

United Lutheran Seminary

GETTYSBURG + PHILADELPHIA

2018 Synodical Report

At United Lutheran Seminary, we have a new understanding of Jesus' words from the Gospel of John: *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

We are a new seminary, born out of our predecessor schools with over 300 years of experience in theological education. Many people have sacrificed their time, talent, and resources to bring us to this point. The sacrifices continue, as does the work of United Lutheran Seminary.

We look to the future of the church in which all are empowered to bring God's reign into fullness and fruition.

On both the Philadelphia and Gettysburg campuses, we look to those who have gone before us in order to learn those core convictions of our confessional learning that hold us steadfast in grace. We call on the excellence of our alums to provide us with benchmarks and goals for our current students. We remember the suffering of those who fought on our campuses, both in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. We look to the future of the church in which all are empowered to bring God's reign into fullness and fruition.

As recipients of these gifts, we are working diligently to raise up leaders for an ever-evolving church. We are striving to keep the best of our predecessor schools:

- The Urban Theological and Town and Country Institutes.
- A strong, diverse faculty.
- The best support from alumni and synods of all the ELCA seminaries.
- And of course, your prayers and support that sustain us from day to day.

There have been some birthing pangs along the way. In March, after much prayer and discernment, our board made the difficult decision to have the president step down. We continue the process of building our administration and faculty, with multiple search committees working diligently to make sure the needs of our students are met by the best-qualified candidates. And we are working through the challenges of bringing together two established schools with their myriad traditions and best practices.

There are many highlights to our first year. United Lutheran Seminary has record enrollment numbers. This past fall, 78 new students enrolled. Thirty-five additional new students have enrolled this spring. This is significantly higher than the combined incoming classes of our predecessor institutions, where enrollment of new students was 15 to 20 in the spring semester.

As these emerging public leaders join us, we are proactively helping to reduce the problem of student debt. All full-time ELCA, residential students in the candidacy process receive full-tuition scholarships at United Lutheran Seminary. In the two years that we have offered this initiative, there has been a dramatic drop in the level of borrowing as each new class enrolled. Prior to offering these scholarships, 70-85% of new students financed part of their seminary education by borrowing through the federal loan program. That rate has dropped to just 22% of new students financing their education with loans.

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New technologies are making it possible for classrooms on both campuses to come together in virtual environments to discuss theology, study scripture, and discuss best practices for ministry. In addition, we are creating new life-long learning opportunities for pastors, deacons, and lay leaders in all fifteen synods of regions seven, eight, and beyond.

Last September, the Association of Theological Schools visited both campuses and concluded that “ULS has in place the required authorizations and documentation to deliver theological education as a school in good standing.” This ensures our future as an institution of higher education that meets and supersedes the benchmarks placed before us by all accrediting agencies. Sacrifices will continue to be asked of those who serve and support the school. It is the nature of our servant leadership to do so.

In this time of interim leadership, we are focusing on three priorities:

- Nurturing diverse, culturally competent Christian leaders and communities.
- Developing new pathways for theological education (e.g., continuing education, M.A. programs, and distance learning programs).
- Cultivating partnerships within and across institutions.

We are moving forward with each of these by launching a ULS Diversity Task Force, entering into conversations with synods and foundations to explore means of reaching new students, and discovering ways to provide resources for public Christian leaders – students, alumni, and other church leaders – for ministry in the 21st century.

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Most importantly, ULS strives to foster a diverse community of faith where people come to meet Jesus and each other at the table of God's grace. During our recent time of discernment and conversation, the ULS board heard the concerns and pain of the students, faculty, and staff. The decision to remove the former president was not made lightly, but was done with care and compassion for the needs of the institution, as we believe the future of ELCA congregations in the Northeastern United States calls for a robust academy of learning for future rostered leaders, with a healthy and vibrant community of *koinonia* and trust. To this end, we are committing considerable resources for counseling and sensitivity training for everyone in the ULS community. In this context, we will work to forge a new sense of mission and purpose so that our graduates are empowered to serve the church of the 21st Century.

Without endings, there can be no new beginnings. Without dying to the self, there is no hope of new life, no chance of resurrection. United Lutheran Seminary is a place of extraordinary education, living into the power of death and resurrection through our shared experience and learning. It is a story of sorrow and love, suffering and hope.

We are grateful to you for continued prayers, financial support, and compassion as we move forward in faith. We ask you to join us on this journey in every way possible. God bless you in your ministries to the church and the world.



Acting President James S. Dunlop