER RESEARCH. AS A FULBRIGHT AWARDEE AND FORMER VISITING ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, SHE HAS ACTIVELY SHAPED THE MINDS OF FUTURE LEADERS, CULTIVATING A SPIRIT OF GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION.**





## THE CALLED TO LEAD AWARD

REV. KIMBERLY VAUGHN, MDIV '08

Rev. Kimberly Vaughn leads at the ELCA with conviction, resilience and a steadfast commitment to inclusivity, values that have long defined her work in ministry.

In fact, Rev. Vaughn chose to attend LSTC because of its multicultural setting and the opportunity to advance the urban ministry work she had long been called to.

"Upon [my] arrival in Chicago," Rev. Vaughn remembers, "I was introduced to those who would become my 'family' forever – Dr. Richard Perry, Dr. Linda E. Thomas, Dr. Albert Pero, Dr. Cheryl Stewart, Dr. Monica Coleman and Dr. James Echols, as well as Southside pastors

who walked alongside me and others through our seminary careers and beyond."

Those relationships proved significant in shaping Rev. Vaughn's path at LSTC, supporting her work in pastoral care and guiding the choices she made when accepting leadership positions within the ELCA.

After graduating from LSTC

with her MDiv in 2008, Rev. Vaughn embarked on a career that involved both pastoral work and leadership at the Churchwide office.

"At [Churchwide] I found that the work we do to promote inclusion and justice was, indeed, the good trouble we were called to," Rev. Vaughn says.

Around the same time, Rev. Vaughn took a position as Assistant to the Bishop with the New Jersey Synod. The role lasted a little over five years.

"I loved being on staff and

all the learning that came with working with congregations on issues of multicultural ministry, call process and discipleship," she said of her time as the Bishop's assistant.

Reflecting on her current role as pastor of Christ Our Redeemer Lutheran in Jersey City, Rev. Vaughn says she finds fulfillment in the on-the-groundwork. She enjoys engaging with the community, celebrating life passages and discussing scriptures with colleagues and church members.

Rev. Vaughn remains dedicated to promoting inclusion and justice and continuing to make deep connections with the people in her congregation.

"I love getting to know the neighborhood, hearing their stories, joys and concerns, and they seem to enjoy getting to know the new pastor on the street," Rev. Vaughn said. "I relish life passages – blessing newborns, sitting with the bereaved, sharing Eucharist each week.

"Discussing the scriptures with people, finding the struggle and the hope in God's word ... those things still fulfill me after all these years."

The significance of Rev. Vaughn's work and her passion to continue it are just some of the reasons LSTC honors her with the 2024 LSTC Called to Lead Award.

Winning the LSTC Called to Lead Award holds special meaning for Rev. Vaughn, who appreciates the recognition of her impact and the affirmation of her leadership style.

Rev. Vaughn remarks, "Being spoken well of in your absence – that's amazing to me." Looking towards the future, she hopes the ELCA and LSTC will boldly embrace learning from those on the margins, allowing room for transformative growth in our community. 🌱

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**RECEIVING THIS AWARD GIVES ME ENCOURAGEMENT THAT MY WORK IS NOT IN VAIN, NO MATTER WHAT MY SUCCESSES OR FAILURES MAY BE. I STRIVE TOWARDS BECOMING MY BEST, MOST AUTHENTIC SELF, AS GOD DESIGNED ME.**

REV. KIMBERLY VAUGHN



## THE FAITHFUL SERVANT AWARD

DR. CHERYL M. PETERSON MDIV '91

**T**he illustrious career of Dr. Cheryl M. Peterson, a distinguished theologian and servant-leader, was shaped by the formative experiences and rich ecumenical environment at LSTC. Inspired by mentors and friends, she earned her Master of Divinity degree from LSTC in 1991 and, later, a Ph.D. from Marquette University.

Throughout her career, Dr. Peterson has embodied the spirit of faithful service in leadership. From pastor to professor, Dr. Peterson has continued to demonstrate a holistic understanding of ministry and theological education.

In reflecting on winning this alumni award Dr. Peterson said, "I'm honored to win something that recognizes all the service I've done across the Church. I've been a pastor, I've been a professor and an associate dean, and now I'm an academic dean. I've published articles and books. I've served on synodical candidacy committees, spoken in several synods, served the ELCA and LWF on ecumenical dialogues, and in other ways. To be recognized with this award is an honor."

A prolific scholar, Dr. Peterson has contributed extensively to the field of theology. Her 2024 book, *The*

*Holy Spirit in the Christian Life: The Spirit's Work For, In, and Through Us* (Baker Academic), is poised to provide a significant intervention in graduate classrooms. She wrote it to encourage new discussions around the Spirit's role in three key movements of Christian life: justification, sanctification, and mission.

Other publications reflect Dr. Peterson's deep engagement with topics such as ecclesiology, pneumatology and the intersection of theology with contemporary issues like #MeToo movement. Through her work, she continues to inspire critical reflection and dialogue within the church and academia.

After serving for 18 years on the faculty at Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, Dr. Peterson joined the Wartburg Theological Seminary community as the first female Academic Dean last summer.

Her dedication to nurturing future generations of theologians, pastors and deacons underscores her commitment to the ongoing mission of the Church. As she continues her journey, Dr. Peterson's legacy stands as a testament to the lasting impact of faithful service in God's kingdom. 🌿

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**EVERYTHING I DO IS OUT OF SERVICE TO GOD, AND FOR THE MISSION OF GOD IN AND THROUGH THE CHURCH.**

DR. CHERYL PETERSON





# MARYJEANNE SCHAFFMEYER

## TO BE HONORED WITH THE 2024 DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

By Keisha Dyson

Maryjeanne Schaffmeyer, a decade-long member of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's board of directors, is being honored with the 2024 Distinguished Service Award. This esteemed recognition, given by the seminary at its spring leadership dinner in May, is presented annually to individuals whose commitment to Jesus Christ and collaborative efforts within seminary life serve as exemplary models.

Schaffmeyer's commitment to effective communication is a hallmark of her leadership style. She emphasizes clarity and understanding on the board, ensuring that all messaging is not only conveyed but can be easily comprehended and shared. A trained speech pathologist, Schaffmeyer boasts over 50 years of experience in healthcare, in roles that span from administration to academic. The skills she learned during her leadership tenure at a non-profit healthcare organization, where she eventually became the Chief Operating Officer (COO), have been particularly valuable to her board service at LSTC.

Schaffmeyer's board leadership at LSTC began in 2014 when she was invited to serve by the Bishop of the East-

Central Synod of Wisconsin. As the wife of a rostered minister—who later became an intentional interim pastor who served nearly 20 congregations within the ELCA—Schaffmeyer's unique perspective on ministry and management enrich her contributions as a board member.

"I approach the school's mission of cultivating leaders for the church with a strong focus on fostering leadership across diverse contexts," said Schaffmeyer. "The values I hold in high regard are integrity and wholeness of our mission and message across diverse people and cultures. Diversity in our leaders and our church spurs innovation which can be integrated within the traditions."

Schaffmeyer's vision for the seminary extends beyond conventional templates. She recognizes the need to prepare leaders for the Church of the future and envisions LSTC influencing the broader ecclesiastical landscape by producing thought leaders capable of shaping the church's trajectory.

In her initial two years on the board, Schaffmeyer served on the Academics and Community committee before assuming the role of Board Chair in 2016, chairing the Governance Committee. In 2018, Schaffmeyer established the board's Review Committee and was a major contributor

to the establishment of a structured presidential and board of directors' evaluation and review process.

Since 2018, Schaffmeyer has been instrumental in supporting the seminary's strategic path in her capacity as the chair of the Marketing and Fundraising committee.

An advocate for transparency and effectiveness, Schaffmeyer actively champions the



**DIVERSITY IN OUR LEADERS AND OUR CHURCH SPURS INNOVATION WHICH CAN BE INTEGRATED WITHIN THE TRADITIONS.**

MARYJEANNE SCHAFFMEYER

implementation of robust tools and processes within her committee and on the board at-large. By asking for detailed plans on improvement strategies, timelines, and anticipated outcomes, she consistently initiates conversations that move from measurement and data to outcomes.

According to Schaffmeyer, this results-driven approach has over time significantly enhanced the accessibility, clarity, and transparency of advancement data. The team has improved communications with boards, donors, and other departments within the school.

Schaffmeyer is no stranger to transformation. During her tenure as the hospital COO at ThedaCare, Schaffmeyer actively contributed to the hospital's implementation of a management system and philosophy aimed at maximizing customer value and optimizing organizational efficiency while minimizing waste.

Reflecting on her work at ThedaCare she says this experience instilled an understanding that organizations experiencing transformation require standard processes, transparency of purpose, consistent communication, and valuable feedback mechanisms essential for growth. "In a unique context like LSTC, there is a significant need for stability and routine processes that provide crucial support during times of transition."

Beyond her official duties, Schaffmeyer extends her support to staff and leaders, providing guidance and mentorship. She remains committed to retaining and nurturing talent and ensuring a smooth transition for newcomers both in the school and on the board of directors.

Schaffmeyer joined the Foundation Board of Trustees as a representative from the board of directors in November 2020. In this role, she continues to shape the future trajectory of LSTC. While her term on the board concludes in fall 2026, she is certain that her work at the seminary is far from complete. 🌸









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