

Loehe's Legacy and the Apostolic Calling of Wartburg Theological Seminary for the Church and World in the 21st Century

Ann L. Fritschel, Craig L. Nesson, Winston D. Persaud

June 10, 2010

1. Neuendettelsau? A place Wilhelm Loehe never desired to live, commenting that he would not even want his dog to be buried there. Yet this village has become to this day a center for the gathering and sending of “apostles” for mission to the global church. These are the two central impulses of the Loehe legacy and the apostolic calling of Wartburg Theological Seminary in the 21st century:

—gathering for life together in the worshipping, teaching, and learning community and being

—sent forth from this community in service to others for the life of the world.

2. What is the attraction and ongoing significance of the Loehe legacy? Seven core characteristics demonstrate remarkable continuity between the vision and practice of Wilhelm Loehe, the nineteenth-century pastor, and the life of Wartburg Theological Seminary in its 156 years of history.

2.1. First, the Loehe legacy is *worship-centered*. Loehe reformed liturgical practice according to historic forms and renewed worship for the church in the 19th century, understanding that in worship God was at work accomplishing God's mission for the life of the world.

- At Wartburg Theological Seminary worship remains the centering practice of our life together in Jesus Christ.

2.2. Second, *the* Loehe legacy is *communal*. Loehe gathered people around worship into a community of life-giving relationships that stretched from Neuendettelsau to the ends of the earth.

- At Wartburg Theological Seminary each new generation of students is initiated into bonds of friendship that are formed in a daily life together of mutual conversation around chapel, refectory, and classroom and that leads to a sending into service to others.

2.3. Third, the Loehe legacy is rooted in *Lutheran pietism*. Loehe was deeply committed both to the Lutheran confessional heritage and to Christianity as a living faith.

- Wartburg Theological Seminary holds together two impulses that are often rent asunder in the life of the church: commitment to historic Lutheranism, centered on justification by grace through faith in Christ alone, and the expression of this faith in personal faith and integrity through lives devoted to justice.

2.4. Fourth, the Loehe legacy allows for *open questions*. While Loehe held core Lutheran commitments to justification as articulated in Scripture and the confessional writings, he also

maintained an ecclesiology that allowed Christians to have different opinions on non-essential matters.

- At Wartburg Theological Seminary this characteristic has fostered and continues to foster a way of being church that is clear about ultimate matters but respectful of difference in penultimate matters.

2.5. Fifth, the Loehe legacy is *diaconal*. Loehe founded in Neuendettelsau a host of diaconal institutions to serve the needs of the most vulnerable members of society.

- Wartburg Theological Seminary has prepared students for diaconal service as pastors, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, chaplains, associates in ministry, and active laity, always with an eye on service to the needs of others.

2.6. Sixth, the Loehe legacy is *missional*. For Loehe, worship and community life were never ends in themselves, but rather the centering activity for being sent into the world in service to God's mission.

- Wartburg Theological Seminary understands itself as serving God's mission by sending leaders forth from its communal-formation process as leaders for faith communities who "proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing."

2.7. Seventh, the Loehe legacy is *global*.

- Although located in the out-of-the-way setting of Neuendettelsau, Loehe cultivated a global vision of God's mission, reaching out to North America, Australia, Brazil, Tanzania, and Papua New Guinea.
- Wartburg Theological Seminary continues to cultivate a global ministry by receiving, preparing, and sending students from and for the global church.

3. The Wartburg Theological Seminary Mission Statement articulates well how the Loehe legacy continues to come alive in the school: *Wartburg Theological Seminary serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning. Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church's mission as ordained and lay leaders. This mission is to proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.*

4. The Twelve Pastoral Practices further explicate the shape of the Wartburg curriculum and formation process in fulfilling its mission [see Appendix].

5. The Wartburg "way" of forming valued leaders involves the fostering of intentional relationships between students, faculty, and staff in life together through

- seminary worship
- convocations in the refectory
- student-advisor interactions
- faculty team-teaching
- small-group pedagogy
- J-term immersions, contextual education, and

- campus life oriented to the residential community.

6. The Wartburg “way” has received enthusiastic affirmation both through reaccreditation reports from the school’s accrediting agencies and through the practice of assessment undertaken by faculty visits to the congregations of graduates. ELCA bishops and churchwide leaders especially affirm the values of ecclesial partnership, collegiality, and reading context as fostered by the communal formation process at Wartburg Theological Seminary.

7. The mission of Wartburg Theological Seminary is closely related to the gathering of the worshipping, teaching, and learning community in residence and the sending forth into service of God’s mission in the world.

8. The mission frontier of the 21st century presents new and dramatic challenges to the Loehe legacy as Wartburg Theological Seminary seeks to respond faithfully and effectively to its apostolic calling. It is imperative that “learning leads to mission and mission informs learning” abides as the central feature of Wartburg’s apostolic calling as it considers new partnerships and unprecedented changes across the landscape of theological education. Wartburg Theological Seminary has been a school located in the heartland of the United States, which has in each generation claimed a global scope for its mission. It has been a center for gathering together gifted people, joining them to worship-centered community, grounding them in biblical and theological wisdom, and sending them forth as valued leaders at God’s mission frontiers. Those whom Wartburg Theological Seminary sends forth as missionaries (*Sendlinge*) from this place of formation are

- equipped with a theology centered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- steeped in biblical wisdom
- prepared with a global vision
- to demonstrate a spirit of collegiality, breadth of hospitality, skills in collaborative leadership, and a deep commitment to the mission of the Triune God in the world.

9. Two basic definitive questions face Wartburg Seminary as it enters into the context of church and world in the 21st century:

- How might Wartburg Theological Seminary even more compellingly *gather* more kinds of leaders for more kinds of ministry through its particular communal formation process?
- How might Wartburg Theological Seminary continue to *send* the kinds of leaders needed by the church and world for the rapidly changing context of the 21st century?

10. The implementation of new distance education methods for teaching and learning in both the TEEM and Masters degree programs is one promising initiative that needs to cohere with Wartburg’s core values in residential education. Three critical questions must be asked:

- Can Wartburg Theological Seminary envision other new strategies for maximizing the contribution of the school as a gathering and sending place for missionaries to the church and society?
- Can Wartburg Seminary commit to accomplishing this mission even more creatively in collaboration with new partners?
- Are there new possibilities for lifelong learning and lay theological education that can build upon the institutional strengths of Wartburg Theological Seminary?

11. In many ways the communal formation process at Wartburg Theological Seminary, as articulated the Mission Statement and elaborated in the Twelve Pastoral Practices, already anticipates the preparation of the kinds of missional leaders needed by the church in the 21st century.

12. Wartburg Theological Seminary, in its life and history, embodies and builds upon the Loehe legacy through the peculiar strengths highlighted above, strengths needed for the future of theological education in the ELCA and the preparation of leaders for the mission of the global church in the 21st century.

For Further Reading

Craig L. Nessian. *The Theology of Wartburg Theological Seminary 1854-2004*. Dubuque: Wartburg Seminary, 2005.

Thomas H. Schattauer. "The Loehe Alternative for Worship, Then and Now." *Word & World* 24(Spring 2004): 145-156.

Thomas H. Schattauer. "Reclaiming the Christian Assembly as *Communio*: The Significance of the Lord's Supper in the Work of Wilhelm Loehe." In Dietrich Blaufuss, Editor. *Wilhelm Loehe: Erbe und Vision*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009.

William H. Weiblen. *Life Together at Wartburg Theological Seminary 1854-2004*. Sesquicentennial Edition. Dubuque: Wartburg Seminary, 2006.

Wilhelm Loehe and His Legacy. Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Loehe Society. *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33 (April 2006).

Appendix: Embodying Wartburg Seminary’s Mission Statement

Wartburg Theological Seminary’s Mission Statement guides and directs our life as a seminary, including the implementation of a theological curriculum. By “curriculum” we include both the courses offered in the classroom through the degree programs and the entire program of formation, including worship and community life.

The Wartburg faculty has adopted these Twelve Pastoral Practices as a further elaboration of its Mission Statement which articulates intended curriculum outcomes, a description of what we hope to see in Wartburg graduates based on our mission. These practices are intended to be inclusive of candidates for all rosters. By “pastoral” we intend to encompass the ministry practiced not only by the ordained but also by diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and associates in ministry. By “practices” we do not mean mere actions that are performed. Rather, these pastoral practices are understood to be incarnated and embodied in being as well as doing. They intend coherence between one’s disposition and one’s practice of ministry. Ministers thus formed are able to give reason why they act in a particular way. Effective formation has instilled a fundamental attitude out of which one then does.

The purpose of our setting forth these criteria is for the Wartburg faculty to invite reflection on the effectiveness of our curriculum. We seek excellence in our educational programs and invite you into conversation about these pastoral practices as a way of assessing and revising our curriculum.

The central question is: *To what degree has the educational and formational process of the Wartburg Seminary curriculum accomplished its mission objectives?*

Wartburg Mission Statement and Twelve Pastoral Practices

“Wartburg Theological Seminary...”

[Three overarching practices]

- *Practice of Being Rooted in the Gospel:* Articulates the Gospel in a way that is heard as Gospel. Is publicly Lutheran and Gospel-centered.
- *Practice of Missio Dei in Word and Sacrament:* Is grounded in Word and Sacrament as the means by which God creates faith in Christ and a community (*koinonia*) for God’s mission (*martyria* and *diakonia*) in the world. The ordained exercise faithful worship preparation, evangelical preaching, and sacramental leadership. The consecrated serve as a strategic bridge between church and world. Associates in ministry serve faithfully in their areas of call in relationship to the worshipping community. All the baptized are sent by the Spirit to employ their gifts in God’s mission for the life of the world.

- *Practice of Biblical and Theological Wisdom:* Interprets reality theologically and biblically as a habit. Has a core set of theological concepts that are interpreted with flexibility in different contexts.

“...serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning.”

- *Practice of Ecclesial Partnership:* Displays a healthy sense of connectedness with the whole church. Fosters partnership with the ELCA and ecumenical openness.
- *Practice of Complex Analysis:* Demonstrates capacity to carefully examine complex social, economic, scientific, and religious issues without oversimplification. Sees relationships from a systems perspective, remaining spiritually centered in the face of ambiguity.
- *Practice of Curiosity:* Is fundamentally curious, employing creativity in the use of language. Is open to grow beyond current perspectives and willing to pursue learning with intellectual depth.

“Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church’s mission as ordained and lay leaders.”

- *Practice of Pastoral Concern:* Loves God’s people with the compassion of Christ, demonstrating a generous spirit in relating to others, teaching and modeling stewardship. Maintains a clear sense of pastoral identity and desire for excellence in pastoral ministry.
- *Practice of Personal Faith and Integrity:* Lives as person of faith, grounded in a life of prayer and study. Is self-aware in seeing the larger picture, proclaiming hope, leading courageously, and setting healthy boundaries.
- *Practice of Collegiality:* Leads in a way that is responsive to the situation and promotes team building. Creates collegial groups within and beyond the church for promoting many forms of ministry.

“This mission is to proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.”

- *Practice of Evangelical Listening and Speaking the Faith to Others:* Listens in a way that leads people to deeper faith questions. Engages in thoughtful witness to the Christian message, especially to youth and those outside the faith.
- *Practice of Immersion in the Context:* Shows awareness of the context through listening to, dialogue with and involvement in the local community. Has ability to interpret texts and contexts with insight.
- *Practice of Sensitivity to Cross-Cultural and Global Dimensions:* Is sensitive to multicultural issues and religious pluralism in the context of globalization. Understands the inclusive character of the Christian Gospel.