



Students in the river Zygakti. It is said to be the spot where the Apostle Paul baptized Lydia.

A Blessed Baptism: Pilgrimage of a Lifetime

My first semester of seminary, I took History and Theology I with Dr. Peter Vethanayagamony and I wrote an essay on the cultural context of the Roman Empire and its effects on the spread of Christianity. During that class, I learned about the Via Egnatia, a Roman military road that the Apostle Paul used to travel between Philippi and Thesselkaniki.

I never dreamed that my journey at LSTC would be concluded by an opportunity to physically walk that road

during LSTC's "World of the Bible" pilgrimage to biblical sites of Greece and Turkey in May 2024, led by LSTC's Dr. Barbara Rossing and Dr. Esther Menn.

And yet, only a few months ago, I found myself at Philippi where the Apostle Paul established the first Christian church on European soil around 49-50 AD, walking on a part of the Via Egnatia. It was a shining moment in a transformational pilgrimage where I, and other LSTC students like me, were able to fully appreciate the historical contexts of the Bible and Christianity.

Together, we found spiritual renewal, a blessed baptism, in being able to experience keystone sites so foundational to our faith.

As an example, only a few hours after walking the Via Egnatia, we visited the Baptistry of St. Lydia. It is said to be the spot where the Apostle Paul baptized Lydia, the first Christian in Europe, in the river Zygakti (Acts 16: 13-15). I immediately took my shoes off to soak my tired

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Basilica Cistern, Istanbul



LSTC Students on the pilgrimage of a lifetime



Kylee on her pilgrimage to biblical sites of Greece and Turkey

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feet in the cool water of the river.

As I sat at the river's edge, I felt emotion overtake me. This sacred spot is a pilgrimage for many Christians, and I can now say that I am one of them. I was so thankful to God for this opportunity and the reminder of my baptism and new life I received through Christ our Lord.

Water—and its scarcity and importance in the region and our faith—became a common theme throughout our pilgrimage. We remembered our baptisms and walked through the ancient baptistery in the basilica of St. John. We swam in the

Aegean Sea and sailed in the same waters as John the author of Revelation.

In Istanbul, we walked through the underground Basilica Cistern, which used to hold 2.8 million cubic feet of water and reflected on water as a political tool for both the Roman and Ottoman Empires, for where there is water, there is life.

In Ephesus, we saw the Roman water pipes system and learned that the wealthiest parts of their society had access to both hot and cold water. In Pamukkale, site of the Travertines, also known as Cleopatra's pools, we soaked in mineral hot spring water where ancient people came for healing.

I believe humanity is not just

thirsty but dehydrated for the truth of the Gospel. What does it mean to serve a God who declares himself the living water? Who amid an Empire that used water as a means of control, says, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me!" (John 7:37b).

Those words took on new meaning as I experienced the healing waters of the Aegean and echoed throughout my journey through Biblical sites that gave new life to my evolving ministry. I will be carrying these thoughts and experiences with me as I graduate with my MDiv and embark on another journey—this one an uncharted pilgrimage into the world of my own ministry.



Tuesday, May 6, 2025

Join us in creating opportunities for students to thrive. Together, we can remove barriers and empower the next generation of leaders to live out their faith in transformative ways. Make a gift today!





Pastor Heidi Torgerson, MDiv '06

Embracing Courage and Love Through Global Ministry

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 encouragement she received from 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.

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.

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.

She led the congregation's courageous and compassionate response to tend to the needs of a Venezuelan family in crisis. This presented an opportunity for Pastor Torgerson to enact the values of the public church curriculum she studied at LSTC.

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

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.

Save the date!

April 28-30, 2025 – Homecoming and the Queer Intersectionality and the Public Church Symposium. Join us virtually or in-person! Learn more at <https://lstc.edu/events/>

A Leap of Faith Created New Opportunities for International Students

When Char Laywa thinks about God's role in her life she thinks immediately about the ways that faith has motivated her. "I can learn in the midst of good and bad times where God is and how God can help me," Laywa says. "From those times, I know I'm not alone."

Faith, and her commitment to service, was especially important to Laywa's dedication to attending LSTC in spring of 2021, when she made the arduous journey from Myanmar, her war-ravaged home country, to attend LSTC in Chicago, all during a global pandemic that affected both countries.

Still, Laywa knew from the first glance of LSTC's website that this was the place for her. "The first thing that motivated me was when I opened the LSTC website," Laywa says. "The slogan said: 'go deeper, go further, go beyond.'" She saw the words, and the promise of a truly diverse institution connected to the ELCA and knew that this had to be the next step.

Thankfully, Laywa found that LSTC was there to support her financially with a full tuition scholarship and academic support to help bridge the culture gap. Laywa saw God, through people, at work. "I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who donate generous gifts for



Char Laywa

the theological students who look at the face of God and support students even though we did not know each other before," Laywa says. "I would [also] like to thank the LSTC faculty and staff, LRWC, my friends, my learning partners, and the LSTC community."

Laywa's call to pastoral ministry began when she taught Sunday school, prior to seminary, while student in Myanmar. "I felt [during that

time] that God was calling for [my] ministry," Laywa says. The joy she experienced in sharing her knowledge and faith with young people brought new meaning to what she had come to value while earning her undergraduate degree and Master of Arts in Theology in her home country.

Laywa graduated with her MA at the end of the Spring 2023 term. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in the Old Testament field.

Global Leaders Fund

LSTC has a long history of welcoming accomplished students from across the globe who typically arrive having practiced various ministries in their country of origin. They also face unique

challenges that we must recognize and support to continue to attract and retain promising scholars. To do this well, we need to significantly enhance our ability to extend assistance for housing, living expenses, healthcare and emergency situations. Ensuring that our international students are

secure in these basic needs, beyond tuition, allows them to focus on their studies and their own spiritual growth. Your support creates an environment where these students can thrive and therefore offer their ministry to a global audience as visionary leaders.