

DL Dispatch

Updates from Luther Seminary's Distributed Learning Master of Divinity Program

A Periodic Newsletter

Issue No. 1 - April 2008

Candidacy

Krista Lind highlights the relationship between Luther Seminary and synod candidacy committees and raises upcoming candidacy considerations.

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Scott Simmons shares how he has experienced community in the DL cohort.

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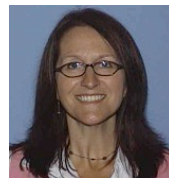


Context

Nancy Going describes how the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin has worked with Jody Becker to create a unique contextual setting in rural Wisconsin.

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January Intensive



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Walter Sundberg and Mary Hinkle Shore provide a preview of this summer's intensive courses: Early/Medieval Church History and Greek.

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Numbers

We crunch the numbers on the first DL M. Div. cohort.

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Program Sketch

In the midst of our first year in the DL M. Div. program, we are grateful for the 17 students in the first cohort and look forward to a new cohort beginning in January 2009. At this juncture, we want to share with you the pillars of this program.

Cohort

Participants in the DL M. Div. program travel through the curriculum within a cohort of 12-20 students. Through classes, shared time on campus, and informal MyLutherNet threads, these students support one another in times of celebration and tragedy, in times of stress and leisure. In a cohort, students establish conversation partners and friendships for their education and future ministry.

Courses

The DL M. Div. program has the same high academic standards and comprehensive curriculum as the residential M. Div. program. Whether online or in the classroom, students and professors gather around Scripture, classic



theological texts, and ministry experiences to deepen knowledge and foster the formation of pastoral identity. In the fall and spring semesters, students study part-time online via video files, audio files, blogs, web postings and emails. Each January and June, students gather on Luther's campus for two-week intensives, experiencing several hours of class each day, chapel, late-night debates, shared meals, and other aspects of campus life.

To provide ample time for the candidacy process, M. Div. study for the 2008 cohort will begin in January 2009. Greek will be offered in Fall 2008 for those without that pre-requisite.

Context

Beyond books and abstract thoughts, local congregations and communities shape our distributed learners. In the first three years of the program, students spend 10 hours a week in a congregation learning where ministry happens, participating in regular conversations with a partner pastor, and experiencing leadership in various areas of congregational ministry.

Internship happens in one of two ways: part-time over years 4 and 5 or full-time in year 4. Together students and candidacy committees decide whether the final semesters will be completed on Luther's campus or in a distributed fashion.

Megan Thorvilson
Student Services

Candidacy



We are so grateful for our partners in candidacy in the first year of this DL M. Div. The variety of conversations and concerns voiced from the candidacy community have helped to form the DL program and we believe that the formation of candidates for pastoral ministry will be stronger because it is done in communion with all of you.

As we move toward thinking about a second cohort for this program, we are committed to being in conversation with synod staff and candidacy leaders about candidates for this program prior to their acceptance to the DL cohort. Their admission to Luther will come first, then a decision regarding their appropriateness for the cohort will come only after they are an entranced candidate for ordained ministry. I will be contacting each synod prior to this decision to talk about particular candidates for the cohort as well as to answer any questions about the DL program.

We're beginning to coach current DL students regarding CPE for next year as well as thinking about plans for the first cohort's endorsement interviews in the fall of 2009. We'll be in touch as those plans develop. As always, feel free to call or email anytime you have questions or concerns.

Krista Lind
Coordinator of Candidacy

Context

Jody Becker is one of the newest students to join the Distributed Learning cohort at Luther. She began in fall 2007 as a Masters student in the distributed Children Youth and Family Ministry program. But, as she noted, "The tug that I have long felt toward pastoral ministry only seemed to get stronger." So Jody interviewed to join the DL M. Div. cohort just before they gathered for their first intensive in January.

Jody has been serving as a part-time youth minister in her home congregation in Ladysmith, Wisconsin for the past several years. During the January intensive, Jody was able to talk with many other students and better understand the contextual components that would be most beneficial as she progressed through seminary. She expected to return home from Luther ready to shape her position to match her new sense of call, but there was an unexpected offer from her synod. A small, rural, two-point parish just 20 minutes from her house was in need of leadership, but unable to be served through traditional routes.

Jody's synod, the Northwest Synod of WI, has spent many hours in conversation with Luther, the congregations and Jody. Together they have worked out an arrangement that meets the needs of all involved. Jody will serve the congregations on a part-time basis both for her contextual work and for her internship. Initially, her responsibilities will include pastoral care and preaching. Her synod's bishop feels that it would be appropriate for her to receive special dispensation for sacramental ministry after a year of service in this context. Jody will be accompanied in her contextual learning process by both a partner pastor of her choosing and a supervising pastor in a neighboring congregation.



Jody says, "I have been struggling with what it means for me to be called to the WHOLE church. And yet, I love this little part of central Wisconsin. I feel committed to this place and these people. I am a missionary in my own backyard! I am very thankful that God has affirmed my call to this place by giving me this ministry for my years of seminary."

At Luther, we are excited at the possibility to help meet the pastoral needs of the Church, while offering our students a rich contextual experience. Jody responds, "I could not pay Luther enough tuition to equal what I will learn in a contextual opportunity like this!" We are delighted that a gift like Jody is able to be

such a significant part of pastoral ministry all through her seminary education.

Nancy Going
Contextual Leadership

Community

Over a year ago, God opened me to the possibility of joining Luther Seminary's Distributed Learning M. Div. program. For me, it was a perfect fit. For some outside the program, though, the concern was that it wouldn't provide the sense and experience of community so essential for pastoral formation.



This past January, our cohort gathered on campus for the two-week intensive. We entered the term as 17 people from all walks of life and all parts of the country. But without a doubt, we left Luther as a close-knit community.

The groundwork had been laid over the fall semester, as we interacted through online classes, conference calls, and the cohort's online forums on MyLuthernet. By the time we arrived on campus, we were all open to the Spirit's work. We established friendships, shared pieces of our lives away from seminary, and even established our own peculiar lingo (the verandah, cogitinis, flannelisms, lab rats, the burning bush, happy happy fun tub, and octopus tag come immediately to mind).

Perhaps most poignantly, our emerging sense of community was challenged one week into J-Term when a member's father died after a long illness and again a few weeks later when another member's father died unexpectedly. In both instances, the prayer, care and support from other members of the cohort were an absolute blessing to all involved. It was the true essence of community – a Spirit-led outpouring of love for those who needed it most.

We are a community, and each of us thank God every day for that reality.

Scott Simmons
DL M. Div. Junior



Telling the Story January 2008

It was my sincere privilege to welcome the first Luther Seminary Distributed Learning cohort to campus for J-Term and the cohort's first on-site intensive experience. The class was the first of three required courses in biblical preaching, *Telling the Story*, where we introduce students to the public reading of Scripture, effective delivery, thinking and interpreting theologically, and writing for oral communication for the sake of effective evangelical public leadership in the church. They were a remarkable group of students on a number of levels: their varied and extensive experiences in parish life, their commitment to learning, and their profound engagement with the subject matter. They brought to discussions, writing, and reflection a deep sense of this new vocational possibility for their lives, an ability for deliberative thinking that reflected their collective life stories, and an awareness of the sheer giftedness of God's calling. As a result, they created a community for themselves and in the classroom that was centered around the transformative power of the Word of God.

Karoline M. Lewis
Assistant Professor of Biblical Preaching

DL M. Div. Team

Mary Hinkle Shore — Director
Krista Lind — Candidacy
Nancy Going — Contextual Leadership
Megan Thorvilson — Student Services



Early Church History Summer 2008

*An Interview with Walter Sundberg,
Professor of Church History*

1300 years of material in two weeks. What changes will you make to the course in order to accommodate the schedule?

As much as possible, I want them to have the full course. It won't be streamlined, but we'll have to accommodate the concentrated time. Before the class begins, I'll send the readings and PowerPoint slides to the students, and after the intensive, they will complete a take-home final.

How is the class structured?

Chronologically. We begin with the apostolic fathers and end with the late medieval debates over grace and merit. We cover the Trinity, Christology, Sin and Grace, Sacramentology - the presence of Christ in the sacrament and the emergence of infant baptism and its theological application, and finally, Two Kingdoms - the relationship between church and state. These are important topics because the early church is the grammar of theology.

What do you think is gained and lost by an intensive format?

Intensives provide a concentrated experience. They allow those in the class to get to know each other better and more informally, and students get to know each other more quickly.



Greek Summer 2008

*Maximizing Flexibility, Fostering
Accountability*

"Brick 'n' click" is a way of talking about courses that combine on campus and online components. For M. Div. DL cohort members and other M. Div. students who have not had Greek, this summer brings a new option for learning to read the New Testament in its original language.

The brick 'n' click Greek course combines pre-campus study in May with on-campus intensive work on grammar during the first two weeks of June. Following the June intensive, students spend six weeks in online groups reading selected New Testament texts.

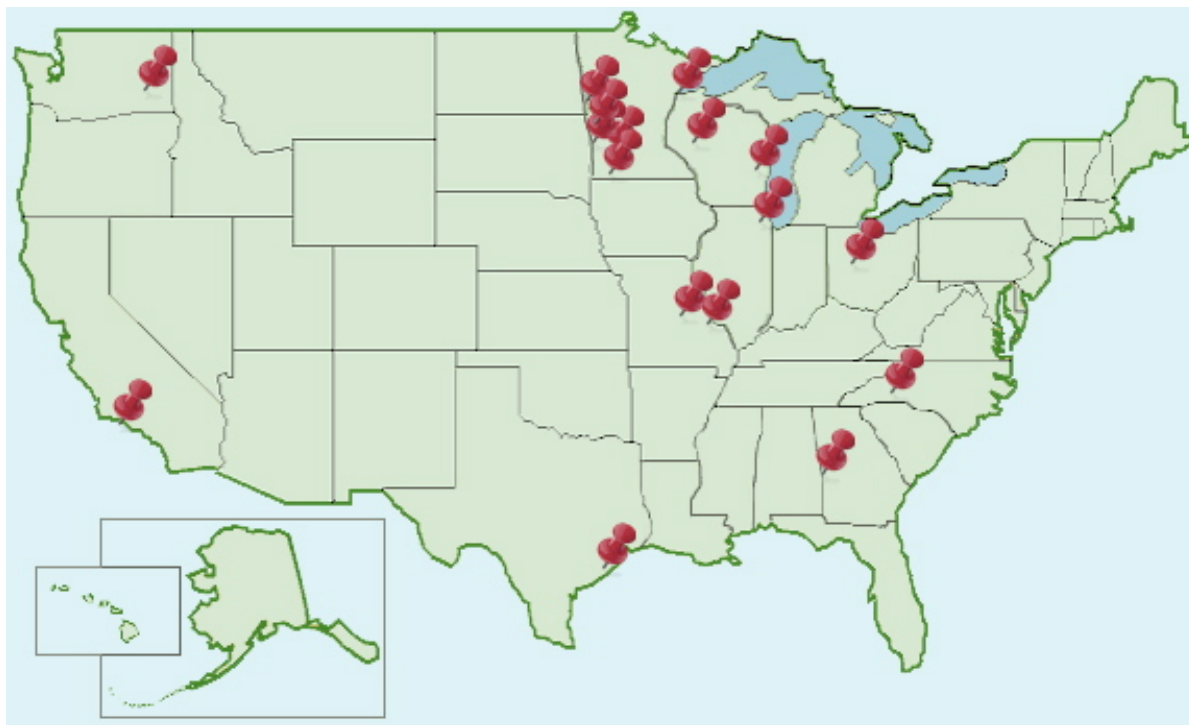
The class is designed to maximize flexibility and accountability. Students complete many of the course requirements in their own location, yet because they work together in groups both on campus and online, they are able to support each other—and hold each other accountable—both in the brick-and-mortar buildings of the campus intensive and in the mouse-click environment of online learning.

Mary Hinkle Shore
Associate Dean for First Theological
Degree Programs and Associate Professor
of New Testament

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Numbers

A Look at the First Cohort



17

Number of students in the first DL cohort

10

Number of US states represented

11

Number of ELCA synods represented

2

Number of ecumenical students

9/8

Ratio of females/males

\$1,100

Cost for one full Luther Seminary course for the 2008-2009 academic year

Luther Seminary

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The other summer intensive course for the DL students is Greek, which is a difficult pairing with Early/Medieval Church History. I plan to accommodate their Greek studies as much as possible. If you are training for the ministry, you are training for a profession. A profession professes. What do we as ministers have to profess? The Biblical Greek, so that pastors can speak with knowledge about the Scriptures.

What books are on the syllabus?

A History of the Christian Church by Williston Walker and primary texts of the early Christian fathers: First Clement, Ignatius of Antioch, The Didache, Irenaeus, Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas.

How can students incorporate the content of Early/Medieval Church History in their congregational contexts?

Throughout the course, we relate historical content to present-day Christian witness and practice. We consider the material in light of contemporary problems. For example, we discuss apostolic succession and what that means in our current church structure, and we think about the implications of Romulus and Remus's debate over communion for today's practice.

Admissions Info

Applications must be received by Luther by July 1. To be considered for the DL M. Div. program, applicants must have the following completed.

- Admission to Luther Seminary
- Positive Entrance Decision for Candidacy
- Interview for Acceptance to the DL Cohort

The DL M. Div. team will conduct two rounds of admissions decisions - the first in May and the second in October.

For Further Information

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http://www.luthersem.edu/admissions/degrees/first/mdiv_dl.asp?m=-2678