



CONVERSATIONS

“Navigating Our Current Realities”

By Gretchen E. Ziegenhals

Five seminary deans and five Lexington Seminar staff members met in Tampa March 3-4 to discuss the narratives that the schools have prepared for the Summer Seminar. These deans represented the five seminaries in the final cohort of The Lexington Seminar: Theological Teaching for the Church's Ministries. Seminar staff noted that while 30 seminaries have preceded these final five in the program, the schools presented fresh insights on familiar issues, as well as the opportunity to discuss issues the Seminar has not yet addressed. Topics included balancing church-seminary relations, navigating the internal and external pressures that fragment us, teaching students who present unusual challenges, teaching integration, and sharing the workload in a small faculty. Throughout the time together, a common question of discernment surfaced: How are we to be teachers of the church, given the current realities that demand our attention?

Bethany Theological Seminary was founded in 1905 and is the graduate

school and academy for theological education for the Church of the Brethren, an historic peace church. Recently relocated to Richmond, Indiana, the school also offers more accessible graduate degrees through Connections, a distance education program that combines intensive courses at the Bethany Center, on-line courses, and off-site courses hosted by the Susquehanna Valley Satellite in Pennsylvania. The small faculty is stretched between writing, teaching, advising, mentoring, and on-line teaching, among many other roles. As the denomination's only seminary, the faculty must also continue to define and redefine their relationship with the national church. Their narrative prompts such questions for faculty as: What is my vocation? How is it sustained by the seminary? How do we

form a teaching community of colleagues excited to be where they are?

Eastern Mennonite Seminary is located on the 93-acre EMU campus, in the heart of the historic Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Eastern Mennonite School, as it was first called, began as a Bible academy in 1917. By 1965, a seminary had evolved, seeking to prepare its students for Christian ministry. While the seminary is an integral part of the university, seminary faculty are working on finding their place in teaching in the context of the university. As they teach for the church and keep faith with its mission, they must also seek ways of working with colleagues who have other perspectives. This situation raises questions for the class-

room: How can faculty model for students how to negotiate and integrate these two worlds? How do we teach for integration and collaboration? How will the seminary respond to students who arrive with a different set of assumptions?

Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest began construction on its wooded, five-acre campus site in 1954. Located in the



Seminary administrators Alan Gregory, Ervin Stutzman, Diane Hymans, Craig Nessian, and Stephen Breck Reid meet in Tampa to prepare their schools for the 2005 Summer Seminar.

Navigating continued

middle of Austin, Texas, the seminary is just north of the University of Texas, and near Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Its mission is to prepare leaders who will equip the church to carry out God's mission in a culturally diverse world. Among its core values is a hospitable community life that embraces diversity and ensures that all voices are heard. Yet the small faculty finds itself wrestling with how to balance those voices in forms such as distance learning, technology, elevated pastoral studies; simultaneous 4-, 8-, and 12-week course schedules; ministry and counseling programs, cross-cultural programs, and the Hispanic program. What is the limit to what we can fit into a curriculum? How do we decide what to try and what to set aside? How do we deal with issues of conscience when we say "no" to a good idea, because of limited resources? What do we mean when we talk about diversity? How do we honor the complexity of small seminary settings?



Wesley Theological Seminary Dean Bruce Birch and wife, Susan, participate in worship at the June 2004 Seminar.

Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio is a school of theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Its rich and varied history spans over a century and a half, and culminated with Trinity opening its doors in 1978, a consolidation of Hamma and ELTS. As a seminary of the ELCA, Trinity stands for what a commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, to educational excellence, and to preparation for Christian service. However, with several retirements gone unfilled, 20 full-time faculty teach a student body of 250. Faculty struggle with overcrowded calendar and curriculum issues, which have created a frenetic pace for teaching and learning. They note the lag between living in a post-modern culture of limitless possibilities, and the ability to choose between options. How do we sort out all of these demands? How do we redefine "core?" How do we learn to be part of a community in which we all share the workload? What new models of seminary education are available to help us navigate these current realities?

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Wartburg Theological Seminary

traces its history back to the missionary efforts of Bavarian

pastors who founded an educational institution in Saginaw, Michigan in 1852, which moved to Dubuque, Iowa, the following year. Several seminaries have merged with Wartburg over the past 150 years, forming its present ELCA institution. The beautiful, 35-acre campus sits on the brow of a ridge in southwest Dubuque, overlooking the hills. As it seeks to prepare students for the church's ministries in the world, the faculty reflected on issues of teaching and learning with respect to students who are admitted to seminary, despite special behavioral, emotional, ideological, or intellectual needs. How can limited resources of time and money stretch to meet students who present unusual challenges? Are there limits to what faculty can or should do with such students? How do we balance the tension between wanting to honor a student's call to ministry, and our ethical obligations to the congregations they will serve? What criteria will we use to decide what to do with students who present unusual challenges?

Conversations around these issues will continue when six-member teams from each of these schools meet in Northeast Harbor, Maine, June 9-14 for the Summer Seminar. Participants in the Seminar will experience formal sessions planned around each seminary's narrative, team meetings, and worship; as well as informal times for continued conversation about teaching and learning, recreation, and rest with colleagues and spouses.

2005 Summer Seminar Participants

Bethany Theological Seminary

Eugene F. Roop
Stephen Breck Reid
Jeff Bach
Nadine Pence Frantz
Tara Hornbacher
Dan Ulrich

Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest

Titus Presler
Alan P. R. Gregory
Charles James Cook
Susan Dolan-Henderson
Margaret W. Izutsu
Cynthia Briggs Kittredge

Eastern Mennonite Seminary

Loren E. Swartzendruber
Ervin R. Stutzman
Brenda Martin Hurst
Mark Thiessen Nation
Sara Wenger Shenk
Lonnie D. Yoder

Trinity Lutheran Seminary

Mark A. Ramseth
Diane J. Hymans
Donald L. Huber
John K. Karanja
Henry Langknecht
Joy A. Schroeder

Wartburg Theological Seminary

Duane H. Larson
Craig Nesson
Susan Ebertz
Nathan Frambach
Ann Fritschel
Elizabeth Leeper

SEMINARY NEWSBRIEFS:

2004 Participants

Ashland Theological Seminary

Academic Dean Dale Stoffer writes, "Our Lexington Seminar project is a two-pronged consideration of the issue of critical thinking in theological education.



The first prong deals with helping faculty reinforce critical thinking skills in their teaching. To this end, the faculty will be going to Sugar Creek, Ohio, for a two-day retreat, April 14-15, 2005, with Dr. Stephen Brookfield, a leader in the field of adult education and critical reflection. The second prong is the development of a process of evaluation and remediation for incoming students to prepare them better for theological education. Dr. Brenda Colijn, one of our team members, has volunteered to assist in this phase of the project. She has been given release time in the spring quarter to research available resources and facilitate the evaluation and remediation process. We hope to have some initial pieces of such a process in place this fall."

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond

Dean of the Faculty Richard Vinson writes, "The faculty at BTR completed the Profiles of Ministry Inventory this fall. POM is the instrument given in many seminaries to the entering class; it gives each



student a report showing them how some of their tendencies in ministry compare to their classmates and to the whole database of students. We hope that when we get our profile back, we can use it as the basis for a discussion of how we as a faculty understand "ministry" and how our understanding compares to that of our students. Francis Lonsway, who directs the Profiles program for ATS, has agreed to come to help interpret our results to us."

Lancaster Theological Seminary

Dean of the Seminary Anabel Proffitt writes, "In January the faculty met for two days with representatives of the seven judicatories we serve to listen to one another's perceptions on what constitutes excellence in ministry, and to identify the educational needs of the judicatories as we continue to examine aspects of our mission beyond the confines of degree programs. Surrounded by worship based on the epiphany theme of 'Recognizing God Doing a New Thing' (using the story of Simeon and Anna in the temple), the meeting involved shared meals, planned discussion sessions, and fellowship time in the President's home. While the seminary faculty and judicatories generally agreed on what constitutes 'excellence in ministry,' we diverge in our beliefs about what it takes to foster that excellence. This divergence has been discussed at subsequent faculty meetings and will be the central topic at the two-day Spring Faculty Workshop in May."



Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Academic Dean Michael Root writes, "Our project focuses on how we can extend the virtues of full-time, residential theological education, with a firm commitment to the Lutheran tradition, to part-time and non-Lutheran students (who, to an extensive degree, are the same students). During discussions at the Seminar, the six-member team found both that we are committed to full-time study as the norm at Southern and that we are interested in ways of reaching out more effectively to students who are unable to study full time. This interest was not grounded in a financial need for more students, but in a sense of the seminary's mission, especially in the context of South Carolina.



During a faculty retreat held at Lake Logan Episcopal Retreat Center, near Asheville, NC, from Jan 20-22, 2005, a consensus statement was drawn up in which we agreed that we see the Seminary as "committed to full-time study as a primary focus of its curriculum." In addition, however, the faculty stated: "The seminary should commit itself to seek ways to extend the benefits of full-time study to more of its part-time students and other-time students." Ideas for how this might be done were discussed. A work group of the ongoing curriculum review will address the question.

The retreat was an opportunity for the faculty to have an extended discussion of a topic central to seminary life, without the pressure to make any

Please see Newsbrief on page 4

Newsbriefs (continued)

detailed policy decisions. This sort of faculty fellowship was an important side-effect of our discussions. A follow-up retreat will be held in the summer of 2006, as we approach the end of our curriculum review."

Wesley Theological Seminary

Dean Bruce Birch writes, "The first of four faculty dinners hosted at President David McAllister-Wilson's home will launch our project. Divided into four smaller groups, the Wesley faculty will be asked to share their own experience of diversity, both as a personal experience and as an element in the shaping of their vocational identity."

The Faculty Retreat has been extended to two full days on August 24-25

and will be devoted to developing our abilities as teachers to use diversity as a pedagogical resource for the seminary classroom and in equipping our students for ministry. We are planning the Retreat with the help of Charles Foster.

The Wesley Diversity Committee, led Beverly Mitchell, is also planning three campus-wide events for the spring in an effort to broaden consciousness and interaction in the Wesley community. These events will focus on issues of race and ethnicity; ordination and sexual identity; and finding unity with divergent theological views. Although the Lexington Team is not directly planning these events, we are working with the Diversity Committee to include them as part of our overall project strategy."



Gettysburg faculty enjoy visits to historic Civil Rights sites as part of their immersion experience in Atlanta.

2003 Participants

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

Dean of the Seminary Robin J. Steinke writes, "The faculty spent two and a half days in Atlanta, Georgia as part of a multi-cultural immersion experience January 19-22, 2005. Nelson Strobert, a senior faculty colleague invited the faculty to read the book, *I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Future of Multi-cultural America*, edited by James Echols, and "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Future of Multi-cultural America: Toward a Kingian Educational Process," an essay by Nelson T. Strobert. These readings served as background for our immersion experience in Atlanta.



tual experience in which a majority of faculty and students are persons of color, in order to enhance our ability to prepare students for ministry in multi-cultural settings. 2. Gaining greater awareness of the rich resources available to our students in Atlanta through the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) and the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta (LTCA). 3. Enhancing faculty cohesion through an intensive three-day experience of study, conversation, and visits to the historic Civil Rights sites in greater Atlanta. 4. Demonstrating to our students, the Board, and others, the faculty's commitment to engaging in the intensive multi-cultural experiences expected of students. 5. Reinforcing our institutional commitments to anti-racism and lifting up the rich contributions of God's diverse people to church and society.

We will continue to reflect on this experience and broaden the conversation to include staff and students as the semester continues."

The objectives of our work together included: 1. Sharing a common context-

Continued

Methodist Theological School in Ohio

Associate Professor of Theology Sarah Lancaster writes, "As we move into the final stages of our project, we have expanded our conversation to include other constituencies of the school. In February, members of the Board of Trustees spent an afternoon with faculty and administrative staff discussing assessment of students. I shared information from previous faculty conversations on grading, and the group took another look at a portion of the survey that had been taken last spring regarding the purpose of theological education. We discovered through that survey that 'transforming the community and the world' is a high value at this school. Trustees, staff, and faculty together explored such questions as: What are the most important things that need to be assessed as students prepare for their vocations? What qualities do our students need in order to transform the community and the world? How do we nurture those qualities in our students? The next morning discussion moved on to the other purposes identified as important for theological education at MTSO: 'a center of theological inquiry' and 'preparing students for pastoral ministry.' These discussions will provide the basis for identifying the next stages of our work."



Phillips Theological Seminary

Dean Don A. Pittman writes, "The faculty has continued its conversations about how best to facilitate critical thinking skills and to encourage alternate ways of thinking and acting in church and



society. The focus has been on exploring the addition of new elements in the required first-semester course, Introduction to Theological Education for Ministry, the shape of a new mid-program course, The Art and Practices of Ministry, and the design of a new final-semester course, Creating Vital Christian Communities. Another faculty colloquium is scheduled for April 18 and a faculty retreat is planned for late May.



The Rev. Dixie Walker Brachlow, wife of BTSR Seminar participant Stephen Brachlow, assists with morning worship at the June 2004 Summer Seminar.

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Associate Professor of Church Education Barry Jackson writes, "The focus of our project has shifted over the past few months, and we are now in the initial stages of a new examination of the ministry toward which we teach, and the church and world in which that ministry takes place. The faculty will be participating with members of our board of directors and other church leaders in a conference on this topic in May. The faculty will



then gather a week later to consider implications arising from these conversations for our role as theological educators. Leaders for these events include Daniel O. Aleshire of ATS and George Hunsberger of Western Theological Seminary. Earlier in the year the faculty gathered for a relaxed dinner in a local restaurant. This is the first time in many years the faculty has met without an agenda or related activity, and the opportunity to have this social time together has had a positive influence on our sense of community."

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Associate Academic Dean Jim Moore writes, "The Lake Geneva, Wisconsin Conference Center provided a second opportunity for a two-day retreat for 25 faculty. Following an April 2004 retreat, TEDS faculty again escaped suburban Chicago for rest, relaxation, and reflection along the shores of beautiful Lake Geneva. The days were spent with discussions centering around the work of two of our faculty colleagues. The first day, 'Scripture and the Disciplines: The Question of Expectations,' led to consideration of our individual epistemic humility and corporate ortholatry. We wrestled with the question, how can we facilitate learning that joins interdisciplinary content with community experiences in the faith community? Day two provided further dialogue around issues of collaborative learning and confronting institutional structures that sometimes stifle the educational endeavor. We are most grateful for the opportunity to reflect on our roles as theological educators. The two retreats our faculty have participated in, and a number of small internal initiatives which have positively effected faculty ethos, have set the course for future retreats to build community and to dialogue on our vocational calling."



THE LEXINGTON SEMINAR

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2005 Consultation Participants

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

Robin J. Steinke • *Dean of the Seminary*
Richard P. Carlson • *Professor of Biblical Studies*
William O. Avery • *Professor of Field Education*

Methodist Theological School in Ohio

John Kampen • *Academic Dean*
Sarah Heaner Lancaster • *Associate Professor of Theology*
Randy Litchfield • *Associate Professor of Christian Education*

Phillips Theological Seminary

Joseph Bessler-Northcutt • *Associate Professor of Theology*
Janet W. Parachin • *Assistant Professor of Practical Theology*
Bernard Brandon Scott • *Professor of the New Testament*

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Carnegie Samuel Calian • *President*
Byron Jackson • *Associate Professor of Church Education*
Teresa Lockhart Stricklen • *Assistant Professor of Homiletics*

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Tite Tienou • *Senior Vice President of Education and Academic Dean*
James R. Moore • *Associate Academic Dean*
James E. Plueddemann • *Professor of Mission and Intercultural Studies*



CONVERSATIONS

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Gretchen E. Ziegenhals.....Editor

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