



LifeTogether

THE MAGAZINE OF
WARTBURG THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Spring 2024

LifeTogether

The official magazine of Wartburg Theological Seminary for our alumni and friends. Permission is granted for additional use in congregations. Founded in 1854 and located in Dubuque, Iowa since 1889, Wartburg Theological Seminary is one of seven seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

EDITOR

Jessica Schneider, *Director of Communications*

ADMINISTRATIVE CABINET

Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Lergen, *President*

Michael P. Johnson, *Vice President for Development*

Rev. Dr. Cheryl Peterson, *Academic Dean*

Dr. Kristine Stache, *Vice President for Leadership Formation*

Andy Willenborg, *Vice President for Finance and Operations*

COVER PHOTO

J-Term Trip to Tanzania

Photo contributed by Kristin Lergen

SPRING EDITION 2024

Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, Iowa 52003

Phone: 563-589-0200
Fax: 563-589-0333
wartburgseminary.edu



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.

TANZANIA —THREADS OF FAITH CONNECTING ACROSS CONTINENTS 04

Wartburg group finds meaningful lessons in Tanzania

FROM A COLLEGE CHAPEL TO AN AFRICAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 08

Hope for the future provides power in the present

QUEER CONFIRMATION: FABULOUS YOUTH FINDING LIVABLE FAITH 10

A conversation with the co-creators of Queer Confirmation

SEMINARY STUDENTS PRESENT AT SOCIETY FOR BIBLICAL LITERATURE ANNUAL MEETING 12

Introducing Marit Johnson and DaMisha McFarland-Pollock

BEHIND THE SCENES: THE UNSUNG HEROES OF CAMPUS 13

Recognizing the contributions of Bill Link and Ken Veach

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FIND COMMUNITY AT WARTBURG 14

Jamil and Zo bring unique perspectives to the Wartburg community

CELEBRATING THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF LEAD BOLDLY 15

Lead Boldly Capital Campaign exceeds goal

LATINE MINISTRY: A CALL FOR THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION 16

A message from Pastor Violeta Siguenza

FACULTY AND STAFF UPDATES 18

Tanzania—Threads of Faith

Connecting Across Continents

As a winter chill settled over Wartburg Theological Seminary, a diverse group of students, faculty, and alumni found themselves embarking on an adventure that would take them far from the familiar. January Term (or J-Term) is known for its unique travel courses, and among the destinations offered in 2024, Tanzania stood out as a unique opportunity for cultural exploration and spiritual connection.

Paige McGrath, a final year CL student, was quick to sign up for the trip. The allure of Tanzania's vibrant culture and the chance to witness the Lutheran Church's impact on the ground were appealing to her. This journey promised a deeper understanding of the local ministries and an opportunity to make meaningful connections.

Pastor Elise Hynek '23 from St. James Lutheran in Rudyard, MI, on the other hand, sought an adventure that offered unique insights she might not encounter again. The fact that her synod had a presence in Tanzania, coupled with the chance to delve into the structure of the local church, made the decision clear for her.

Once in Tanzania, the group of 11 (one participant needed to leave before the conclusion of the trip) found themselves immersed in an experience unlike anything they had encountered before. Kathleen Robinson, a first year MDiv student from Wisconsin, marveled at the joyous expressions of faith she witnessed. In Tanzania, Lutherans don't merely recite prayers; they sing and dance, creating a unique and welcoming atmosphere of celebration.

For Pastor Kurt Saenger-Heyl '23 of Trinity Lutheran Church in Centerbrook, CT, the pinnacle of the trip's worship experiences occurred at a Maasai Girls Lutheran Secondary School. Three consecutive nights of chapel led by the students revealed a powerful and intriguing perspective on worship. The girls, numbering over 350, brought a different tone, rhythm, and spirit to each evening. The group was surprised to see that the Tuesday night evening prayer, always conducted in English, was Holden Evening Prayer, a service familiar and beloved. It was sung with distinctive variations, which provided Pastor Kurt with a new lens through which to view his own faith.

As the days unfolded, the students discovered that while the language and cultural nuances differed, the core essence of worship remained universal. The Tanzanian journey not only expanded their understanding of Lutheran practices but also challenged preconceptions and deepened their appreciation for the diverse ways people express their faith.

The ministry they encountered in Tanzania was multifaceted, with a focus on holistic support and engagement of the people. Kurt reflected on the growing infrastructure, where the Lutheran Church has historically played a crucial role in constructing schools and providing essential medical care. The act of being Christ for others extended beyond the sanctuary, ensuring basic needs were met as communities developed and grew through education.

New friend Winnie embodied this holistic approach in her own ministry. A dedicated church member, the group was introduced to her in Monduli, where she actively engaged with the local women in the community. A significant aspect of her calling involved working with widows and orphans, aiming to empower them with options and opportunities to sustain themselves financially. Amidst these practical endeavors, the core of her mission remained deeply grounded in the teachings and mission of Jesus Christ.

In several conversations with the group, Winnie emphasized the importance of bringing the mission of Jesus Christ into every aspect of their work. Her commitment to addressing the needs of widows and orphans went beyond economic empowerment; it was infused with the power of prayer. She spoke of the profound belief that God hears their prayers, strengthens them, and guides their mission. For the students, this revelation became an important reminder of the universality of faith and the unifying force that surpasses cultural and language barriers.

Similarly, in the heart of Tanzania, the group found that the seminary's tagline came to life as pillars that guided their experiences in profound ways: "Listen. Wonder. Lead."

Listen. The trip began with a deliberate act of disconnection, as one participant shared. By step-



Photo contributed by Kristin Largen

ping away from the constant buzz of U.S. news and social media, the group found a rare opportunity to be present and truly listen. This intentional silence allowed them to focus on the needs of the Tanzanian community, contemplating the role of the church. The essence of listening extended beyond language barriers, with Kurt emphasizing that the entire trip was designed as a listening expedition. The students engaged with various communities, including those of different denominations, setting aside biases to truly hear and learn from the Tanzanian people.

Hannah Friedericks, a first year residential MDiv student, unable to understand Swahili, discovered a different level of listening, tuning into the tone, emotion, and body language of the worship services. The profound experience challenged preconceived patterns and opened her eyes to the spiritual nuances that transcend language barriers.

Dr. Beth Elness-Hanson highlighted the connection between Tanzanian and Lutheran worship through a familiar hymn: "Listen, God Is Calling." The song's invitation echoed in the Swahili context, creating a bridge between cultures, and fostering a deeper understanding.

Wonder. The group found themselves continuously in awe of the joy, gratitude, and simplicity of life in Tanzania. As one participant marveled at how basic needs brought happiness, a sense of wonder emerged. The stark contrast between perceived necessities in the Western world and the contentment found in Tanzania left a lasting impression.

Lead. Leadership, in the context of Tanzania, took on a nuanced form. The unique practice of being a learner

and a leader simultaneously was acknowledged. The importance of wisdom in interpreting and translating experiences for different contexts emerged as a key aspect of leadership. A consensus formed around the idea that listening is a fundamental aspect of leadership.

The group recognized the significance of stepping into unfamiliar contexts with grace and enthusiasm, acknowledging and respecting the hospitality extended to them. Leadership, as expressed during the trip, was multidimensional, and in some cases involved dancing, sharing sour milk, and embracing the unknown with an open heart.

Pastor Elise urged the group to see the tangible impact of the Tanzanian church's work, emphasizing that stories of support networks, medical clinics, teachers, and evangelists were not distant possibilities but realities being lived out by the church in Tanzania. The challenge extended to the participants to recognize similar movements of the Spirit back home and to appreciate the shared struggles and support networks within their own communities.

And so, the Wartburg group found meaningful lessons in listening attentively, wondering at the beauty of simplicity, and leading with humility and grace. The journey not only connected them with the Tanzanian people but also provided a mirror through which to reflect on their own lives, values, and the limitless potential of the church's spirit. The experience left an indelible mark on each traveler, a reminder that the blessings of life are not confined to a specific location but can be found everywhere when one listens, wonders, and leads with an open heart.



Germany Trip

Photo contributed by Susan Rohan



Ministry in a Digital World

Photo contributed by Troy Troftgruben



Ministry in a Digital World

Photo contributed by Troy Troftgruben

The interim month of January ("J-Term") provides students and faculty with a change of pace from the classroom work of the fall and spring semesters. At Wartburg Seminary, students are encouraged to carefully consider the religious, social, economic, cultural, and political realities of the world into which they are called to bear the gospel.

One avenue for such learning is the Cross-Cultural Requirement: immersion (or immersion-like) experiences that bring students into a significant encounter with a different culture or sub-culture. Such encounters both enrich the students' breadth of experience and provide an opportunity for them to reflect on their own culture. Because students come from many cultural backgrounds, there is no single course by which this requirement is met. Instead, each student consults with their faculty advisor to discern the kind of immersion appropriate to that student's own prior experiences and readiness for future ministry.



Texas / Borderland Trip
 Photo contributed by Marit Johnson



Iceland/Norway trip
 Photo contributed by DaMisha McFarland-Pollock



Texas / Borderland Trip
 Photo contributed by Marit Johnson



Civil Rights Pilgrimage in Atlanta, Georgia
 Photo contributed by Craig Nesson



Tanzania Trip
 Photo contributed by Kristin Lergen



Rural Immersion Trip
 Photo contributed by Dorothee Caspari



Germany Trip
 Photo contributed by Susan Rohan



Rural Immersion Trip
 Photo contributed by Dorothee Caspari



Iceland/Norway trip
 Photo contributed by DaMisha McFarland-Pollock



Texas / Borderland Trip
 Photo contributed by Marit Johnson

From a College Chapel to an African Elementary School

BY KATHRYN HAUEISEN '85



Photo contributed by Brad Otto

Pastor Brad Otto's (WTS 2005) sense of call to launch Acts of Wisdom began at a Texas Lutheran University chapel service in 1998. Adjunct Professor Michael Birnbaum spoke about his passion to serve among the desperately poor Central Americans and invited students to join him on a mission trip to Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Otto signed up.

What he witnessed there planted a seed that eventually became the nonprofit Acts of Wisdom, launched in 2013. The organization's primary purpose is to provide schoolbooks and supplies, expand classrooms, build libraries, and equip teachers with materials to teach effectively. Over the past decade Acts of Wisdom has reduced school dropout rates from 35% to under 9%. The schools that Acts of Wisdom helps consistently score top ranking student performance levels.

Otto recalls how on his college mission trip, "I spent most of my time under an umbrella tree listening to a little boy named Jimmy read to me. He wanted to be a teacher someday, but sadly, that dream wouldn't come true for him, as it doesn't come true for many children around the world. Most boys wind up working with the drug lords and girls became prostitutes. That was my first look at poverty that close and it changed me."

When Otto accepted the call to serve Messiah Lutheran in Houston in 2009, he and the congregation partnered with Water to Thrive to build a well in Ethiopia. Since its inception in 2008 this nonprofit has installed over 1,600 wells, delivering clean, safe water to over 800,000 people in rural African communities.

In May 2013 Otto and Messiah members traveled to Ethiopia with Water to Thrive to build the well the congregation funded. "I saw the same kind of poverty I'd seen in Central America, and I witnessed a huge education crisis. I asked, 'Where are the books for kids?' They had one book for every ten kids. Students had to wait to get the book and by the time they did, the class might be on a different topic.

"Some of the larger nonprofits built the schools, but rarely furnished them so teachers could actually teach. This just seemed wrong to me. Here we are, the western white folks, coming to help this African community, but we don't bother to ask, 'What do you really need?'"

Otto realized, "I felt called, compelled to do something about it. I'd never started a nonprofit, though working as a congregational pastor is good experience for that. I went to a Half Price Books and bought a copy of *Nonprofit Kit for Dummies* for \$7 and followed it step by step."

People with the necessary skills and financial resources needed showed up and soon the fledgling organization had a board of directors, a name, a mission, and a donor data base. In January 2014 the IRS approved Acts of Wisdom as a 501(c) nonprofit. "I and the new board decided to start with the \$3,500 it would take to supply one school with the books they needed in Robit, Ethiopia. It started to click that this was doable. It was a solvable problem."

Otto was in an Ethiopian market on his first trip to visit the school when "Two kids approached me. I thought they wanted money, but it turned out they wanted pens. They needed them so they could do their homework. That was all they needed. Something we take for granted is the key to unlocking a kid's potential. Now whenever I take groups to Africa, I tell them to bring pens because the kids love pens. They use them for homework, to draw, write, imagine. The power of the pen."

Over the years Otto has developed a partnership and friendship with Ethiopian Johannes Wassie. The relationship started when Wassie was Otto's personal guide on his first trips. Today he is an Acts of Wisdom part-time staff person who checks on the schools, delivers the supplies, and helps keep track of the organization's paperwork. Acts of Wisdom has enabled him to evolve from his tour guide work to a local administrator for the organization. Wassie remains an excellent guide and interpreter translating between English and Amharic for visitors who want to do good for the communities they see.

Acts of Wisdom began with one school and a philosophy Otto picked up from Pastor Andy Stanley at Northpoint Church in Atlanta, GA. "Do for one what you wish you could do for many." That one school has expanded to four schools in Ethiopia, two in Uganda and one in Liberia. The Ribit school has grown to 2,000 grade school students. A total of 6,000 students benefit from the organization's work in the four Ethiopian schools.

Acts of Wisdom has expanded into Monrovia, Liberia where the number of students served grew from 60 students to 130, approaching 150. The current project is a \$250,000 capital campaign to build an orphanage for Liberian elementary school age youth with an adjoining six-bedroom guest house.

By providing housing for mission trip visitors, Acts of Wisdom can reduce the cost per visitor from \$3,000 to \$1,500 for a ten-day mission trip. Part of the campaign plan includes starting an endowment fund with \$25,000 to ensure funds are available to address future needs.

In Uganda Acts of Wisdom is building a classroom wing to house a student art project. Students learn art techniques to create art projects that Acts of Wisdom then sells in the States, sending the profits back to the school in Kampapa, Uganda.

In its first year Acts of Wisdom received about \$10,000, primarily from donors Otto knew personally. Over the past decade donors have contributed \$500,000. These funds cover the \$35 to \$40 cost for uniforms, vaccinations, school supplies, and food during the time students are at school. Donor dollars also provide some housing for teachers. The Ethiopian government pays teachers, but Liberian teachers donate their time and must cover their personal expenses. Acts of Wisdom is purchasing motor bikes for these teachers to help them with the five-to-six-mile trips they travel each way each day to get to school. The bikes give teachers more time and a resource they can use to generate personal income during the half days they aren't teaching.

Since its inception in 2013 Acts of Wisdom has provided 60,000 schoolbooks, all purchased in the countries where they are used. COVID-19 disrupted the three-trips-per-year schedule, but Otto is again planning mission trips. He'll lead three groups in 2024: Ethiopia in January, Liberia in April, and Liberia in the fall, on a date yet to be determined.

Otto realizes, "I have been incredibly fortunate in my life to never have to experience the difficulties I see in the world every day. I can't imagine what it's like to go hungry, to not have clean drinking water, and not have access to quality education."

Apparently, he can imagine it well enough to work with his seven-member Board of Directors and his growing list of donors to respond in tangible ways to the need for both safe drinking water and an education. It seems God has heard the people's cry for mercy and justice in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Liberia and tapped Pastor Brad Otto to do something about it. For more information, contact him through actsofwisdom.com or team@actsofwisdom.com.



Photo contributed by Brad Otto

Queer Confirmation: Fabulous Youth Finding Livable Faith



In a groundbreaking initiative, the Rev. Dr. Jan Schnell (she/her), Assistant Professor of Liturgics, and seminarian Kathryn Thompson (she/they), in conjunction with the ELCA, have received a grant from the Carpenter Foundation to develop a Queer Confirmation curriculum. Jan and Kathryn, who envisioned, wrote, and will facilitate the grant, took time to share insights into the curriculum's unique features and its profound impact on both the church and Wartburg Theological Seminary.

The grant aims to create a 24-week Queer Confirmation curriculum that the ELCA will run as a nationwide, synchronous, Zoom-based program. The curriculum spans most of the “Lutheran year” of a typical confirmation curriculum, while also providing an array of topics that are important for Queer and ally youth.

The emphasis is not only on surface-level adjustments, but on queering the deep structure of the curriculum. This happens in many ways, including building a multi-vocal community—the Spirit-driven curriculum, developed by 65 to 70 authors, intentionally includes highly recommended leaders from the Queer com-

munity. Jan underscored the importance of research in Queer pedagogies to ensure that the curriculum was tailored for Queer youth. Each session is built around the pillars of community and learning and includes the following:

- Welcome “wing” of community building
- Confirmation lesson
- Small group processing/discussion/activity
- Coaching/skill-building
- Christian ritual
- Closing “wing” of community building and processing

The curriculum is designed not just for lesson content but also for skill-building, recognizing the challenges faced by Queer youth in the United States. This skill-building aspect is essential for Queer youth to not only survive but thrive in a society that often poses challenges. Rituals will be incorporated to praise the Triune God and create affirming spaces. Community will be fostered and platforms provided to share stories and discuss challenges.

Kathryn highlighted the crucial role of Queer pedagogy in the curriculum, introducing the acronym DRAG (Deconstructing, Reframing, Attending, and Gospel). This approach aims to deconstruct harmful theologies, reframe faith in the context of life, attend to the unique needs of Queer youth, and emphasize the transformative power of the Gospel.

Kathryn went on to share that from a seminarian's perspective, the Queer Confirmation project represented significant progress in embracing inclusive theologies. They expressed gratitude for the natural extension of these theologies beyond the classroom, envisioning the application of knowledge gained at Wartburg in future ministry. The involvement of numerous Wartburg individuals, including alumni, in the project, coupled with the institution's support, showcased the living embodiment of ministry principles.

Jan emphasized the unique opportunity for seminary students to actively engage in ministry beyond classroom walls, creating a constructive link between faculty and students. This, Jan believes, highlights Wartburg's commitment to supporting new ministries emerging from its community.

Jan noted that this Queer Confirmation project aligns with the larger strategic emphasis on diversity in Wartburg's strategic plan. This strategic alignment has fostered institutional support, which has led to visible celebrations within the seminary community.

Jan underscored the monumental impact of the ELCA's partnership, viewing it as a significant step toward churchwide accountability. The financial support from the ELCA, a tangible affirmation of their statements, marked a historic moment. Budgets are moral documents, and this funding represents a commitment to accountability, inclusivity, and healing within the Church.

The ELCA's support went beyond financial contributions, extending to visibility and access through national platforms and social media. The partnership opened doors to present at key events and engage with influential figures within the Church, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

In conclusion, the Queer Confirmation project at Wartburg Theological Seminary, fueled by collaboration, inclusive pedagogies, and strategic alignment, is emerging as a beacon of hope within the Church. The grant and partnership with the ELCA symbolizes a commitment to diversity, equality, and the transformative power of inclusive faith practices.

Learn more at queerconfirmation.org.

This Is Wartburg—Live *With Savanna Sullivan '20*

How Wartburg Prepared Me for Ministry

April 22, 2024 | 7:00 PM CT

Join via Zoom. Contact Elizabeth at
eschmal@wartburgseminary.edu or
(563) 589-0328 for details!

Join us!



Seminarians Present at Society for Biblical Literature Annual Meeting



The anticipation for the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) annual meeting buzzed through the air as scholars, students, religious leaders, and enthusiasts gathered to celebrate their shared passion for biblical scholarship and religious studies. This year held a special significance for Wartburg seminarians Marit Johnson, a second year MDiv student, and DaMisha McFarland-Pollock, an MDiv final year student, who found themselves with the honor of having their papers accepted at the prestigious event.

DaMisha, inspired by the encouraging perspective of Dr. Beth Elness-Hanson, WTS professor of Old Testament, embarked on a journey of self-discovery and scholarly pursuit. Her paper is titled "Empty Liberation in Philemon." DaMisha's work aimed to spark necessary conversations about true freedom from enslavement for all marginalized voices—especially Black and brown individuals as found in Christ Jesus.

Marit, guided by the encouragement of the Rev. Dr. Rachel Wrenn and Dr. Man-Hei Yip, WTS professor of Systematic Theology, ventured into the realm of reproductive justice in the Bible. Drawing on her experiences as an ELCA Churchwide Office Justice for Women Program Assistant, her paper, "Reproductive Justice through a Feminist Lutheran Lens: Abundant Life, Flourishing Bodies, and Right Relationships," explored the intersection of feminism and Lutheran theology in the context of reproductive justice.

The acceptance of their papers came as a pleasant surprise for both Marit and DaMisha. DaMisha, reflecting on her journey, realized that her voice had a place in the academic discourse, and her thoughts were valuable to others. It was a testament to her perseverance and the support of encouraging professors. Marit, on the other hand, felt a mix of shock, honor, and excitement. The rare opportunity for master's students to present at such an esteemed event fueled her enthusiasm and opened up new possibilities for future research and ministry.

As for advice to other students aspiring to submit papers, DaMisha urged them to attend an SBL meeting to get a feel for the atmosphere and then take the leap of faith to write a proposal. She emphasized the importance of getting feedback from trusted peers and mentors, encouraging students to submit their proposals with holy expectation. Marit echoed this sentiment, urging students to pursue their interests and submit proposals without fear of rejection.

The SBL annual meeting became not only a platform for scholarly exchange but also a testament to the transformative power of encouragement, self-discovery, and the pursuit of knowledge. Marit and DaMisha's journey serves as an inspiration for future scholars, reminding them that their voices and perspectives are valuable contributions to the rich tapestry of biblical scholarship and religious studies.

Behind the Scenes: The Unsung Heroes of Campus

In the heart of our community are a pair of unsung heroes, Bill Link and Ken Veach, whose dedication and expertise keep our campus thriving behind the scenes. Although their work may often go unnoticed, their impact on the overall health, functionality, and aesthetics of our campus is hard to overstate. Between them, they have a combined 74(!) years of experience working at Wartburg Seminary (38 for Bill, and 36 for Ken). Oh, the stories they could tell about the experiences they have had, and the things they have seen—from winter storms, to floods, to bats—so many bats!

Under the direction of Andy Willenborg, VP for Finance and Operations, Bill and Ken recently undertook a significant endeavor: the renovation of Fritschel Hall. Tasked with breathing new life into this cornerstone of our campus, they approached the project with their characteristic precision, hard work, and dedication. From managing the logistics of the renovation to ensuring every detail was executed flawlessly, their commitment to excellence shone through every step of the process.

But their contributions extend far beyond individual projects—even one as large as Fritschel Hall. Day in and day out, Bill and Ken tirelessly oversee all aspects of campus maintenance, from mechanical systems to upkeep on student and faculty residences and care of the grounds. Their efforts not only ensure the smooth operation of our facilities, but also play a crucial role in shaping the positive first impressions of our campus visitors. Bill and Ken do so many little things as well: They hang the flags in the refectory that represent our campus community, they attend to issues of accessibility, and they are infinitely patient with lost keys, beeping smoke alarms, and the occasional fire drill.

Indeed, the immaculate condition of our buildings and grounds is a testament to their expertise and professionalism. With every task they undertake, Bill and Ken infuse our campus with a sense of pride, wonder, and beauty. Their skills, experience, and unwavering dedication are unmatched, and we are truly fortunate to have them as integral members of our community.



International Students Find Community at Wartburg



In the diverse community of Wartburg Theological Seminary, two students, Zo from Madagascar and Jamil from Palestine, brought their unique backgrounds and stories to share. Hailing from different corners of the world, they offered their experiences of relocation, faith, and integration to the Wartburg community.

Zo, with roots in Madagascar, found himself stepping out of his comfort zone for the first time as he embarked on his studies in the United States. The challenge of adapting to a new culture and academic environment was met with a mix of joy and fear. He expressed gratitude to Jeanette Perrault, Director of Admissions, and Kellie Lisi, Director of Community Life and Candidacy, for making his transition smooth, emphasizing their support not only in academics but also in matters of daily life.

Jamil, hailing from Bethlehem and East Jerusalem in Palestine, credited his unexpected journey to Wartburg to divine intervention. With a supportive network at Wartburg and the guidance of Jeanette, he navigated the complexities of securing a visa,

scholarships, and housing for himself and his family. He emphasized the ease of the process and the welcoming atmosphere that Wartburg provided.

Their academic pursuits led them to Wartburg Theological Seminary. Zo had been a pastor for 17 years before venturing into further studies. Encouraged by advisors and inspired by the reputation of Wartburg, he found himself drawn to the Lutheran theological perspective. Jamil, guided by a call from God and facilitated by the support of Wartburg, discovered his path to serving in the Lutheran Church.

Both Zo and Jamil expressed their gratitude for the guidance of their academic advisors. Zo commended his advisor, May Burt Persaud, WTS Instructor for Biblical Languages, for helping him choose courses aligned with his goals and navigate the challenges of life in Dubuque. Jamil highlighted the support and advice he received from Rev. Dr. Craig Nesson, Professor of Contextual Theology and Ethics, The William D. Streng Professor for the Education and Renewal of the Church, and Interim Dean of the Chapel, emphasizing the personal connection and assistance in adapting to the academic journey at Wartburg.

Addressing the Wartburg community, Zo shared his belief that having international students enriches the entire academic and communal experience. He emphasized the importance of studying, serving, and praying together despite cultural differences. Zo hoped that the theological perspective gained at Wartburg would find its way back to their home countries, spreading Lutheranism and enhancing church leadership.

Jamil reflected on the challenges faced by international students, especially the inability for employment and the dependence on a new community far from home. He commended Wartburg for creating a supportive platform and community that eased the homesickness and welcomed them into American traditions, such as Halloween and Thanksgiving.

As Zo and Jamil continue their theological journey at Wartburg, their stories become integral parts of the vibrant Wartburg Theological Seminary community. United by their faith, enriched by their diverse backgrounds, they embody the spirit of Wartburg's commitment to global theological education and community building.

Celebrating the Successful Completion of Lead Boldly

By Mike Johnson, Vice President for Development

The Lead Boldly comprehensive capital campaign was launched in 2020 by Wartburg Theological Seminary to address key areas of focus, including scholarships, the annual fund, innovation in theological education, and facility renovations. The campaign aimed to remove barriers for those answering God's call, further support the mission of equipping students to become church leaders, expand access to theological education, and undertake a major renovation of Fritschel Hall. We are thrilled to announce that the Lead Boldly campaign has not only achieved but surpassed its initial goal of \$28 million, with a total of \$28,332,870 in outright gifts, pledges, and planned gifts received as of December 31. We give thanks to God for the generosity of our faculty, staff and donors, and God's ongoing faithfulness and abundance.

The success of the Lead Boldly campaign would not have been possible without the unwavering support and generosity of our dedicated donors, the Board of Directors, and the Board of Trustees (now the Mission Advancement Committee). Their belief in the vision and mission of Wartburg has played a pivotal role in surpassing our fundraising goal. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each and every individual who contributed and helped us make a difference in the church and the lives of aspiring students.

Leading a capital campaign amid the challenges and uncertainties of a global crisis is no small feat. We are immensely grateful to our esteemed President, the Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largent, and Campaign Co-Chairs, Pastor Renee Splichal Larson and Pastor Michael Foss, for their exceptional leadership during this difficult time. Their dedication, vision, and unwavering commitment to the campaign have been instrumental in its success. Their ability to inspire and mobilize people to support a cause that can create a positive impact on the church is truly commendable.

One of the primary objectives of the Lead Boldly campaign was to remove barriers for individuals seeking to answer God's call. By providing scholarships, we have opened

doors for ministerial candidates who may have otherwise faced financial challenges in pursuing their theological education. This commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in theological education is a testament to Wartburg's mission to prepare future leaders for the church.

The annual fund played a crucial role in sustaining Wartburg's mission during the Lead Boldly campaign. The continued funding received through the campaign will further empower the institution to nurture and develop students' leadership potential. It is through the regular giving year in and year out of our supporters that Wartburg can continue its vital work.

The Lead Boldly campaign also sought to create innovative programs that expand access to theological education. By embracing new approaches and technologies, Wartburg aims to reach a broader audience and offer transformative educational experiences. In addition, the major renovation of Fritschel Hall will provide students with state-of-the-art facilities, fostering an environment conducive to learning, growth, and community.

The successful completion of the Lead Boldly campaign is a testament to the power of shared vision, unwavering commitment, and the generosity of the Wartburg Seminary community. Surpassing the initial fundraising goal of \$28 million is a remarkable achievement that will have a lasting impact on the church and the lives of countless students. We express our deepest appreciation to all those who contributed to the campaign and reaffirm our commitment to equipping future leaders, removing barriers, fostering innovation, and creating transformative experiences in theological education. The Lead Boldly campaign stands as a shining example of what can be achieved when individuals come together to make a difference. We give thanks to God for the Wartburg Theological Seminary community, and for God's sustaining presence, inviting our enthusiastic participation in God's mission in the world for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Latine Ministry: A Call for Thoughtful Consideration

By Pastor Violeta Siguenza, Director, Centro Teológico Luterano Multicultural



The concept of establishing a Latine ministry is increasingly appealing to some Anglo congregations. However, the motivations behind such a venture must be rooted in genuine intentions rather than fleeting trends or misguided expectations. Some congregations are drawn to this idea with a sincere desire to connect with their neighbors, while others may view it as a means to boost membership and financial

stability, seeing Latines as potential saviors for their budget and ministry. It is crucial to dispel the misconception that a Latine ministry will automatically lead to increased offerings and immediate salvation for a struggling congregation.

Any Anglo congregation contemplating the initiation of a Latine ministry must undergo a thorough discernment process. The motivation behind this mission should be carefully examined, questioning whether it stems from a genuine love for neighbors, societal trends, or a desperation to revitalize a declining membership. It is essential to discern whether this ministry aligns with the overall mission of the congregation or if it marks the inception of an independent established congregation.

Furthermore, the commitment to support this ministry must be evaluated—will it be sustained for the long run

or only for a few years? Leadership is another critical consideration. Should the ministry be led by an Anglo proficient in Spanish, or is it more appropriate for a Latine individual to take the helm? The congregation must also be prepared to immerse itself in Latine culture, seeking to understand how to "serve" rather than paternalistically "save" the Latine community.

These initial questions serve as the beginning of a comprehensive process that demands energy, prayer, patience, and love. It is my earnest prayer that Anglo churches contemplating a Latine ministry undertake their due diligence. Launching a ministry without a well-thought-out plan for the long term can be cruel, leading to the unfortunate scenario of shutting down the mission due to fatigue, frustration, demotivation, or changing trends.

Countless Latine individuals have been left without a church due to the lack of long-term vision by well-intentioned congregations. To my fellow siblings in Christ considering diversification through a Latine ministry, I implore you to allow yourselves the time needed to align your priorities correctly. Recognize that this type of mission requires a lifelong commitment, sustained by continuous prayer, monetary offerings, and unwavering support.

May the endeavors toward a Latine ministry be marked by genuine love, cultural understanding, and a steadfast commitment to serve, ensuring a lasting impact on both the congregation and the community it seeks to embrace.

Are you or is someone you know considering seminary?

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

Ministerio Latine: Una Llamada a la Reflexión Cautelosa

Por Pastor Violeta Siguenza, Director, Centro Teológico Luterano Multicultural

El concepto de establecer un ministerio latine resulta cada vez más atractivo para algunas congregaciones anglosajonas. Sin embargo, las motivaciones detrás de tal iniciativa deben estar arraigadas en intenciones genuinas en lugar de tendencias efímeras o expectativas equivocadas. Algunas congregaciones se sienten atraídas por esta idea con un sincero deseo de conectarse con sus vecinos, mientras que otras pueden verlo como un medio para aumentar la membresía y la estabilidad financiera, considerando a los latines como posibles salvadores de su presupuesto y ministerio. Es crucial desmentir la idea errónea de que un ministerio latine conducirá automáticamente a un aumento en las ofrendas y a la salvación inmediata de una congregación en dificultades.

Cualquier congregación anglosajona que esté contemplando iniciar un ministerio latine debe someterse a un exhaustivo proceso de discernimiento. La motivación detrás de esta misión debe ser examinada cuidadosamente, cuestionando si proviene de un amor genuino por los vecinos, de tendencias sociales o de una desesperación por revitalizar una membresía en declive. Es esencial discernir si este ministerio se alinea con la misión general de la congregación o si marca el comienzo de una congregación independiente establecida.

Además, se debe evaluar el compromiso de apoyar este ministerio: ¿se mantendrá a largo plazo o solo por unos pocos años? El liderazgo es otra consideración crítica. ¿Debería ser dirigido por un anglosajón competente en español, o sería más apropiado

que una persona latine tomara las riendas? La congregación también debe estar preparada para sumergirse en la cultura latine, buscando comprender cómo "servir" en lugar de "salvar" paternalísticamente a la comunidad latine.

Estas preguntas iniciales sirven como el comienzo de un proceso integral que demanda energía, oración, paciencia y amor. Es mi sincera oración que las iglesias anglosajonas que estén contemplando un ministerio latine lleven a cabo el debido discernimiento. Iniciar un ministerio sin un plan bien pensado a largo plazo puede ser cruel, llevando al lamentable escenario de cerrar la misión debido al cansancio, la frustración, la desmotivación o cambios en las tendencias.

Innumerables individuos latines han quedado sin iglesia debido a la falta de visión a largo plazo de congregaciones bien intencionadas. A mis compañeros hermanos en Cristo que están considerando la diversificación a través de un ministerio latine, les insto a que se den el tiempo necesario para alinear correctamente sus prioridades. Reconozcan que este tipo de misión requiere un compromiso de por vida, respaldado por oraciones continuas, ofrendas monetarias y un apoyo inquebrantable.

Que los esfuerzos hacia un ministerio latine estén marcados por un amor genuino, comprensión cultural y un compromiso inquebrantable de servir, asegurando un impacto duradero tanto en la congregación como en la comunidad que busca abrazar.

Listen. Wonder. Lead.

At Wartburg Theological Seminary the voices of God and our neighbors call us to **listen** deeply. In these limestone halls and your local communities, Jesus' love invites us to **wonder** at the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, who inspires our life together. Our graduates **lead** a changing church with holy curiosity, creativity and joy. In hope, we proclaim God's grace that carries us through death to resurrection life. **Listen, wonder, and lead at Wartburg.**

Faculty & Staff Updates



Dr. Beth Elness-Hanson (on leave of absence) continues to engage her Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellowship in Tanzania, where she hosted President Largen and nine students and alumni for a January-term course. In November, Elness-Hanson presented a paper titled "Triangulated Shalom: Ontological Bridge-building for Climate Change Mitigation in Maasailand" at the Society of Biblical Literature conference in San Antonio, TX, which is the biblical-ecothological framework for her fellowship. Recently, two chapters were published: "A Wandering Aramean and the Wandering Maasai: An Intercultural and Ecotheological Dialogue," in *Context Matters: Old Testament Essays from Africa and Beyond* Honoring Knut Holter, ed. Madipoane Masenya et al., vol. 16 of International Voices in Biblical Studies (SBL Press, 2023), 179–92; and "The Fruitfulness of the Vineyard Metaphor: Isaiah 5 and Beyond," in *Metaphors in the Prophetic Literature of the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. David Davage, Mikael Larsson, and Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, vol. 35 of Journal of Ancient Judaism—Supplements (Brill Schöningh, 2023), 69–95.



Rev. Dr. Nathan C.P. Frambach, Professor of Pastoral Theology, returned from sabbatical in January of 2024 and is making the transition back into the Wartburg community and life at the Wartburg castle. Nate taught a TEEM pastoral care intensive immediately upon his return in January and will be teaching a full slate of classes in the spring semester, including Pastoral Care in Context, Being Mortal: Loss & Grief in Pastoral Perspective, and Teaching the Bible with Youth (with Troy Troftgruben). Nate will offer a presentation at Wartburg's Reformation and Reunion Alumni event in early April entitled, "The Secret Poets Society of Stark County: A Pastoral Narrative."



Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largen led a study trip to Tanzania in January, where the group connected with Wartburg professor on leave, Dr. Beth Elness-Hanson; leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania; and several Wartburg Seminary alumni. Included in the picture on the right are Ms. Janet Justo (whose husband studied at Wartburg), Rev. Dr. Gabriel Kimirei, and Rev. Dr. Elieshi Mungure.



Rev. Dr. Martin Lohrmann, Associate Professor of Lutheran Confessions and Heritage, has started a new role as Associate Book Review Editor for *Lutheran Quarterly*. He also attended a recent meeting of the American Society of Church History, at which he participated in a roundtable discussion of the Oxford Handbook of the Bible and the Reformation and presented a paper entitled "Food Theology in the Early Lutheran Reformation."



Rev. Dr. Craig Nesson, Professor of Contextual Theology and Ethics and The William D. Streng Professor for the Education and Renewal of the Church, and Interim Dean of the Chapel, was a speaker on "Navigating Polarized Times: Our Bonhoeffer Moment," at a pastors' retreat in Chamberlain, SD, February 4-6, 2024. Nesson also published a book, *Paul Leo: Pastor with Jewish Roots in Flight from Nazism*. This is a book witnessing to the legacy of Paul and Eva Leo through Wartburg Theological Seminary.



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, continues his vocation as a teacher of the church. This included serving as a presenter at the ELCA Global Service retreat for returning missionaries in October 2023 at Loyola University Chicago; teaching the WTS TEEM course, Systematics in January 2024; and the adult education class on the topic, "Witnessing to Jesus Christ in the Modern World," in January at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Dubuque, IA. Currently, he is teaching the select course in Systematic Theology.





Rev. Dr. Cheryl M. Peterson, Academic Dean, was delighted to speak on the topic “Who Is the Church?” as the keynote speaker for both the Fall Theological Conference of the Central States Synod in October, and the Winter Theological Event of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin in January. She also served as faculty for the Lutheran World Federation’s Re-

treat of Newly Elected Leaders (bishops and church presidents) in Wittenberg, Germany, last November. Her forthcoming book, *The Holy Spirit in the Christian Life: The Spirit’s Work For, In and Through Us*, will be published by Baker Academic Press on March 19, 2024. This April, she will receive one of the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Awards—the Faithful Servant Award—from her alma mater, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.



Rev. Dr. Troy Troftgruben, Associate Professor of New Testament and The William A. & John E. Wagner Professor in Biblical Theology, contributed to Augsburg Fortress’s Lent 2024 devotional (*Gathered Into One*) and finished a book (*Bearing Witness in Acts and Today*), out by 2025. He was recently invited to the Book of Acts steering committee for the Society of

Biblical Literature. This winter-spring Troy is teaching on Acts, Ministry in a Digital World, and Teaching the Bible to Youth (with Nate Frambach), among other courses. He is leading education sessions this spring for the Northwest Minnesota and Eastern North Dakota synods, the South Dakota Synod staff, and at local churches in Madison and Dubuque. For fun, Troy continues to play music in a local band.



Rev. Dr. Mark Yackel-Juleen, Director of Small Town and Rural Ministries and Director for the Center for Theology and Land, is collaborating with synodical leadership of the South Dakota Synod, ELCA, on pilot educational projects focused on small-town and rural ministry leadership. Most recently, the first offering of the South Dakota Practi-

cum—a three-week January intensive in South Dakota—was completed with excellent results. Also, Mark has been coordinating a research and resource development project under the working title, “Voices and Experiences of Rostered Women in Small Town and Rural Contexts.” This work is being undertaken in conversation with the “Quality of Call Initiative” for women, an endeavor of the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA.



Dr. Man-Hei Yip, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, was approved for a grant on the “New Perspectives on Social Psychology and Religious Cognition for Theology: Training and Developing Science-Engaged Theologians.” This one-year grant is part of her fellowship program facilitated by the University of Birmingham, UK. Her project title is

“Respacing the Sacred: Hope among the Diasporic Communities in Their Exilic Journey.”

Reu Memorial Library News!

Thank you to all the students, staff, and friends who helped move the library from ReuX in Afton Lounge back into Fritschel’s newly renovated Reu Memorial Library! In late November we moved four large shelving units and thousands of books in just two days! Thanks to your help and nice weather, everything went smoothly.

Reu Memorial Library Hours:

Monday - Thursday 7:30 am – 10:00 pm

Friday 7:30 am – 4:30 pm

Saturday 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Sunday 2:00pm – 10:00 pm

Closed Monday - Friday at 10:30 am for Chapel.

Welcome, Denise Vondran!



Please join us in welcoming Denise Vondran to Wartburg as the Library Services Coordinator at the Reu Memorial Library. Denise has over 20 years’ experience working in a library environment with knowledge about materials, research databases, circulation, archiving and museum studies. She has experience working with and supervising

staff and supporting library operations. Denise is a member of St. Rose Catholic Church in Cuba City, WI. When not at work, Denise enjoys spending time with her fur babies Butterscotch, Mango and Sid.

Upcoming Events

April 2-4, 2024
ReFormation and Reunion

May 12, 2024
Commencement



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



Germany trip

Photo contributed by Kristi Swanson

Thank You for Supporting Future Ministry Leaders!

Give today using the enclosed envelope to have an immediate impact on our students in this season.

GIVE ONLINE AT WARTBURGSEMINARY.EDU/GIVING-OPPORTUNITIES