

LifeTogether

THE MAGAZINE OF
WARTBURG THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Spring 2021



MEET THE REV. DR. KRISTIN JOHNSTON LARGEN, WARTBURG SEMINARY'S FIFTEENTH PRESIDENT

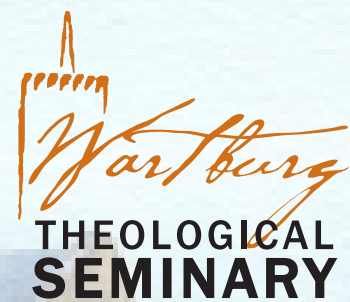
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Mission Statement

Wartburg Theological Seminary serves Christ's church through 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.

The community embodies God's mission by stewarding resources for engaging, equipping, and sending collaborative leaders who interpret, proclaim and live the gospel of Jesus Christ for a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing.

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MEET WARTBURG THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY'S FIFTEENTH PRESIDENT

"We are so well-positioned to meet the future, with our innovative culture and strong foundation, and I am really excited to see how we continue to develop as an institution in response to the call of the Holy Spirit and the needs of the church and the world."

It's probably safe to assume you didn't dream of being a seminary president when you were young. What did you dream of being/doing/achieving?

My mom loves to tease me that when I was in middle school and did one of those career surveys, forestry service came up as number one! This shouldn't have been a surprise—I have always loved the outdoors, especially the mountains, and I love hiking and running, but I didn't ever think seriously about pursuing forestry as a career.

Honestly, I have always loved teaching. When I was young, my dad was a middle school biology teacher in Denver, and I remember going to school with him when I had in-service days (I was in a different school district), and he even let me help him grade multiple choice tests and things like that. One year for my birthday, we did blood typing tests as our "game"! As I got older, I just fell in love with the college/university setting, and knew I wanted to teach at that level. But now, just a few months in, I can honestly say that this particular presidency—not just a seminary presidency in general—is my dream job!

Can you describe the moments, mentors, or otherwise meaningful memories that shaped your understanding of being called to ministry and to teaching/theological education?

I'm glad you linked these together, because I really see my identity bound up both as a pastor and theological educator—they go together and always have! And, of course, this seems like a softball, since those moments and mentors were primarily here at Wartburg! Let me just share three moments that were extremely formative for me.

The first one was with Frank Benz, one of my Old Testament professors. I came to

Wartburg originally for an MA; I had always felt called to teaching, but not necessarily to ordained ministry. I was pretty intimidated by so many of my classmates who had been religion majors at Wartburg or Luther and seemed so far ahead of me in so many ways. But in a conversation with Dr. Benz, he encouraged me to embrace who I was and my own gifts, and not compare myself to others. And, he slyly encouraged me to think about an MDiv—a degree, he said, that would give me more time to take classes and prepare me just as well for doctoral work. That was a very affirming conversation for me. It opened me to a call to ordained ministry, and ultimately, I did change to the MDiv.

The second was a "bench conversation" with Professor Persaud. I was committed to universal salvation, and he was pushing me on that—in a good way, of course. We were using the analogy of a bank account. If someone has deposited a check in your bank account for a million dollars, but you don't know it's there, can you really use it? Does it make a difference? I'd like to think I won that one (just kidding), but what I remember more is just the time and the conversation, and his intentional support in the development of my theological thinking. That mentoring continued throughout my academic career, by the way. Winston served as my professional mentor when I first became a professor at Gettysburg Seminary, too!

Finally, I have to mention Duane Priebe—and here, there are more conversations, more moments than I can even call to mind. Professor Priebe was the primary advisor for my senior thesis, and he (and Professor Persaud as well) really encouraged my interfaith theological exploration. He believed in me as a theologian and helped me to believe in myself and my potential. I team-taught a course with him at the seminary in Lae, Papua New Guinea, the summer after I graduated, and it



"[The faculty] are here for students in the fullness of their lives, not just in the classroom. I valued that so much as a student, and I continue to treasure it today."

REV. DR. KRISTIN JOHNSTON LARGEN, PRESIDENT

was the most amazing experience. He treated me like a peer, and really confirmed my desire to do doctoral work.

What was important about choosing to attend WTS for your own seminary education?

I'm sure this sounds crazy to students now, many of whom visit multiple seminaries as they discern their call to ministry. But I was fortunate enough to have two fabulous home pastors—Jim Rasmussen (of blessed memory now) and Scott Beebe—who always supported and encouraged me, and they both went to Wartburg. So when I discerned a call to attend seminary, there was no question where I was going to go—I would go to a place I knew formed excellent Christian ministers and public leaders!

In your return to WTS now as president, what ways has the ethos of WTS stayed the same? Changed?

Well, I was delighted to find that the sense of community, the sense of *life together*, remains so strong. This includes the robust worship life, too—and keeping worship at the center of the theological education/formation that happens here. This also includes the very active role faculty play in the life of the community and the life of the students; they are here for students in the fullness of their lives, not just in the classroom. I valued that so much as a student, and I continue to treasure it today. Obviously, what has changed significantly is that all of this happens not only here residentially, but also at a distance; and I

am so pleased at the way Wartburg expands what happens here to include our DL and CL students—like arms spread wide—rather than just seeing those students as part of different communities. We are committed to being one community, and we live that out with real integrity, I think.

What makes you excited to get up and get to work in the morning?

Right now, one of the most exciting things is all the new people I'm meeting. I am really enjoying my conversations with our generous, kind donors—and counting the weeks until I can travel and meet them in person! It has been especially rewarding to get to know our amazing faculty and staff. We have the most incredible team of folks here, and I feel really blessed to be part of such a great group. And I love living on campus. I meet more students every day when my dog Rufus and I are out for our walks, and that's really fun, too.

But, to speak more generally, I am most excited to be leading such a strong seminary at this time in theological education. We are so well-positioned to meet the future, with our innovative culture and strong foundation, and I am really excited to see how we continue to develop as an institution in response to the call of the Holy Spirit and the needs of the church and the world. None of us knows exactly what the church will look like in 20 years, but I am confident Wartburg will continue to form leaders who are superbly capable—nimble and creative, ready to serve God's children in a variety of contexts, and faithfully proclaiming the gospel to a world

What Do WTS Students Say About...?

BEING CALLED TO MINISTRY

that always needs to hear it!

You have a blog, Happy Lutheran, where you regularly write and reflect on current issues, books you're reading, and how we are called to be people of faith in the midst of this wild world. Why is it important to you to engage in this way?

I'm so glad you asked this question, because I asked it myself a year ago, when I thought about stopping it. I mean, no one really blogs anymore, and not very many people read it. I started the blog back in 2012 when I was starting my first sabbatical. I had received a generous grant that was going to enable me to travel to four different countries and do research for a book, and I wanted my students to be able to follow my travels and share in how I was thinking about my experiences. So, it started out as something very specific. But then I just kept writing.

A year ago, I stopped for a few months to think about whether I really wanted to continue—and if so, why. I realized that it was very important

for me to bear public witness, if you will, as a public theologian—that is, someone who sees the relevance of theology and theological education for the fullness of life in the world—one's own individual life, but also for the life and health of a society as a whole. My theological understanding of God, humanity, and creation affects how I think about everything—nothing is outside that lens. Therefore, I feel both empowered and called to share why my faith in Christ *matters*, and makes a difference in how I think about racism, politics, climate change, friendship, science and technology, health—I mean, you name it! The gospel *matters*, and I want people to know that.

I also want to model this kind of theological activity for students, so that they also are empowered to blog or write letters to the editor, for example (which I also do) and bear their own kind of public witness. I don't want to cede the public square to the most conservative Christian voices; mainline Christians need to stand and speak there, too.



PRESIDENT LARGEN ON HER FIRST DAY



PRESIDENT LARGEN WELCOMED BY STUDENTS AT THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE



PRESIDENT LARGEN WITH HER DOG, RUFUS



SEAN AVERY, RESIDENTIAL LEARNING MDIV STUDENT

There is a quote that I came across years ago that has always really made me think about vocation. It's from Fred Buechner, and he said that vocation is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. And so I've always thought of vocation as this idea where your God-given gifts and abilities and talents find an outlet in the world, and live out those things. And that's what's always come to mind for me.



MARIE MARTÍNEZ, DISTANCE LEARNING MDIV STUDENT

I always think about in Matthew where Jesus asked the disciples, "Hey, who do you say that I am?" and Peter responds that you're the Messiah, the son of God. But Jesus wasn't asking, "How do you think I spend my day?" or "How would you describe my job?" He's asking, "Who am I? What is my purpose? Where are my God-given talents most useful and needed in the world?" So when I think of my vocation, it's not so much which profession is going to describe best what I'm doing with my talents, it's getting at the core of who I am, what my purpose on this earth is as a faithful person.

Residential Students Reflect on Being WTS Community in a Pandemic

A CONVERSATION WITH MASTER OF DIVINITY STUDENTS NATHANIEL ADKINS, ELISE HYNEK, DAMISHA MCFARLAND-POLLOCK, AND KURT SAENGER-HEYL

Let's start at the beginning of your seminary experience. Why did you choose Wartburg?

Nathaniel Adkins: My family and I ultimately moved to Wartburg, and 90% of our decision was because of the sense of community that we picked up on when we visited campus. We came to the Fishbowl. We saw kids running around. We talked to the professors, and they talked about how it was a safe place. It was a supportive place where you were living in close community with people, but it was not an obtrusive microscope sort of thing. It was basically a place where I could send my kids outside, where my wife could be herself, while I was a seminary student.

Elise Hynek: I was absolutely convinced I was not going to come to Wartburg. I visited as a courtesy to all of my clergy colleagues who were like, "I went to Wartburg. I love it. You need to check it out." And I went, "Okay, fine. I'll check it out, but I'm not going." I was so determined not to go, I almost accepted another offer.

Ultimately, I decided on Wartburg because of several things. I felt that Wartburg would give me a good foundation into entering ordained ministry, and you need to have the foundation. Otherwise, whatever you build is not going to be successful in the long run, or it's going to take a whole lot of maintenance, which is much more tiring. And also, coming to visit, I loved how worship-centered this community was. We go to our morning class, and then together, as we're discussing what was in the lecture, we'd walk into the chapel, we'd worship, we would commune together, and then we would go out and continue conversations that were happening throughout the week. I also found the community aspect of Wartburg important because I don't know what context my ministry is going to be in. Once we go out to serve Christ in the world and to serve the church, to be able to have relationships to continually go back to that

start here and now in seminary was so critically important to me.

DaMisha McFarland-Pollock: I moved across the country in the midst of a pandemic because I love Wartburg. The main reason, as many people will always say, is community. I have a spouse, and I wanted a place that not only would educate me and help form me into the pastor that I need to be, but also where my spouse could grow and find community. Not only was I welcomed with open arms, but so was he. And it's been awesome to see how the community has included us, even though most of everything is online right now. But being here residentially, you can still see your neighbors or classmates when you're walking around campus and when you are having socially distanced gatherings outside.

My spouse is part of the Wartburg Fellowship of Spouses, and they have the best time. They live their best lives. I'm totally jealous when they have their gatherings. When they had their very first one, it was super cold and everyone bundled up, took their chairs, went down the street to a little parking lot, and they set up and just had a great time talking with each other and dealing with life as the spouse or the loved one of a seminarian. And so that's part of why I chose Wartburg and to come to campus, because all of those things are important. I'm getting a lot more interaction, safely, here than I actually did back in Pittsburgh in the midst of this pandemic where we were all shut in and no one was coming out, not even to wave in the front yard. So this has been very good, not only academically, but also for my mental health.

Kurt Saenger-Heyl: As I reflect back on that time of discernment, the single word is *community* that's been repeated. For me, what that looked like was the sense of us all rowing in the same boat together, of the professors and the students and the faculty, the staff, everyone is here for the same



KURT SAENGER-HEYL



ELISE HYNEK



DAMISHA MCFARLAND-POLLOCK AND HER SPOUSE, BRUCE POLLOCK



NATHANIEL ADKINS



KURT SAENGER-HEYL (BACK) WITH EDMUND ADKINS (NATHANIEL'S SON) AND ERIC LOCKE'S (WTS MDiv STUDENT) SONS BEHIND

purpose. And obviously, everyone's roles are different. And even as students, we all have different roles, and what we're looking for and the areas we need to grow in and develop and the areas with which we can then share and develop others. I think the intensity with which that could take place here on campus was probably really the main thing, in that communal sense, that drew me and the ability to have those conversations over lunch, which I miss a lot these days, with professors or staff or anyone who just pops down to the refectory and those hallway conversations. So to be in community and to have that as the foundation in which I get to be formed is truly special.

How did you adapt to the pandemic on campus in those early days?

EH: With the initial shutdown, thankfully, the weather was getting warm, and so we could be outside. I experienced the shift in the community in that it drove everyone outside. I saw a whole lot more people sitting on their stoops and doing their homework, writing papers, reading textbooks out in the front yard. And then people would bring their chairs over and sit six to twelve feet away, however far we needed to be, once they saw someone else

sitting outside. That was the nice part, it drove everyone outside, and in some ways connected us a little bit more because we saw each other more. We started to do a lunch Zoom Room and whoever wants to join and have this digital lunch together, and still have those conversations that we would around a table in the refectory. Our physical interactions drastically changed within like 12 hours, but we found ways to be creative, and we're still finding ways to be creative around those interactions.

KSH: All of us who'd never really had to use Zoom for the primary learning modality were like, "How do you do this?" And some of our distance classmates shared how they do it every day, what their routines are, and how they've made the best use of the technology. And there wasn't any question. Right? It was just what we needed to do. Everybody jumped in, and the professors would scratch plans just to talk about life, and so that "We're in the same boat" mentality kicked in, and the boat's got to keep going down the river because we're not at a place that we can just jump out. I have friendships now that I probably wouldn't have had, had we not needed to be intentional then about our time together and make that space. We had no choice but to be intentional about

what we did, when we did it, and how we did it. The community really lifted that up and embraced that.

NA: There have been ways that, as a community, we've adapted. We've been able to bring back some things. And I think, collectively, we've been very resourceful at looking for ways of integrating community into what we're doing. But it's still hard just sustaining little unplanned 30-second interactions when you're walking up the stairs together, or when you're walking down a hallway and, "Oh, I got to go this way," and "Okay. Well, I'll talk to you later." It feels like a mineral deficiency. But I am hopeful—warmer weather is coming back, so we'll be able to hang out outside more. There is a vaccine. The fact that this two-week thing turned out to be 11 months and counting, and the fact that there is an actual, legitimate end in sight...I'm swimming to that shore as quickly and as energetically and as hopefully as I can.

DMP: I've adapted pretty well, but I also wanted to be residential because online learning is not necessarily the best for me. Having no choice in that right now, I've adapted and it's going well, and Wartburg excels at online learning. Of all the places I've

encountered, interacted with, and other people who are going through the same thing in other places, I think we do online education the best.

Have you found or experienced joys in the midst of the pandemic?

DMP: I have a huge joy. In the year before I came physically to Wartburg, I was online in the certificate program, and COVID hit, and Chapel went online daily. As someone who wasn't physically here, I was able to participate every day. A joy that I have even now as a residential student is seeing people in the distance learning programs in chapel every day instead of just one day a week is beautiful. I hope it's something that continues even when we are able to physically worship together in the chapel.

NA: I think something that just could not have happened had it not been for the pandemic is the Fishbowl Academy [a Montessori school on campus for children of students]. I mean, that definitely poses its own interesting dynamics where we've got five little guys, who tend to play outside together anyway, who are now thrown together into a classroom situation. That has definitely amped

up the brotherly dynamic, but that's been an incredible, amazing thing that we couldn't have foreseen and couldn't have asked for. Another thing: whenever I talk to anyone in my family—and I've probably said this to everyone on this screen at some point—is that you could not have designed a better situation or a better community in which to go through a period of global trauma and physical distancing. At the very least, I know all of my neighbors, and they all know me, and we're all looking out for each other. And just the fact that we already had that connection going in, just kind of that built-in sense of neighborliness, that was one less thing to have to struggle with.

EH: I would say, strangely, the fact that I have spent so much time indoors on my computer now, I think this has driven me to be outside even more. As soon as class is done when the weather's warm, I'm out and lying in my front yard reading, or like Nathaniel said, like, "Oh, Nathaniel's outside. Oh, I'll go out." In some ways, I think I've had more meals with my neighbors and classmates than I did pre-pandemic because now I'm like, "Oh, I have a grill. I will go set the grill up in my driveway. I'll have hot dogs. And anyone who wants to come and have a hot dog, they can safely

grab their own food from this hot space that is killing the bacteria and viruses." And also, I've been a whole lot more active in going on daily walks with friends and things like that. Because when I'm sitting at a computer for so long, I need to get out. I want to interact. And so we have a nice little group that every day goes for a walk when we have the opportunity, which has led to interacting with faculty who live on our walking routes. We wave and occasionally drop cookies off at their door or something like that. Those are all things that didn't happen pre-pandemic because I had other things that I thought that needed to get done. So in some ways, it's helped me slow down and re-prioritize, and to shift the way that I was originally looking at community.

DMP: I keep going back to last November. One of my last memories of something that we did as a residential group was we had a group hug with Thomas after the death of Maria and Gwen. And as a class, I think that was time—for me, I was also quarantined for the first two weeks of spring semester, so I have different memories from everyone else. But to me, that was the last thing we did as a residential class. And I'd love that—I'd love it if the last thing we did was hug and the first thing that we do when this is over is hug.



DAMISHA MCFARLAND-POLLOCK AND
HER SPOUSE, BRUCE POLLOCK



WTS RESIDENTIAL STUDENTS AND
THEIR FAMILIES

What Do WTS Students Say About...?

TAKING THE NEXT STEP



DAN SHIMON, DISTANCE LEARNING MDIV STUDENT

Well, first of all, I was terrified, absolutely terrified [to take that next step]. I went through a point in time where I was thinking, “Is this really what God is pointing me toward?” I’m mostly there, but there’s a little part of me that’s thinking, “There’s no way.” And for me, the validation came when I was out to eat with my wife, and I was telling her about where my head was at. I was thinking, “Man, I don’t know if this would be a good fit for me,” and my wife looks at me from across the table, and she says, “Well, it’s because you need to hear it come from me, too.” Right there, in that moment, I started getting very emotional. I was thinking, “Her voice is the missing part of this whole thing.” So for me, having my wife and family be such a huge part of this. They’re going along in this journey just like I am. I couldn’t have taken this step without the support from my loved ones.



KENNY CHAMPAGNE, DISTANCE LEARNING DIACONAL MINISTRY GRADUATE

I’d say you might never feel 100% ready or 100% that this is *the* direction, but that’s part of the process. Part of the joy of seminary is it’s not the end point of a discernment process. It’s the beginning point of a discernment process surrounded with amazing faculty, staff, and peers to help you through the whole way. I entered seminary as a Master of Arts student and fairly quickly shifted to diaconal ministry because I was able to explore and take a diaconal ministry class in my first semester, learn more about it, and realized that that’s really what I felt like I was being called to—one foot in the church and one foot in the world, going out and serving. So, seminary itself is a discernment journey; jump in, take that leap of faith, and enjoy the ride.

Faculty Roundtable: Teaching, Advising, and Living into Being a “Motley Crew”

DR. KRISTINE STACHE INTERVIEWS REV. DR. SAMUEL D. GIERE AND REV. DR. ANN FRITSCHER

Dr. Kristine (Kris) Stache: Could you talk a little bit about how you understand your role as both pastor and professor in walking with students and in particular your advisees?

Rev. Dr. Ann Fritschel: When I came to seminary as a student, I knew I could handle the academics. But I wasn’t sure that I was a pastor and equipped to be a pastor because I’m sort of introverted. And what was important for me at Wartburg is the word formation that you used, Kris. That it’s not merely learning academics and skills, but being shaped and forming a pastor’s heart. That was so important to me in my own growth. And so that’s something that I like to share with my advisees. I want to get to know them, not just in terms of their academic courses and how they’re doing there, but as people. I try to meet with them once a month. We’ll talk about how things are going; get to know them, their families, their faith life, and journeys and struggles with God; and we’ll pray together. Just as ways of helping to shape them into the people God is calling them to be.

Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Giere: When I meet with advisees, I think meeting them as human beings in discernment is the disposition in which I approach folks. And well, when you’re coming to seminary—you’re going to be different when you finish this process than when you started. Meeting people where they are, with the questions that they have and also promising them that I will, as their advisor, accompany them through this discernment journey, which includes the relationship with the church and their candidacy committee. So we talk a good deal about that relationship. Like Professor Fritschel said, it’s not only about academics. It is about academics, but it’s also about this formative aspect of our life together, which

is in service of the church. Those two things are guiding lights in our time together.

KS: When you meet an advisee for the first time, whether that is in your office, in the refectory, or via Zoom, what is something you do, say, or ask as you kick off this new relationship?

SG: When I first meet with an advisee, I want to know where they come from. I want to know the topography and geography of their life to this point. What’s their history? Where do they come from? And also what are their hopes and dreams? Why are they here? And what do they envision as their purpose, their future?

AF: It’s somewhat similar for me. I want to know who they are. What has brought them to this point? I want to know them as a person. What do they like to do in their spare time? What’s their family like? And then it’s a question—and sometimes they roll their eyes when I ask because they’ve had to answer this so many times, but I ask about their faith journey to this point and their sense of call. But it’s to get to know them as people. And then I also share a little bit about myself so they get to start to know me as a person as well. The hope is that over our time together, we can build a good relationship of trust with each other.

KS: Part of our role as faculty is also meeting with students who are discerning or considering attending seminary. What is one of the most common questions or most memorable question that you’ve been asked when you meet with prospective students? And how did you answer?

AF: For me, I have met with, I would say, four or five students over the years who

have visited every single ELCA seminary and they're discerning where they belong. Their most frequent question—and others who haven't attended all the seminaries often ask too—why Wartburg? What is it about Wartburg that should bring me here? I try to say to them, all of our seminaries are fine seminaries and each will work for a particular person. But when I talk about Wartburg, I talk first of all about our sense of community, that we are intentional Christian community, both residentially and at a distance. And then I think, if you're going to be a leader of a Christian community, you should be experiencing good, intentional Christian community. I talk about the worship-centered nature of our community because we really are a worship-centered group. I'll say, in the time of COVID-19, being centered and grounded in worship has kept me alive in many ways and sane. It's a chance to talk about our emphasis on formation and a sense of collegiality, because we really want to help each other and learn from each other. Then I get into other little things: our concern for social justice and international issues. But I love that question of why Wartburg? Because it shows there's real discernment going on.

SG: When I'm meeting with the prospective student, I will ask them, why in the world would you want to do this? There are so many pathways that a person can take through

life—ministry in the church is not always the easiest road. And so why would you want to do this? I find that that opens up a conversation about what really is in the gut of this person and what they are feeling called to, which then opens up conversation possibilities in terms of similar questions to what Ann was talking about in terms of why Wartburg? Because I end up at the same place. That intentional community is the place where you can sort through questions of purpose and call in a way that is also practicing purpose and call in real community. It's not a plastic community that we have here. It's a real community with all of its joys and also all of its struggles.

KS: I think the stereotype is that you have it all figured out before you attend seminary and that you have the answers definitively about call. But the Wartburg community can also be a place where you work to figure that out. And that's really important for people to understand, that that happens more often than they might think.

KS: How would you describe Wartburg's faculty as a collective or as a whole?

SG: We're a motley crew, Wartburg's faculty. We all have our own passions, joys, and personalities. I think we all have a deep commitment to the academic disciplines that we



DR. KRISTINE STACHE

have been formed to study and to teach, but a common thread that ties us all together is a commitment to the well-being of the church and the well-being of the world. Our common purpose is the formation of our students and not just about the individual, but it's about formation for service in the church in the world. I think that ties us together quite nicely, actually, this motley crew.

AF: I like the language of motley crew. But we do have common ties, as you said, Sam. I do want to lift up the grounding in our academic disciplines, and also the love for the church and for God's mission in the world. Many of us love the parish. We're not here because we couldn't do the parish, but because we love it and want to continue to prepare leaders for mission and God's world. I'd also say that I am amazed by the creativity, the imagination, and the flexibility of my faculty colleagues. As we move forward into an uncertain future—who knows what the church is going to look like. We're not coming up with cookie-cutter pastors for cookie-cutter parishes. I think we have some of the best thinkers in Christian theological education now thinking about the needs of the church, and the future of the church, what that's going to look like, and leadership for the church. I also think an important thing for me in this faculty is our collegiality. I've experienced in my schooling where you could see tensions and divisions among the faculty. We have learned how to disagree with each other honestly, but that never causes us to disre-

spect each other. We can do this in love and respect. I'm just honored to be a part of this faculty, because it really is a dynamic and caring place. We care for each other. We support each other as well as our students.

KS: I couldn't agree more. I'm in my 14th year now of serving on the faculty, and there's a sense of striving for excellence that doesn't involve egos. This excellence that the faculty strive for in their own scholarship, in their own leadership, is truly about serving the church. And we serve the church by accompanying our students and taking that seriously in formation. It has been one of the biggest blessings I've had in my own multiple calls—is to be part of a group of people who are so diverse, who think differently, who don't always agree, yet have this common goal of excellence to serve the church.

KS: How do you think the faculty collegiality affects our students?

AF: I think part of it is that they experience it and they're invited into it. I see my students not as future colleagues, but colleagues already now, so there's a way where they're invited into this collegial relationship. I also think we do a good job of modeling how you can disagree and yet still respect each other. I think that's modeling that's important in our very divisive society today. And that it's okay to not be in lockstep with one another. But that doesn't change our basic humanity. And I



REV. DR. ANN FRITSCHEL

think it gives an opportunity for students to feel safe and secure in raising their own questions and asking their own hard and difficult ponderings as well, knowing that that's okay, and we'll be better for it.

SG: One of the one of the hallmarks of our curriculum is that a number of key courses are team taught. So in addition to other para curricula or less formal ways where students see us interacting with each other, there are some basic courses in the curriculum where the students see that weekly or daily in terms of the capacity to be unified in Christ and disagree about aspects of whatever it is that we're working through on a particular day. When I think about the nature of the church, it can't digress into a community of the like-minded. Because then we're just making the center of things our own interpretations of what truth is or what ideology we're aspiring to follow. Rather, it's Christ who is our unity. And so I think the modeling of collegiality and community among the faculty is a modeling of this unity in Christ that is the church.

AF: Sam, you were talking about the faculty as a motley crew. And I'd like to think of our student body as a motley crew too. Great range of diversities in every type of category. We're not trying to force them into one particular mold, but respect the gifts of diversity and "motley" that they bring and finding our unity in Christ.

KS: Any last thoughts, words of advice, nuggets of wisdom?

SG: An image that comes to mind when I think about seminary education and Wartburg Seminary in particular, is an image of lapidary, of rock polishing. It's a lost art form these days. But when you're polishing rocks, you put them into

a tumbler with all of their sharp edges. And you put them in there together with some sand and you turn it on and you let it turn for a long time. And it does polish the rocks, but they're not different rocks when they come out. But they're polished. And they're polished from bouncing off one another for a long period of time. This seems to me to be a decent image of what formation at Wartburg Seminary is like. We tumble together in this thing called life and theological education. And we perhaps take some jagged edges off one another or off ourselves. We look different when we come out, but we are the same rocks that went in. That's the work of the Spirit in this formative process, and in particular at Wartburg, in this worship-centered life together that we have.

AF: I like that image. Thanks, Sam. One other thing that I would say is that both Sam and I are alum. Kris, you are an alum of a different institution. We've all been here for some significant number of years. I'd like to think that's not because we couldn't find another job, but because we find it life-giving, and fulfilling, and joyful, and grace-filled to be here at Wartburg Seminary. And I think that's the same type of experience that we hope for our students, our staff, our families, that Wartburg is a place to discern, to grow, to live out faithfully whatever God's future is calling you into. And it's a good, supportive place to do that. It's sometimes painful to have the rough edges knocked off. Stones don't feel anything. But it is a good place to discern what God is calling you into.

KS: Well said. It is an honor to have you both as colleagues. Thank you so much for your time today.

What Do WTS Students Say About...?

THEIR WARTBURG EXPERIENCE



MARIE MARTÍNEZ, DISTANCE LEARNING MDIV STUDENT

When people talk about this grand community that an institution has, I always approach it a bit skeptically because I'm naturally kind of pessimistic, because I didn't think it could really be as good as people were touting. But I really do feel fully integrated in the community even having only been on campus for Prolog Weeks. People know my name, my face. I have connections with faculty and staff, and other students get together and speak with people outside of the classroom about non-school-related things. I found the faculty and staff both very invaluable and helpful in discerning my call or anytime I've had a personal issue arise that I needed help with. And they've been more than willing to step in.



SEAN AVERY, RESIDENTIAL LEARNING MDIV STUDENT

At Wartburg, we do everything together. We worship together. We learn together. We play together—table tennis is a big thing here—and that's sort of the beauty of this place whether you're at a distance or here. It's special. My wife Becky and I have thought of this whole seminary thing as an adventure. If there's any advice that I can give, it would be just to lean into that sense of adventure and know that God goes with you through all of this, so don't be afraid. The people here, your peers, your faculty, admissions, they are here to be your cheerleaders. They're here to see you be successful and to help you discern and to learn the language of your sense of call, and that will come in time. It will take time, but it will come—glimpse by glimpse—but it will come. Lean into that and trust that there are people here that are ready and excited to walk with you.

Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández-Marcial's Story

GET TO KNOW WARTBURG'S NEW ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HEBREW BIBLE



INTRODUCTION

The Wartburg Theological Seminary community welcomed the Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández-Marcial to the faculty as Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible beginning January 1, 2021.

The search for the Hebrew Bible faculty position was conducted in the late summer and early fall of 2020. The process included the work of a faithful search committee that moved forward with their designated responsibilities using digital meetings and communication due to pandemic restrictions.

Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández-Marcial will be teaching required courses in Bible, electives, and team teaching integrated courses. Prof. Hernández-

Marcial holds a PhD in biblical studies from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). She specialized in Hebrew Bible, and in particular, Wisdom Literature with her dissertation titled, "Life under the Sun: Contradictions and Resistance in Ecclesiastes from a Puerto Rican Perspective."

Prof. Hernández-Marcial has taught at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, McCormick Theological Seminary, and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. As a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), she served as a pastor in several churches in Puerto Rico, where she taught Old Testament, Christian Ethics, and Christian Theology at the Disciples of Christ Bible Institute. Prof. Hernández-Marcial holds a bachelor's degree with a major in biology from the University of Puerto Rico, an MDiv from the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, an STM from the Union Theological Seminary (NY), and a ThM from the LSTC.

REV. DR. LYDIA HERNÁNDEZ-MARCIAL'S STORY

I was always a curious child. My favorite question was—and still is—"why?" I remember as a small kid having a doctor's bag with a stethoscope, thermometer, etc. Later, when I was a pre-teen, I asked for a microscope. I was interested in exploring things, breaking things down, and putting them back together again. It made sense to study science when I grew up. I wanted to be a doctor in medicine and a researcher.

I started a master's degree in microbiology, but I discovered that that was not what I wanted to do the rest of my life. With time I learned that God was calling me to go in another direction. I never imagined that in my adult life, I would be doing the same (exploring, breaking things down, and putting them back together), but with the Bible and theology and teaching others to do the same.

I started teaching in church when I was very young. I didn't connect this experience with the concept of call or vocation until I was in college. It was also during my college years that I first experienced my call to pastoral ministry. I had some friends who attended some college ministry meetings, and they invited me. To be honest, this wasn't something that I was excited about. Long story short, I went one day, and after some months, I became one of the group leaders. I discovered I was good at listening to people and with pastoral care. I started preaching and leading worship. Suddenly, I realized I was functioning as a pastor, and I loved what I was doing. However, it took me ten years to finally say yes to God's call to ministry. I wasn't ready until I was ready.

When I started the candidacy process at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I was sure that God was calling me to be a pastor and a teacher. I always stated this fact in my interview meetings. I knew I needed to work as a pastor first to be ready to teach other children of God who felt called to a pastoral or diaconal ministry. I went back to school to fulfill this goal eleven years after I finished my MDiv, and that is twelve years after I started working as a parish minister.

I decided to pursue studies in Hebrew Bible back when I did my MDiv in Puerto Rico. I had a Hebrew Bible professor whom many students

feared, but I liked his classes a lot. The late Dr. Alfred Wade Eaton inspired me in my pursuit to study Hebrew Bible. As a pastor, I noticed that parishioners asked many questions about the Bible, especially from the book of Genesis or other books from the Hebrew scriptures. I felt the need to prepare myself to serve the church better by giving tools to the people to study this first testament of our Bible. I further have a specialization in wisdom literature. Why wisdom literature? Because of its connection with folk wisdom and the centrality of human experience as a way to gain knowledge and wisdom.

Twenty-four years after I started this journey, I still understand my call as a combination of pastoral and pedagogical ministries. Now, instead of being at a church pulpit, I am in the classroom (virtual or in-person, it does not matter). I have learned new ways of doing ministry for new generations and new realities.

When I started learning more about Wartburg, it intrigued me to read on the website how the professors at Wartburg are presented as scholars *and* pastors. During the interviews, I confirmed that Wartburg values its professors' pastoral vocation, that it is integral to our role as faculty members. Walking with students throughout their candidacy process, being with them before, during, and after the interviews, feels like pastoral ministry. Having the opportunity to teach the Hebrew Bible, while focusing on a healthy approach to Scriptures for our faith communities, is exciting.

Wartburg's faculty is like a family. They have helped me in the process of integration, and I have felt welcome. It is easy to talk to my colleagues; it is exciting to get to know new students, listen to new voices, and learn how students and faculty interact in and outside class.

A photograph of the interior of a church. In the foreground, a priest in white vestments and a face mask stands at a wooden pulpit on the left. Another priest in white vestments and a face mask stands at a wooden table on the right. The church has a high, vaulted ceiling with exposed wooden beams and a large stained glass window in the background. The floor is made of polished wooden planks.

Are you or is someone you know considering seminary?

Attend an upcoming **Online Open House** or **start a conversation** with the Wartburg Seminary Admissions team! We can't wait to meet and walk with you in your discernment journey.

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Wartburgers Reflect on Ministry in the Nation's Capital

STORIES FROM CURRENT STUDENT AND DEACON CANDIDATE

ALYSSA PRINZIVALLI AND DEACON KENNY CHAMPAGNE '20

ALYSSA PRINZIVALLI Current Student and Deacon Candidate in the Metro D.C. Synod

I came to the D.C. area for the politics, so I like to think that I knew what I was getting myself into when I started an internship here in 2012. But the past few years have definitely added strains to the country and to the D.C. area. I serve as the Director of Congregational Ministries at a congregation in Fairfax, VA, and it just seems like things affect people differently in this area.

Within my congregation and community, we have a lot of people who work for the government in some capacity, so when the government shuts down, we have to figure out how to help those in our communities who may not be working. When the insurrection happened on January 6, we had to think about who may have been in the District that day for work, who may have been in the Capitol that day, or the surrounding areas, and also think about the general safety of our members. These are not your typical congregational concerns, but these things aren't new to the D.C. area—okay, maybe the attempted insurrection was.

After the continued murders of our Black siblings in Christ we bore witness to last year, I felt a call toward wearing a clerical collar, something that not all Deacons do, especially knowing that I have access to a lot of different marches and protests in and around D.C. This feeling of needing to wear some sort of outward symbol stemmed from my passion for social justice and racial equality and recognizing that some folks do not always see the church's place in

that. As a Word and Service candidate, I had to speak with my Bishop, the Rev. Leila Ortiz, about whether I would be able to wear a collar as part of my public witness to the Gospel. Thankfully, Bishop Ortiz encouraged me to explore this part of my call. Being able to wear a collar in the public square, for me, means showing up to a BLM march, or a protest for climate justice, or women's rights, or whatever the cause may be, allowing me to show others that these important issues and Christianity are not at odds with one another.

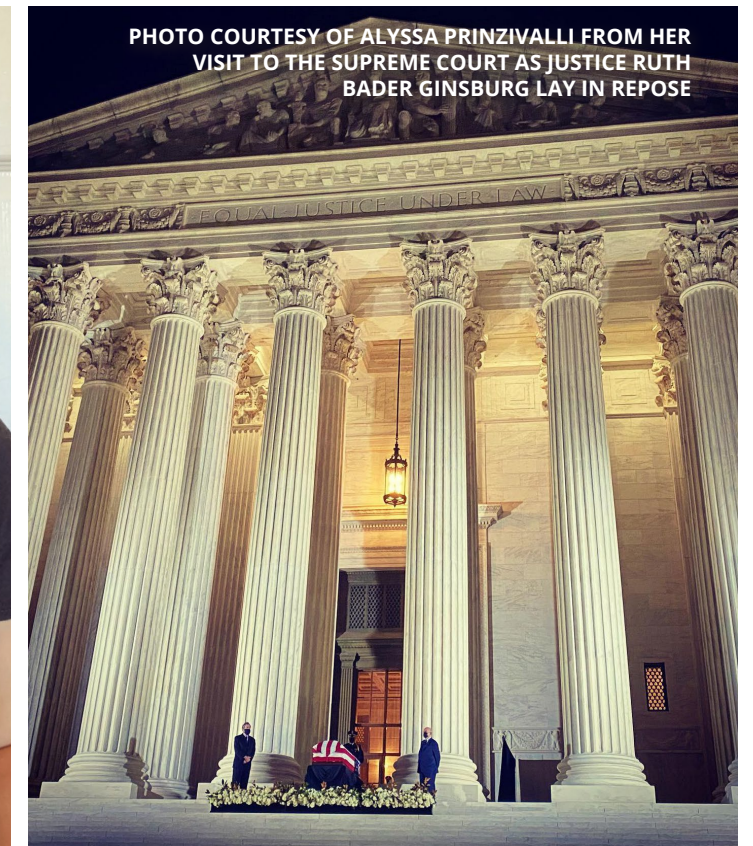
I am 110% a D.C. enthusiast. I have lived either in the District or the surrounding area since 2012, taking only a nine-month break to finish up my senior year of undergrad in North Carolina. In many ways, this area helped shape me and open my eyes to a much larger world than the one I was used to. Even though it's almost a decade that I've been here, I am still completely in awe of the city. The monuments at night, and what these buildings stand for—a representation of the people—still hits me in my feels when I see them. In September, when Justice Ginsburg passed away, my spouse and I knew we had to go downtown to pay our respects to this monumental woman who gave our country so much. As we walked up, past the Capitol, towards the Supreme Court Building, there was this ethereal energy in the air. There was collective mourning, grief, fear, and yet it was beautiful, to have that moment with other people, after months of distance; every race, religion, gender-expression, age, you name it, was represented there that night. It was a holy moment, as we paid our respects to an American hero.



The congregation that I serve has people from all over the political spectrum. We have members who work for the government, for startups, teachers, IT developers, and everything in between. Something we take seriously is being honest about what is happening without taking sides or making anything overtly political but making sure that the Gospel is being preached honestly. My pastor has helped me truly understand what the Theology of the Cross looks like in practice, because we always call a thing what it is.

DEACON KENNY CHAMPAGNE '20 Master of Arts in Diaconal Ministry Graduate and Deacon in the Metro D.C. Synod

Through our seminary formation and beyond, we regularly hear the phrase, "context matters." While this year has taught us much, the context in which one serves and leads has created a diverse set of experiences and skills for church leaders. Serving as a deacon in a congregation in the suburbs of Washington D.C., about 30 miles from the White House and Capitol Building, this past year has highlighted the challenges of church leadership



in this particular context. I serve far enough from downtown D.C. that it is easy to forget the context.

On January 6, I was sitting at the desk in my home (most of our buildings in the area remain closed due to the pandemic) typing away at some confirmation lesson plans when my phone buzzed with a text message. It was a friend from seminary checking to see if I was okay. Then another message, and another. Unsure of what might be wrong, I opened my news app and there it was, "The Capitol Under Attack." I was, of course, fine, and nowhere near any of the protests but my mind quickly shifted to members of our congregation who lived or worked in D.C. I began sending off my own text messages and emails. One of them was to another staff member whose husband works in the Capitol. Thankfully, he had been working from home for the past year as well. And then I sat and watched and prayed. In the days that followed, like the rest of the nation, we heard the stories, but not all of them were reported from the news. We heard from other pastors whose congregations were near the Capitol who had encounters with the protesters. Stories of leaders unable to

go to their buildings because of curfews and additional lockdowns. It is a different context hearing those stories from the mouths who lived it, from friends and colleagues.

Church leadership in the shadows of the nation's capital is different. Not necessarily good or bad different, but different. You can be in the suburbs with the monuments out of sight but on a 20-minute drive to see friends and suddenly see that iconic skyline appear. You see your community driving down the street, going to the grocery store, taking kids to soccer, struggling with all the same issues most people struggle with, but then they mention a name of a Senator or President when discussing their work. In this context it is easy to forget where you are but just as easy to be abruptly and unexpectedly reminded. It appears you are only a few degrees of separation from the extremely powerful and never even notice. It is easy to dehumanize those whom we

see in power or close to power, but the thing about ministry in the D.C. area is how quickly and abruptly those people become human when they are sitting in your pews, or serving next to you, or leading a council meeting.

This past year we have all had to discern the best ways to lead through a pandemic, deep loss, protests, violence, extreme politics, Christian nationalism, and so much more. Each context has had its own struggles, issues, and learnings. But ultimately, we are all in the people business. We are all called to lead and serve people. Serving in Washington D.C. has its own unique struggles and joys but even here, we are called to serve and lead people. While people are not always easy, isn't this good news? After all, God chose to come to us, as one of us, as a person, as human. Context matters but the Gospel matters more. No matter the context, seek the humanity in people and witness the image of God we were all created in.



DEACON KENNY CHAMPAGNE (BOTH PHOTOS)

Alumni Notes

'45

Helen Schlueter, wife of **Rev. Arnold Schlueter**, died on July 25, 2020.

'47

Rev. John Keller died on December 21, 2021. He served for many years in specialized ministry in the treatment of alcoholism and as pastor of Zion, Johnson, NE.

'55

Rev. James Ullom died on December 3, 2020. He served parishes in Sherman, TX; Oberlin, KS; and Rothschild, Mazomanie, Cross Plains, West Middleton, Hope and Racine, all in Wisconsin. He also served as chaplain at the A-Center for Drug & Alcohol, Racine, WI.

'58

Rev. Richard C. Schroeder died on December 24, 2020. He served St. John's Townline, Birnamwood and St. Paul's, Aniwa; St. John's, Augusta and St. Luke's, Foster; Immanuel, Zittau and Trinity, New London; New Hope, Downsville, Little Elk Creek, all in Wisconsin.

Rev. Donald Smith died on April 1, 2020.

'61

Rev. Oliver Dewald died on December 10, 2020. He served

parishes in Mercer, New Leipzig, Hazen, Linton, Hettinger, and New Town, all in North Dakota.

'62

Rev. August R. Borchardt died on July 29, 2020. He served Grace and St. Paul, Fairfield, MT; St. Paul, Missoula, MT; St. James, Leola, SD; St. Paul, Clear Lake, SD; West Nidaros, Crooks, SD; and Grand Valley, Canton, SD. He also served as a chaplain at Luther Manor and Avera McKennan, Sioux Falls, SD.

'65

Joan Baumgardner, wife of **Rev. Thomas Baumgardner**, died on February 2, 2021.

'72

Rev. James Jay Carstensen died on October 22, 2020. He served parishes in Baltimore, MD; Mobile, AL; Saginaw, MI; and Waterloo, IA.

'77

Rev. Jose Luis Garcia, Jr., died on December 26, 2020. He served as a chaplain and Deputy Command Chaplain in the Air Force; as pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, San Antonio, TX; and as Executive Director for Hispanic-Latino Outreach and

Director for Mission Development for the ELCA.

'82

Rev. Donald C. Reusch died on January 14, 2021. He served as pastor of parishes in Lily, SD; Butler, SD; and Sioux Falls, SD, and as chaplain for the Seamen's Church Institute and St. matthew's, Paducah, KY.

'87

Rev. Harriet Danielson died on November 15, 2020. She served North Beaver Creek, Ettrick, WI; Peace, Tilleda, WI and Elias, Gresham, WI; First, Decorah, IA; Henrytown, Canton, MN; and Luther College Campus Ministry in Decorah, IA.

'12

Rev. Jenna Couch has begun a new call as Associate Pastor at Our Saviour's, Austin, MN.

'20

Rev. Jason Poole-Xiong was ordained on November 13, 2020. He has been called to serve as Associate Pastor to Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Beloit, WI.

Rev. Matthew Grant Vanderford was ordained on October 15, 2020. He has been called to serve Bethesda Lutheran Church, Moorhead, MN.



Faculty and Staff Updates



Rev. Liz Albertson, Vice President for Admissions and Student Services, began her call to

Wartburg Seminary on December 1, 2020. A 2006 graduate and former Board Member, Liz most recently served as Director of Evangelical Mission (DEM) & Assistant to the Bishop of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod and previously served a congregation in Ettick, Wisconsin.



Eric Haitz, Admissions Associate, joined the team in the Office of Admissions and Student

Services at Wartburg Seminary in November 2020. In this role, Eric will be working with prospective students on their vocational discernment journey to Wartburg Seminary. He, his wife and two children are located in Council Bluffs, IA. Eric is also pursuing the Master of Arts in Diaconal Ministry Degree, and in candidacy for word and service in the Western Iowa Synod.

Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández-Marcial, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible, began her call



to Wartburg Seminary on February 1, 2021. Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández-Marcial holds a

PhD in biblical studies from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). She specialized in Hebrew Bible, and in particular, Wisdom Literature with her dissertation titled, "Life under the Sun: Contradictions and Resistance in Ecclesiastes from a Puerto Rican Perspective."



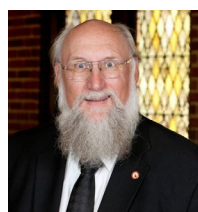
Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largent, President, began her call to Wartburg Seminary on

February 1, 2021. She most recently served in a dual role as Professor of Systematic Theology at United Lutheran Seminary and Associate Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life/College Chaplain at Gettysburg College. President Largent has two recent publications: "Beyond Pluralism and Inclusivism: Multiple Religious Validity and *Lotus Sūtra*," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 40 (2020), 25-38; and *A Christian Exploration of Women's Bodies in Shin Buddhism*, (Lanham, MD), Lexington Books, 2020.



Rev. Dr. Martin Lohrmann, Associate Professor of Lutheran Confessions and Heritage,

has a new book published by Fortress Press. *Stories from Global Lutheranism: A Historical Timeline* tells how Lutheranism has become a unique and engaging expression of the global church. Dr. Lohrmann's essay on Luther's interpretation of the First Epistle of John was also recently published in the Winter 2021 issue of *Word & World*.



Rev. Dr. Craig L. Nesson, Professor of Contextual Theology and Ethics, The William

D. Streng Professor for the Education and Renewal of the Church, and Academic Dean, published a new book, *Wilhelm Loehe and North America: Historical Perspective and Living Legacy* (Wipf & Stock, 2020) and book chapters, "The Relation of Justification and Sanctification in the Lutheran Tradition" in *All Things Needed for Godliness: A Portrait of Holiness among Christian Traditions* (The Foundry Publishing, 2020) and

"Practicing Jesus Christ in Public, Embodying Resistance" in *Truth-Telling and Other Ecclesial Practices of Resistance* (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021).



Rev. Dr. Winston D. Persaud, Professor of Systematic Theology, Holder of the

Kent S. Knutson and UELC Chair in Theology and Mission, and Director of the Center for Global Theologies, celebrated 40th anniversary of ordination (30 September 2020); reviewed for *Lutheran Quarterly*, The Christian Faith, by Carl E. Braaten (Cascade Books, 2020); via Zoom: gave post-sabbatical lecture, 'The Spiritual Practice of Remembering that Christians across the world and across the ages confess, "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church..."' (9 December 2020); preached at Week of Prayer Unity opening worship of the Guyana Council of Churches (24 Jan.); taught TEEM course Systematics 1 (25-29 Jan.); seminar on the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* for pastors in Guyana & Guyanese diaspora in U.S.A. & Canada (30 Jan.); Adult Education on "Confessing the Gospel in today's plural world," Grace LC, Champaign, IL (31 January, 7&14 February).



Dr. Kristine Stache, Associate Professor of Missional Leadership and Vice President

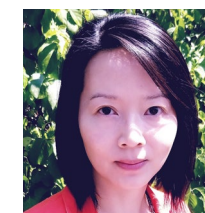
for Strategy and Innovation has concluded her service as Interim President, which she served from January 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021, and continues as a member of the Administrative Cabinet in the role of Vice President for Strategy & Innovation. She recently published a chapter in *Sustaining Grace: Innovative Ecosystems for New Faith Communities* titled, "Learning to Listen: A Relational Approach to Vocation and Discernment, and an article in the journal *Ecclesial Futures* titled, "Stories That Shape an Understanding of God's Mission in the World: Visionary Leadership in the ELCA."



Rev. Dr. Troy Troftgruben, Associate Professor of New Testament, is teaching new electives

this year on Ministry in a Digital World and Teaching the Bible to Youth (with Nate Frambach). He is publishing articles on enhancing online presence in online teaching (*Didaktikos*, 2020) and on using

collaborative wikis in classrooms (*Wabash Center Journal on Teaching*, May 2021). Troy also contributed portions to an Augsburg Advent devotional, *Our Hope and Expectation* (2020), and to the Bible Odyssey website (SBL, www.bibleodyssey.org). This Spring he is teaching on themes from his book *Rooted and Renewing: Imagining the Church's Future in Light of Its New Testament Origins* for an education class at Christ Lutheran Church in Baltimore (MD).



Dr. Man-Hei Yip, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, presented her paper, "What

have Hongkongers to do with Luther? A Proposal for Theological Method" at The American Academy of Religion (AAR) Virtual Annual Meeting on December 9, 2020. She contributed a chapter, "Remembering the Immigrant Experience: The Body of Christ as a Borderless Space to Embrace Our Shared Humanity in the Face of Rising Xenophobia," to the forthcoming book, titled *Truth-Telling and Other Ecclesial Practices of Resistance*. This volume aims to explore how theology is responsibly connected with ecclesial practices of resistance in an increasingly divisive world.

Upcoming Events:

April 20, 2021

Admissions Online Open House

May 11, 2021

Admissions Online Open House

May 16, 2021

Class of 2021 Baccalaureate & Commencement

June 6-8, 2021

Preaching for Deacons Continuing Education Online Certificate Course

November 6, 2021

Inauguration of President Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, PhD



For more information and to register, visit www.wartburgseminary.edu or use the QR code above.



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