Learning Out Loud

Several of us in The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd were asked by the pastor to meet weekly with Christina Auch, in order to recreate for her (insofar as is possible) the kind of conversation that residential students may have in a dormitory or on campus. Our discussion group: (1) was led by the pastor, a genuine scholar who is skilled in teaching academic conclusions to a congregation that appreciates being addressed as adults; included (2) two other seminary graduates (now retired) with additional advanced degrees; (3) two women who have read widely in feminist theology and sophisticated biblical studies; (4) a Christian agnostic with a deep commitment to the poor; (5) a man who enjoyed being described as a “Lu-Bu” (Lutheran Buddhist); and (6) a college administrator, who is a dependable church worker. Over the semester, we considered topics from both Christina’s spring semester courses: Creation and the Triune God and Pentateuch. At some point all of the above participated in theological deliberations; fewer felt prepared to discuss the biblical text.

Fred Weeks, Lauren Weeks, Sue Barrett, Ed Barrett, Christina Auch, Pastor Richard Handschin
Not Pictured: Bill Johnson, Tom Little

Whether discussing the Mosaic Covenant or Proleptic Theology, the dating of Deuteronomy or the “Economic” Trinity, the Patriarchs or Process Theology, Christina grasped, weighed, and arrived at tentative judgments – while conscious of ambiguity and the need for further development of her thought.

Perhaps because I taught religion and philosophy courses at a liberal arts college (Muskingum College) for more than thirty years, I had a deep appreciation for Christina’s maturity. In addition to her intellectual curiosity and ability to comprehend new ideas, she had the discipline to read assignments, and even emailed them to us so we could prepare. In discussions, she made herself known and did not just take notes.

Beyond our group, she regularly attended Sunday Morning worship services, discussed the life of the congregation with Pastor Handschin, and engaged members of the congregation in Christian fellowship.

It was a joy to participate in this program.

J. Edward Barrett
Greetings! I look forward to knowing and learning from all of you as I begin working as the Program Coordinator for the Distributed Learning Master of Divinity program. In this role, I hope to provide students with helpful support that will enable them to focus on their work in the program.

After a number of years working with high school students as an English teacher, I continue to find the process of learning and of figuring out best learning practices immensely engaging and enjoyably challenging. Working with folks eager to learn is a delight, while cultivating supportive learning communities is my passion.

In various experiences, encountering the vitality of people who have a clear sense of vocation has given me profound encouragement as I discover more about the infinite ways in which Christians live out their callings.

Blessings as you support these students and live out your own callings.

Joy Aarsvold
Program Coordinator

The new Student Resource Center opened this spring at Luther to centralize support systems for students in their journey at Luther Seminary. As the mission statement describes, “The Student Resource Center exists to encourage the vocational and leadership development of students by providing resources for discernment, learning and growth toward Christian public leadership.” I am grateful to serve as the director of the Student Resource Center and will continue to be the liaison to synods regarding ELCA candidacy issues for Luther students.

Krista Lind
Director, Student Resource Center

Hi! My name is Kathryn Zurcher and I am an associate director of admissions for Luther Seminary. In that position, I travel a lot, talking with people around the country about vocation and seminary education. I will be the front person for the Distributed Learning program - the one prospective students are in contact with first to talk about the details of DL and whether it is a good fit for them.

Blessings as you support these students and live out your own callings.

Kathryn Zurcher
Associate Director of Admissions

Three years ago this summer, we started developing what has become the Distributed Learning Master of Divinity program. It has been a joy to oversee the development of the DL M.Div. As we move into our fourth year of a four-year grant, most of my involvement in the program’s administration is ending as the program is being integrated into the offices of Luther Seminary that are responsible for tasks associated with running it: Admissions, Student Services, Contextual Leadership, and Learning Design & Technology. For a few hours each month, I will serve as a consultant to Luther Seminary leadership as this transition happens. Otherwise, since I am returning to full time teaching as of July 1, my involvement in the program will be only as a New Testament professor who seems to teach an awful lot of online classes! I’m proud of the program and its students, and I’m grateful for everyone I have worked with on it. Thanks, everyone.

Mary Hinkle Shore
Associate Professor, New Testament

Over the past two years, I have enjoyed learning within the Distributed Learning Master of Divinity program. As a previous residential M.Div. student at Luther and as a current deployed staff, I have an appreciation for what the students need to thrive both in their communities and on campus. The beginning of any endeavor is a dynamic time, and I am grateful for your willingness to imagine with us how we might best educate leaders for Christ’s church in a changing world.

My time with Luther Seminary’s DL M.Div. program concludes July 31st, and I begin at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences on August 3rd. Though I will no longer be involved with distributed learning, I will always hold these students, the seminary and our wider church in prayer.

Megan Thorvilson
Coordinator of Student Support
ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE...

In the church we talk a lot about diversity, so much so that it has nearly become a cliche. But as Gary Commins writes, “When we unearth the spirit of diversity that is already an intrinsic part of our faith, our scripture, and our tradition, we begin to understand that it is an essential part of our life” (Becoming Bridges, 9). Seminary students can always draw on their varied backgrounds, but one of the strengths of the DL M.Div. program is that students can engage the curriculum and their contexts from different places - geographically, theologically, family situations, and employment - in the midst of their studies. Meet two of our students - one from the Midwest and one from the Northeast, one in full-time ministry and one who publishes newspapers, one who has kids still at home and one with three out of the house. We are grateful for both voices.

Sarah Raymond
Grand Forks, North Dakota

Teaching Parish: Calvary Lutheran Church
Partner Pastor: Rev. Dr. Troy Troftgruben

Employment: Visitation Ministry at Calvary Lutheran
Family: Jay, my very supportive hubby of almost 20 years; three kids: Emily (16), Karl (14) and Thomas (11); and a dog, Rocky, who sleeps ON my feet when I study.

Favorite Theologian: I really enjoyed reading Elizabeth Johnson this semester. I don’t agree with everything she says, but she certainly does make me think! I also enjoy reading some we wouldn’t really consider “official” theologians, like Anne Lamott and Sara Miles and William Young. Again, they really make me think.

What has most surprised you about distributed education? What has surprised me most is the quick and deep connections I have with my cohort. We support each other and encourage each other and challenge each other. This past spring when flooding threatened the Red River Valley, I sent out a message to my cohort. They responded with prayer and support and one of them even organized a group to come up and help. It is a fabulous support system.

How has this changed the way you live your life? I have more homework than my kids! So I have to be pretty diligent about keeping up on the studying. I am learning how to balance family and work and studies through trial and (a lot) of errors.

What keeps you coming back? I denied the call to ministry for 15 years. Last summer, I finally took the leap into seminary with the distributed learning program. I know this is where I am supposed to be and that is what keeps me coming back.

Rick White
Dalmatia, Pennsylvania

Teaching Parish: Zion Lutheran Church, Sunbury, PA
Partner Pastor: Rev. Richard C. Fangmann

Family: Married to wonderful wife, Judy, for 29 years. Three children: Aaron, 27; Bryan, 25; and Maribeth, 21.

Favorite Theologian: One of Dr. Paul Sponheim’s favorite quotes is that “no theologian has it all.” I found that to be true this semester reading Ted Peters, Phil Hefner and Elizabeth Johnson and others. Each of them contributed more than enough for me to digest, and each of them stimulated thought about the nature and will of the Triune God.

What has most surprised you about distributed education? Community. Who would have thought that 18 people from 9 states across the country could form a healthy, caring community? That’s what happened with my cohort. We not only encourage each other to learn and grow, we have truly bonded and care about one another. One might expect that to happen on campus, but our cohort became a community before we met face-to-face.

How has this changed the way you live your life? My life as I once knew it does not exist anymore. Time has become so precious. Between my full-time job, classwork and contextual work, there are not many hours remaining in a week for family and personal time, let alone exercise time and recreation. Time management is crucial. After 29 years of marriage, I’m scheduling face time with my wife!

What keeps you coming back? The call. I do not think anyone would put themselves through the rigors of theological education without the realization of a call to ministry. I ignored and dismissed that call for too many years. The DL program at Luther is allowing me to follow that call while maintaining my obligations to family.
The second cohort gathered on campus in June for their second intensive. Early/Medieval Church History and Mission of the Triune God I filled their days, while homework and conversations filled their evenings. Beyond the classroom, the cohort served as leaders in daily chapel, caught a glimpse of their synoptics course for the fall, learned about Clinical Pastoral Education, and provided feedback for the Learning Design and Technology team. The students also hosted receptions for their professors from the spring semester: Kathryn Schifferdecker for Pentateuch and Paul Sponheim for Creation and the Triune God. Even with their demanding schedules, they managed to squeeze in a night at Midway Stadium, cheering on St. Paul’s beloved Saints.