



# LTS TODAY

Lutheran Theological Seminary, a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, nurtures and challenges all people for Christ-centred leadership and witness for God's mission in the world.

## THE WORLD AS WE SEE IT

Rev. Dr. William Harrison, President



Every institution in the ELCIC is changing and, as I'm sure you know, LTS is very much a part of the transformation. We've been through some major changes, most notably a physical move, and we aren't finished yet.

The biggest challenge for you, our community, may be to understand the reasons for our questions – and for the answers that we hope to reach. **Bp. Jason Zinko** reminds us that the question "Why?" is central to imagining new futures. **Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein** points to the challenges that the ELCIC faces today, along with the demands these pose for new leadership. Just as we went to press, we received the good news that we have more support from an ally in our transformation. The **Lilly Endowment** has awarded us a substantial grant to begin our work.

Board Chair **Laureen Wray** speaks to LTS's efforts to move forward in partnerships. **Dr. Gordon Jensen** speaks to our priority of Lutheran identity, emphasizing its real importance for the life of the church. **Pr. Sarah Urano**, a 2020 LTS graduate, calls our attention to the process of ongoing change in the life of the church and ways in which change is necessary for us to remain a people of proclamation and invitation.

The **Grace Fund for Faculty**, our fundraising priority and the opportunity for our community to support building the future LTS, is celebrated by generous (anonymous) donors. Please consider a gift or bequest to this fund. We are already able to cover nearly all tuition and fees for degree and certificate students (prospective students take note!). Now, we need money to sustain a strong Lutheran faculty through the days and years to come.

We are sad to note that Dr. Roger Nostbakken, erstwhile President and Professor of Systematic Theology at LTS, has died. **Dr. Cam Harder** helps us to remember the gift that Dr. Nostbakken has been to the seminary and the church.

At the core of LTS's transition is the ELCIC's path to becoming a diaconal church, as *Reimagining Our Church: Public Ministry in the ELCIC* (2019) invites us. The ELCIC is becoming a small church, with a minimal but strengthened internal structure and a focus on externally directed action. Growth can no longer be understood in numbers, as it was in the 1950s and 1960s, when immigration and procreation unleashed tremendous expansion. Instead, growth must be understood in missional terms, rooted in proclamation.

This places the lay vocation, living as ambassadors of Christ, at the centre of the church's life – where it ought always to be. For LTS, this is a reminder that strengthening the ability of laypeople to understand and communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ is our ultimate purpose.

At the same time, becoming a diaconal church means emphasizing the vocation of deacons, who are called to lead the church into the world, providing structure and direction for the church's external focus. Deacons are called to bring a rich sense of the church's prophetic tradition, combined with a deep understanding of the disciplines of ethics and moral reasoning. LTS has committed extensive resources to training for deacons and continues to regard this as a high priority.

In the diaconal church that is emerging, pastors are called to serve the larger church community, rather than individual congregations. Less and less are congregations able to afford pastors – and those who can afford them cannot always find them, as fewer people follow this call. The role of pastors is shifting, so that they are called to train, organize, and support others in the work of proclamation, working in partnerships with multiple groups of Christians in multiple locations.

LTS continues to learn how to be a different kind of seminary, in a different kind of church. We give thanks to God for the faithful community of God's people with whom we are blessed to journey through these times. We take to heart our "Be Challenged" slogan and welcome you as you share in the challenges with us.

# FORMING CHURCH LEADERS *FOR THE FUTURE* (AND TODAY)



*Rev. Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein,  
LTS Affiliate Professor of Theology and Director of Contextual Education*

The ELCIC professes its call to be a church In Mission For Others. In 2019, the National Church Council presented a five-year plan of Vision Priorities intended to shape the church's understanding of God's call at this time: 1) Courageous Innovation, 2) Reconciled Relationships, 3) One Body Working Together, and 4) Empowered Disciples. These vision priorities shape the church's missional orientation, where mission is an orientation for and with the other, not to the other, shaped by the contexts and peoples around us. Responding to this call requires LTS to provide future and current clergy and lay leaders with an education and formation that will support them in "missional leadership" as they seek to proclaim the Gospel amid the contexts of the church and Canada.

These contexts are daunting, to say the least. The ELCIC's current situation includes an unabated decline in membership, a changing cultural landscape, a commitment to reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of this land, the impacts of climate catastrophe, and now life in an ongoing global pandemic. These factors contribute to an uncertain and precarious future, particularly for the four western Synods that LTS predominantly serves. At the congregational level, there is an annual membership loss of ~3.5% each year since

2016, accompanied by a downward trend in the average recorded weekly attendance numbers (a statistical average of 35 attendees/week/congregation). Despite this, congregations are not closing or merging. At the clergy level, synods are experiencing shortages of rostered leaders with 25-35% of congregations empty and no available interims. This will increase as 34% (63 out of 187) of rostered leaders retire between 2020 and 2030, and 70% (130) by 2040.

These demographics necessitate a significant shift in thinking about the clergy/congregation relationship. While traditional models of leadership were successful in times when each congregation could expect to have one (or more) full-time pastors, this is no longer the case. In the past, congregations had sufficient numbers in-house to fill Council seats, run full committees, and carry out the worship and work of the church without exhausting members. Today, both clergy and congregational leaders are in short supply and those that remain are burning out. Twentieth-century leadership methods that assumed singular focus on one congregation and in-house program facilitation need to be replaced with collaborative, partnership-building methods that can transition the church to accommodate and thrive in this new reality.

*...the church needs leaders who can lift up and point to the movement of the Holy Spirit in this time, who can lead congregations and ministries to work collaboratively with others inside and outside the church...*

Significant cultural changes demand a similar shift in leadership style. The #MeToo movement, Occupy Wall Street, BLM, climate justice, and #decolonize/Idle No More are not trends, but the culmination of decades of liberation and justice work. They demand a democratized and collaborative leadership structure, flattened hierarchies, and the empowerment of those who have been excluded. Engaging in political action is coming to be seen as a civic responsibility which the church cannot ignore. Current and upcoming generations of church members and leaders expect the church to be conversant in these issues, if not explicitly supporting them.

Because of these contexts, the church needs leaders who can lift up and point to the movement of the Holy Spirit in this time, who can lead congregations and ministries to work collaboratively with others inside and outside the church, and who can help congregations discern whether to restructure, merge, or close.

The leaders themselves will need the skills to serve multiple congregations simultaneously, to learn from and with lay leaders and community leaders, to publicly engage in the ongoing work of justice for all, and to think of themselves as leaders serving the whole church rather than a single ministry site.

While all of this might seem overwhelming, the Holy Spirit leads us all towards new life and we can trust God to provide who and what is needed to proclaim the Gospel in these times and those to come. With that foundation and with a new future ahead of us, LTS continues to joyfully engage in its vocation of forming and educating leaders for the ELCIC, always in the spirit of grace and resurrection.







# THE PERVERSIVE QUESTION OF CHURCH IDENTITY

Rev. Sarah Urano

For a long time before I followed God's call to go to seminary, I insisted I wasn't going to be a pastor because the church wasn't as welcoming as it claimed to be. I knew, and had been taught, that God is a loving and gracious God. The church, at that time, was definitely not accepting of my bisexuality and many congregations didn't approve of my physical appearance (I had short hair, eccentric clothing, and piercings). I felt excluded and did not want to be associated with a church whose practices and proclamation did not reflect our identity in Christ. Yet here I am, ordained and chugging along into my second year of ministry. Why? Because God moved the church to change. Now I am being asked, "Who are we and where are we going?"

Before we begin to answer that, it's worth recognizing that the question of the church's identity has *throughout history* surfaced when its particular context is experiencing social and political turbulence. When society experiences hardship, the church also experiences hardship. In Luther's time, tumult drove the formulation of the *Augsburg Confession*, which was the reformers' attempt to spell out the foundations of church identity. Likewise, our current unstable social, political, and religious climates call us to re-examine the identity of the church today.

The most tangible aspect of the church's identity – and the one with the most direct impact on our lives – is its *practical* identity. This is shaped by three things: the message publicly proclaimed by laity and by ministers who fill the office of preaching (i.e., pastors and diaconal ministers); the church's ecclesial practices and structure; and its response – or lack thereof – to societal needs. A clear failure to proclaim Christ's loving and liberating Gospel on the part of ministers and laity is exposed when people perceive the church as being extremely conservative, irrelevant, hypocritical, unwelcoming, rigid, anti-science, and anti-change. Recognizing this failure creates an opportunity for ministers and laity to critically examine their current methods of proclamation (including worship practices, institutional structures, and service to community) and to re-centre them on the Gospel.



Pastor Sarah and family.

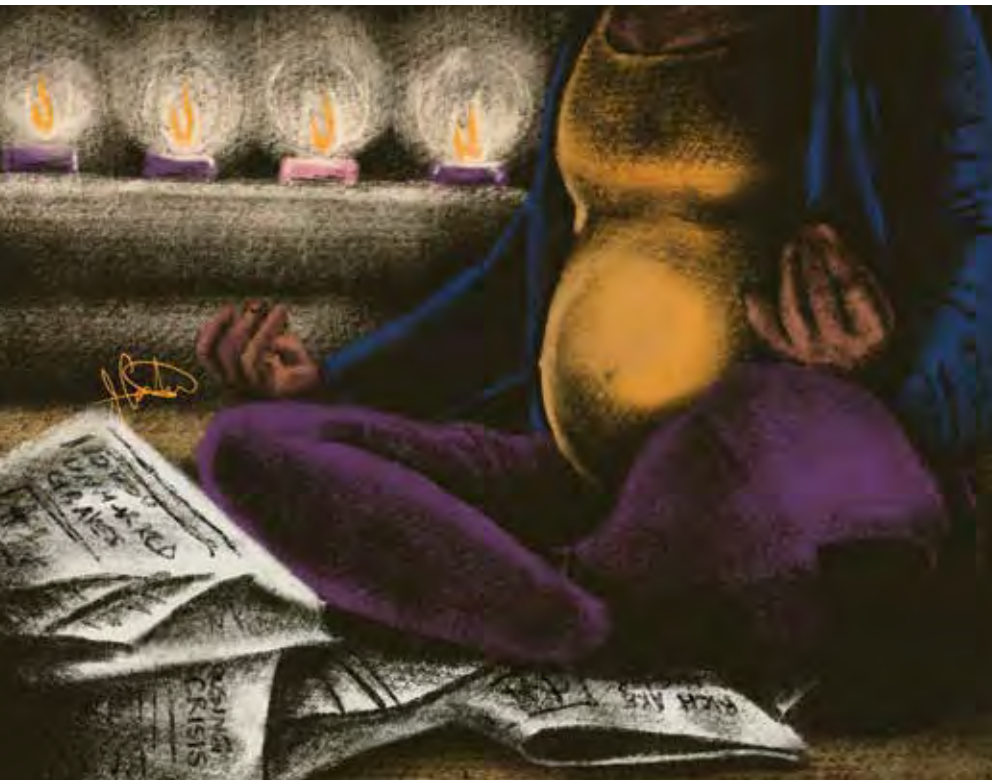
A recent example of social turbulence that has caused people to consider the church's practical identity and to reform it is the onset of COVID-19. In the past twenty months, the pandemic prohibited many of the features that we had considered to be core to proclamation: physical touch, physical gathering in community, and shared meals. Further, in-person worship and the traditional administration of the sacraments were no longer safe or permitted. Ministers and laity were forced to break away from tradition and discover a new practical identity. They found creative ways to worship, pray, listen to the Word of God, and share in the sacraments; meeting online, outdoors, serving individually wrapped elements for the Lord's Supper, visiting through windows, and physical distancing and masking have been viable solutions as we begin to physically re-gather.

Technology has played a central role in our response to the pandemic, without and within the church. Congregations moved to online worship. Council meetings moved to Zoom. Sometimes even pastoral visits happened through screens or telephones rather than in the same physical space. However, while technology has greatly helped bridge physical distance, its widespread adoption has also excluded some, particularly those in marginalized groups (racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, rural, the elderly). Congregations have been creatively addressing these barriers by recording sermons for radio broadcast, sending sermon/prayer/music recordings to public facilities such as libraries and hospitals, assisting seniors with technology, and printing the liturgy and sermons to mail out. Human proclamation is imperfect; thus the church's practical identity is in constant need of reassessment and readjustment.

As the church's practical identity evolves, its surrounding institutional structure is also called to critical analysis. Important questions need to be asked: Have altered methods of proclamation rendered some positions irrelevant? Is the current structure bolstering or inhibiting public proclamation of the Gospel? Is the structure falling away from the Gospel and becoming dependent on its own work under the illusion of vitality? As humans tend to do in periods of unrest and uncertainty, are we curving inward by

holding even tighter to institutional policies and procedures? Recentering the institutional church's identity on the Gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit that moves humanity out of the death the institutional church experiences and into new life freely gifted to humanity, and embodied in Christ's true church in the world.

I reconsidered my original reluctance to go to seminary after the ELCIC's 2011 shift to allowing same-sex unions. I began to see new ordinands that also had quirky exterior appearances. I was inspired to become a pastor because I saw change in the church's practical identity. Now, as a pastor, I continue to be energized by some of the exciting changes that have been happening. Now is the time to creatively look at ways that are not contingent on ritual or tradition, to be proclaimers of the Gospel and witness God's true church in the world. Now is the time to alter the methods of proclamation in order to facilitate the radical proclamation of the Gospel to people traditionally excluded. Diverse forms of proclamation provide an opportunity to re-centre our understanding of the church as *movement*; that is, gospel-based practices that more fully bear witness to the church's identity, rooted in the Gospel. New life and the certainty of salvation through faith alone by God's grace alone calls people to unfamiliar action through which good fruit for all society are the result.



Blessings  
at Advent  
to each of you.

Artwork by Pastor Jaily Corbin, LTS 2017



## WHY THIS IS MEANINGFUL TO ME

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In the last year and a half, various articles in this publication have introduced this new fund to our community: to explain the original spirit of its founding, why support for it is so vital, and how it will ultimately help shape the ongoing and future LTS.

Here though, in this edition, we move beyond the institution's views to learn why this fund is gaining increasing momentum and support from many of our donors. We asked two donors who made gifts to this fund to share their thoughts on why they leant such generous support to the Grace Fund.

As it is, both donors have always asked that their profiles remain anonymous in such publications; we continue to honour that request, here, by anonymizing their comments.

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In browsing through some communications from the Lutheran Theological Seminary, an article on the Grace Fund for Faculty caught my interest.

Knowing that the faculty at the Seminary has a deep and earnest desire to train people to become leaders in the Lutheran church who will bring the Gospel of the Good news to all people, it became even more meaningful to me. Educating pastors has become of ever-increasing importance in our day and age.

The establishment of the Grace Fund ensures that the Seminary can continue to attract top level scholars, theologians and visiting professors to its faculty. As a direct result, it will also attract students who will be armed with a sound Lutheran education, whose lives will be made richer in service to our Lord and his church. We—as practicing and worshipping Lutherans across Canada—will reap its benefits.

I also like the word “Grace”. It is one of the strongest tenets of our Lutheran faith.

These are the reasons I have chosen to support the Grace Fund for Faculty at the Lutheran Theological Seminary.

~An anonymous donor



*'The Sower', N. Wiesmose, 1969*

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My main reason for supporting the seminary is the dearth of pastors in our country, now. While I am not necessarily an expert in education, I like to support anything we can do that will lead to people accepting a call to ministry.

~An anonymous donor

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## THE ONGOING STRUGGLE AND OPPORTUNITY OF LUTHERANISM

Rev. Dr. Gordon Jensen

Many today would argue that the time for “denominationalism” (e.g. Lutheranism) or “confessionalism” (i.e. being committed to confessional statements) has passed. As the 21st century has evolved, churches and denominational schools and seminaries, such as Lutheran Theological Seminary, are seemingly edged toward extinction, as people increasingly ask, “Why do we need a Lutheran Seminary, or a Lutheran church? Why can’t we just have a Christian church, and eliminate all the petty things that seem to divide us, such as doctrines and the teachings of some guys from 500 years ago?” Some would even question why we have an institutional church, such as the ELCIC, at all. These are legitimate questions, and they have not been addressed very well. Placed on the defensive by such ideas, churches and seminaries have often justified their existence by defining themselves by what they are “against” rather than what the Christian Church holds in common. Such definitions or defensive positioning, based on what we are not, however, are not very helpful. They do not really say very much about our identity, based on what we stand for.

Living on the edge of extinction is not something new for Lutherans, however. It started as a movement of reform, hanging by a thread in the sixteenth century. The Lutheran church and the Lutheran Seminary that arose in Western Canada was fueled by people with vision, people whose dreams and visions were always greater than the apparently available resources. In a sense, the Lutheran Church and LTS arose and grew in the early 20th century as a movement that was always precarious, hanging by a thread, and existing on shoestring budgets. So today, beginning the third decade of the 21st century, we are not experiencing something unique.

The Lutheran Church, and the theological institutions that have trained its leaders, however, have been fortunate to have a powerful resource that has defined and shaped, and continues to define and shape, its identity and place within the Christian church. Our identity is not defined by a person,

Luther (although he plays a role), or a source country. Rather, our identity, and the gift we have to offer Christianity and the world, is found in a resource called the *Augsburg Confession*. It was, and still is, meant for the whole church, and not just

Lutherans. It was written and presented to the world as an ecumenical document, not a narrow, rigid doctrinal checklist for Lutherans. What makes it important is that it is a document that clearly defines the Gospel, and shows us ways to look at the world around us with “gospel lenses.”

Truth be told, however, I suspect that a majority of Lutherans in Canada may have never heard of the *Augsburg Confession*, a ‘confession of faith’ written in 1530 and presented to the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles the Fifth. This document is so important that many Lutheran Churches use the name, “Church of the Augsburg Confession” rather than Lutheran Church. At the heart of this document is the Gospel: the firm conviction that the full life, as

Jesus describes it, is found in a community of reconciled and restored relationships—relationships that are possible only by the grace of God. People, relationships, and all of creation are brought into right relationships because God has brought—and continued to bring—them about.

So Lutheranism has always been about “giving itself away” into God’s relationships with the world. From the beginning, it was meant to be a movement, not a church. And as long as the community of faith stays centered on God’s work of restoring and reconciling relationships (called “being justified by God’s grace alone through faith alone” in theological jargon), there is a wonderful freedom possible. It does not matter, then, if institutional versions of a Lutheran church change over time. Lutheranism isn’t about a church, you see. It’s about a living Gospel, of forgiveness, life and salvation being poured by God into the world. That is what the seminary is intent on teaching, and handing on to each generation of leaders—a clear sense, and commitment to, the Gospel. That doesn’t change.



‘Martin Luther’s Sermon’,  
Lucas Cranach, 1547

# LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, SASKATOON RECEIVES PATHWAYS PHASE 2 GRANT FROM LILLY ENDOWMENT

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Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon has received a grant of \$960,000 (CDN) from Lilly Endowment Inc. to support the “Our Classroom is Western Canada: We Meet There in Mission” transformational project, part of our ongoing effort to become a “Small Footprint, Big Impact” school.

The transformation project is being funded through Lilly Endowment’s Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative. It is a three-phase initiative designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada as they prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges they face as they prepare pastoral leaders for Christian congregations both now and into the future.

To become more deeply missional, LTS is shifting to a model that emphasizes course offerings in an immersion format, in locations across the area that we serve – which is all of Canada from Thunder Bay westward. Our classroom, therefore, will become Western Canada, engaging the people, places, and issues that touch lives.

The context of study will be truly missional, welcoming instruction from a variety of local figures along with faculty direction and inviting laypeople into our classes along with those preparing for rostered ministry. This approach also enables LTS to continue the work of decolonization, learning from Indigenous forms of education. Immersion courses will be supported by online offerings and some Saskatoon-based classes.

The Lilly Endowment grant will fund the transformation, including a complete reimagining of our educational systems and organizational structures, along with an anticipated five experimental courses. This will serve as a prelude to the faculty development that we will engage with the Grace Fund for Faculty, supported by LTS donors.

Dr. William Harrison, LTS President, announcing receipt of the grant, said, “We are both grateful and deeply encouraged that Lilly Endowment has chosen to fund the ‘Our Classroom

is Western Canada’ initiative. We appreciate this solid vote of confidence in our efforts to become more missional and take the work of decolonization seriously. This project serves our community, notably in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, while strengthening the capacity of LTS to continue providing high-quality theological formation for years to come.”

Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon is one of 84 theological schools that are receiving a total of more than \$82 million in grants through the second phase of the Pathways initiative. Together, the schools represent evangelical, mainline Protestant, nondenominational, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and Black church and historic peace church traditions (e.g., Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, Quakers). Many schools also serve students and pastors from Black, Latino, Korean American, Chinese American and recent immigrant Christian communities.

“Theological schools have long played a pivotal role in preparing pastoral leaders for churches,” said Christopher L. Coble, the Endowment’s vice president for religion. “Today, these schools find themselves in a period of rapid and profound change. Through the Pathways Initiative, theological schools will take deliberate steps to address the challenges they have identified in ways that make the most sense to them. We believe that their efforts are critical to ensuring that Christian congregations continue to have a steady stream of pastoral leaders who are well-prepared to lead the churches of tomorrow.”

Lilly Endowment launched the Pathways initiative in January 2021 because of its longstanding interest in supporting efforts to enhance and sustain the vitality of Christian congregations by strengthening the leadership capacities of pastors and congregational lay leaders.





## ABOUT LILLY ENDOWMENT INC.

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly, Sr. and his sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. Although the gifts of stock remain a financial bedrock of the Endowment, it is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders' wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion and maintains a special commitment to its founders' hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. The primary aim of its grantmaking in religion, which is national in scope, focuses on strengthening the leadership and vitality of Christian congregations in the United States. The Endowment also seeks to foster public understanding about religion and lift up in fair, accurate and balanced ways the contributions that people of all faiths and religious communities make to our greater civic well-being.

*“We appreciate this solid vote of confidence in our efforts to become more missional and take the work of decolonization seriously. This project serves our community, notably in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, while strengthening the capacity of LTS to continue providing high-quality theological formation for years to come.”*

*~President Harrison*





## WHO ARE WE? AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

By Jason Zinko, Bishop of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

Who are we? And where are we going? These are excellent questions that all churches, seminaries, synods, and ministries should be asking regularly as part of refining their mission alongside God in the world. The work of understanding who we are and on which path we walk is important and critical work in our ministry.

However, these questions often lead us to the wrong answers. Or rather, they allow us to answer in ways that often only reflect the things we are already doing.

What we really need to ask, in addition to these questions, is something more – something that drives us toward identifying our core purpose.

Simon Sinek, a leadership and organizational culture author, has dedicated his career to helping organizations understand their purpose. He asks leaders to first define their ‘why’. To lead effectively and inspire others, organizations should focus almost exclusively on the questions of why the organization does what it does: why does it exist; why should your people be engaged; why should anyone care what you do?

Most organizations (business and charities) often stop at asking ‘what’ or ‘how’. This has certainly been my experience of congregations from the perspective of a lay member, pastor, and bishop. Most churches can articulate *what* they do – worship, choir and other groups, fundraising dinners, etc. They can usually answer *how* they do things – pastor, lay members, etc. But those don’t answer the question of *why*.

Think about your own experience in a council meeting or congregational meeting. How often have you heard questions about how to attract youth and/or young families, what groups can rent the building to help pay the bills, what message to put on the sign, or how to trim the budget. How often have budget shortfalls led to the dismissal of staff who work with youth, families, and administrative support? These questions and actions do not focus on *why*.

Through COVID shutdowns and limited attendance, we have wrestled with the questions of *what* and *how* – what do we do about communion, how will we stream our services, how do we encourage giving? But most of these questions have nothing to do with *why* we exist.

I could run through virtually every conversation I’ve had around a boardroom table in the last ten years and I would

be hard pressed to find more than a handful that really truly addressed the question of *why*.

As Sinek says in his book *Start With Why*: “Most of the answers we get, when based on sound evidence, are perfectly valid. However, if we’re starting with the wrong questions, if we don’t understand the cause, then even the right answers will always steer us wrong...eventually.”

I think that the Christian church, for many generations, has started with the wrong questions. And I believe that the decisions we have made based on those questions have led us to many of the challenges we face. I further believe that by focusing solely on our purpose, we will allow our churches and ministries to find the future that God is already preparing for us.

The question of *why* has revolutionized the way I think about ministry and future planning. It has helped me to evaluate the ideas brought to synod council and discussions in our congregations with a new lens.

A block party might be a great idea, but *why* are we doing it? Does it effectively communicate our purpose to others, or is it simply an attempt to add numbers to our existing Sunday worship service (which answers *how*, by the way)?

I will say that I firmly believe that our Board of Governors at LTS are focused on our *why*. Redesigning our curriculum as an intensives-based model could only have happened, and been successful, after understanding our *why*. A move out of the building on Seminary Crescent with the overwhelming support of our constituency could only have happened after understanding our *why*. Good and accurate answers to the questions of *who are we*, and *where are we going* could only be arrived at after a thorough understanding of why the seminary exists. Certainly there is more work to do, but it has been astonishing to see how creative, flexible, and effective an organization can be when they understand why they do what they do.

I want to encourage all of you reading this to drop everything and spend some time talking over the *why* question with your leadership. I believe it will fundamentally shape your reaction to current stresses, and your plans for future ministry in your context.



## TRUSTING IN GOD'S GRACE *Laureen Wray, the LTS Board Chairperson*

In the same vein as those who first opened the doors to a Lutheran seminary on the prairies, LTS remains focussed on equipping dedicated leaders for service both within the ELCIC and among communities of all kinds. However, the specific context of ministry today and the questions students wrestle with have greatly changed the way programs are developed and delivered over the last decades. As the Board of LTS, it remains our privilege and duty to consider what expression of our consistent mission God is calling us to today and into the future. This work challenges us to listen deeply, think strategically and work efficiently.

One of the directions we have discerned as a Board is a greater desire to work in partnership with others. This is grounded both in our theological understanding of God's call to serve with and for our neighbour as well as in the practical realities of ministry today. The Board continues to put significant effort into the work of discerning what partners and style of partnership God is opening before us. It is an exciting time of exploration and curiosity about what God is doing in our communities, within LTS, and among our

potential partners. The work is daunting, but we step into it trusting God's grace to guide us.

Over the course of this year, we have welcomed several new Board members as they were selected by Synods across the four western synods of the ELCIC. Thank you to all of you who accepted nominations and were elected or re-elected this year. We also say a heartfelt thanks to outgoing Board members who have finished or will finish their service in 2021: Rev. Lynne Granke, Rev. Doug Heine, Rev. Jim Whaley, and Bishop Greg Mohr. It is a blessing to work with the talented and passionate leaders who have been called to serve on this Board—past and present.

As we look to 2022 and beyond, the challenges ahead are significant. Yet, we trust in a God who loves, who lives, and who brings life to the world each day, so we keep moving too. We move thoughtfully and prayerfully towards a vision of LTS that reflects a truly reconciled, just, and loving expression of the Gospel today and for generations to come.

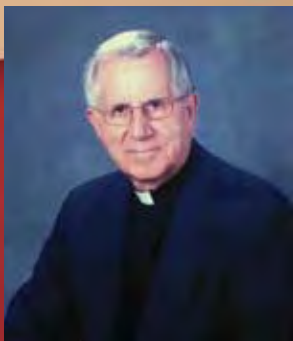


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# In Memory of Dr. Roger Nostbakken

## LTS President: 1985-96

Dr. Roger Nostbakken, former LTS president and professor of systematic theology, passed away this last month. He was a wonderful mentor to me. He helped train me as a pastor in the 70's; and in the late 80's, struggling with whether to go on for doctoral studies, he was the one whose advice I sought. Roger Nostbakken embodied for me the kind of pastoral theologian I wanted to be: deeply engaged with the world and the church. His crucial support at that crossroads shaped the next 30 years of my ministry.

Nostbakken insisted that theology is not a head game for religious intellectuals. Rather, it's a tool for helping Christians understand their faith and to live it. To be effective then, he said, it must be *accessible*. One of the first assignments Nostbakken gave us at seminary was to write a paper explaining the Trinity to a child in Grade 5. The more challenging the concept, he said, the more important it is that we avoid jargon and find concrete descriptions that make sense to the listener. Though Nostbakken could enjoy the arduous prose of theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg, his own preaching, teaching and writing was always clear and compelling. He loved doing theology *for the people*, not just the academy. In part that may be an inheritance from his grandfather, a Norwegian lay preacher, who led worship and Bible study in Lutheran prairie homes as Roger was growing up. It's also reflected in Roger's choice to return to the parish after retirement from seminary serving interim ministries in Calgary, Camrose and Saskatoon.

Nostbakken also insisted that theology only has integrity if it is *contextual*. There is no universal language for describing our experience of God. All theology must reflect the lived experience of particular peoples--and those vary considerably. In a 1995 article in *Consensus*, Roger wrote that modern theology can only be done with integrity in conversation with people of varied faiths, cultures and lifestyles. For him, that conversation begins, not by telling or hosting, but by being a guest in others' space and learning to listen: "Those of us in North America . . . need to listen to brothers and sisters who have all their lives and through all their Christian history lived in a multifaith context... Only after we have listened can we enter into a meaningful dialogue." He quotes Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* who says

"Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener." Nostbakken practiced that listening as a guest of communities around the world during his many years as the Canadian Representative on the Lutheran World Federation. His establishment of the World Religions Department at the University of Saskatchewan was also an expression of his commitment to contextual theology. And Nostbakken's support for the merger of Canada's various Lutheran groups was rooted in his desire to grow a truly Canadian Lutheran church enriched not just by German and Nordic thought but by "French, Inuit, Indian and Metis traditions" as well (1982 *Consensus* article on Canadian Lutheran worship).

Finally, Dr. Nostbakken insisted that the world does not serve the Church as a reservoir for potential new members. Rather the world is the major arena of God's constant activity and the Church, aware of that Divine presence, exists to serve the communities in which it is planted. In an unpublished paper given at the 1979 ELCC National Convention, Nostbakken said "As Christians we are not intrinsically smarter, or better, or more righteous than others. We share the same kinds of problems and personal ambiguities as everyone else. The difference is that Christians face life with a different perspective and a different set of loyalties. That perspective and those loyalties are bound up in the belief in and commitment to serve Jesus Christ. But this is a view of life and an orientation to be expressed in this world. It is not a style of life to be lived in isolation from others." Nostbakken was no mystic. He engaged his world with gusto (among many interests he loved baseball and great conversations with people of all stripes at the pub). And his writings were usually peppered with data showing what was happening in the local and global community, with implications for our own ministry.

I count myself very fortunate to have known Roger Nostbakken. I followed in his footsteps as a systematic professor at LTS, and he followed in mine as a pastor at Messiah Lutheran in Camrose. Most of all, he was a beloved brother in Christ who will be sorely missed.

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