

DL Dispatch

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

A Periodic Newsletter

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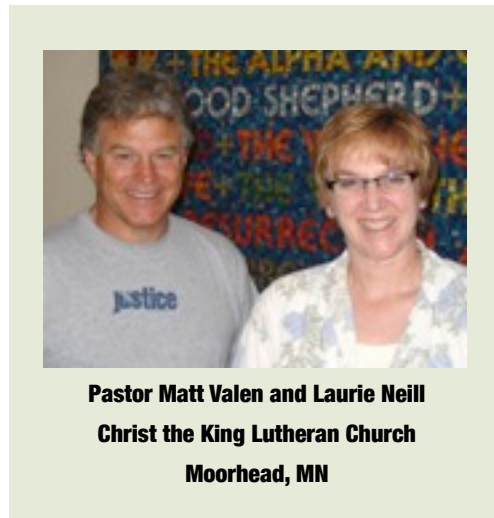


Praise for Partner Pastors

Contextual learning lies at the heart of the Distributed Learning Master of Divinity program. Each student in the program spends 10 hours a week in a local congregation and works closely with a pastor in that area.

While the relationship that is most familiar to many is that of intern and supervising pastor, DL students spend three years in a significant ministry setting before they begin their internship. At Luther, we see contextual pastors as “partners” rather than supervisors and believe they play a unique and critical role in student development.

Redefining that relationship has been one of the many exciting aspects in the development of the DL M.Div. program. We see the relationship between partner pastors and DL students as a two-way conversation in which both people bring



Pastor Matt Valen and Laurie Neill
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Moorhead, MN

their gifts and backgrounds for the mutual benefit of one another and the church. Some of our DL students have chosen the pastors they work with to serve as their partners; some have chosen other local pastors with whom they can build this kind of significant relationship over time.

The partner pastors for our first cohort have taken their roles very seriously. For example, Pastor Bruce Modahl, who

works with James Brooks, says that James' coursework has forced him to hit the books again. “I really enjoy chewing on the theology or scripture that James is studying.”

Pastor Matt Valen uses the sometimes “messy” events of congregational life to let student Laurie Neill in on how he thinks about pastoral care.

Pastor John Waak is developing a multi-year plan that will allow student Chip Reynolds to explore both Chip's unfolding sense of vocation and a variety of pastoral roles as the program progresses.

We at Luther Seminary are very grateful for the time and more importantly the commitment of our DL partner pastors. We look forward to continuing this partnership with them and future partner pastors to raise up leaders for Christ's church.†

--Nancy Going



What Makes a DL Student

Synods, congregations and church leaders help the seminary by identifying and encouraging strong candidates for the DL M.Div. program. — Megan Thorvilson

My husband and I bought our first car this summer. Months of research accompanied this significant decision. Hybrid or partial zero emissions? New or used? Manual or automatic? Sassy or sensible? Once we narrowed our options to three vehicles, we realized we would be happy with any of the cars on the list.

When we consider prospective students for the DL M.Div. program, we consider factors more complex than paint color, interior or wheels. We look for candidates who are not currently able to attend seminary residentially and especially those who will thrive in this mode of learning. Just as there was no one right car for us, no single profile exists for the perfect distributed learning student. That said, there are certain qualities that we expect in students interested in the program.

Self-directed Learning

Students must have a healthy amount of self-initiative in addition to the accountability provided by the cohort.

We want students who take primary responsibility for their learning, students who won't stop until they find the answers to their questions, students who supplement their learning with their own curiosity.

Strong Contextual Setting

In addition to the Luther Seminary community, distributed students immerse themselves in local congregations. The teaching parish serves as a substantial component of the DL program. Therefore, we look for candidates, who in consultation with the synod, can be placed in positive learning environments, with partner pastors who are willing to engage them throughout their education.

Investment in Their Local Communities

Many people who sense a call to ministry cannot explore that call as a move to seminary is currently unfeasible for their lives. We wonder with students, who in their current context might support them with time, energy and theological imagination in

their learning? What support systems are in place in their lives that will allow for the energy and space to make this learning a priority? In other words, we are particularly interested in students whose life circumstances or present call make staying where they are both a life-giving and contextually rich location for theological learning.

If you know of a student who fits this profile, please contact me at mthorvilson001@luthersem.edu or Krista Lind at klind@luthersem.edu. We'd be happy to take them for a test drive.†

Admissions

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Learning Design and Technology

For more than ten years, Luther Seminary has been experimenting with web technologies for online courses. Now, Distributed Learning is growing fast, and there is a growing opportunity to apply what we are learning about technology in the online classroom to enhance what happens in our residential courses and the many other teaching and learning modes of Luther Seminary. In order to help us make the best possible use of technology for student learning, we have formed a new department: Learning Design & Technology. This department serves the various learning modalities of Luther Seminary in three major ways: partnering with faculty in the learning design process, developing and implementing learning technologies, and training and supporting faculty and students in the use of the learning technologies. The Learning Design and Technology team consists of...



Ryan Torma

Director of Learning Design & Technology

Ryan is a graduate of Luther, completing an MA studying the intersections of media & Christian education. He has spent more than 10 years in

congregational ministry, most recently serving at Spirit Garage a church in urban Minneapolis. Ryan has also worked with Faith Inkubators, designing multi-media faith formation curriculum, and also operates his own (very small) photography business which basically provides an excuse to have nice cameras.

Alice Loddigs

Teaching & Learning Support Specialist
Alice has been a part of the Luther Seminary staff for more than 10 years and now continues her work as the lead developer and support person for courses in MyLutherNet, our learning management system. Her considerable experience in supporting online learning and her gracious ability in helping people develop their technology skills are great assets to the team. Alice is completing the certificate program for Distance Teaching & Learning at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She has also been a great advocate for Luther as she has worked to develop online teaching and learning practices with the Association of Theological Schools.

Kristin Payne

Teaching & Learning Technologist
Kristin is the lead developer for the public course web sites and will be developing many web-based teaching and learning opportunities. She has recently returned to the Luther Seminary staff after taking a brief "sabbatical" doing web design for the Twin Cities Met. Council, and by the end of December, she will complete her MS in Technical Communication. We are delighted to have her expertise in communication, design, and editing, skills she honed through years in the publishing industry.†

A New Student's Perspective

When I try to rush things, God inevitably slows me down and reminds me to "wait patiently on the Lord" (Psalm 41:1).

For over thirty years, I have been waiting patiently (most of the time!) for a program like the DL M.Div. God's call came to me early, but I was unable to accept it at the time. While I waited, I lived in eight different cities in five different states and accepted God's call to another ministry--parenthood. These circumstances made the idea of answering God's call to ordained ministry seem challenging, even impossible at times. I prayed for a way to fulfill my obligations as a working mother, avoid uprooting my son, and still answer God's call. The DL M.Div. comes as an answer to this prayer.

I look forward to beginning my studies this fall, relieved that I can continue my work and still be home every day to help my son meet the challenges of being a teenager in a complicated world. It is exciting to think about moving through the program with a cohort of faithful people who are striving to answer God's call in their own unique circumstances with passion, creativity, and commitment. God's timing was perfect, as I learned about the program in the midst of my candidacy process. Now I can truly "run with perseverance the race that is set before me" (Hebrews 12:1c) with joy and confidence in a loving God with perfect timing!†

--Susan Bantz, Muscatine, IA



Technology

As demand increases for online courses, we are launching a new website design for our online courses giving most of the web pages a similar look and feel and making it easier for students to find necessary course information.

At Luther Seminary, we are moving to a system in which most online courses will have several websites that serve the course, including private MyLutherNet sites and a public course website.

MyLutherNet, our learning management system, provides course interaction through discussion boards and chat features. Only accessible to students in the course, the MyLutherNet course pages allow a safe space for learning and student interaction and preserve the freedom of inquiry.

The public course website will house most of the content for a given course, much of the syllabus, weekly assignments, and audio and video files that will be used in the class. This means that for many of Luther's online courses, anyone can access course information - a

practice that has been in place for nearly 10 years with some of our online courses. We hope access to what students are learning will be a great blessing to people in the DL students' context sites and candidacy committees, who work to support student learning. Finally, these public websites serve a public mission, sharing the dynamic work of Luther Seminary with the world.

To view our public course websites, please visit www.luthersem.edu/course/.

Online courses may also make use of other websites, such as a course blog or wiki. Using multiple websites for any given course we are able to have both

publicly available course content and safe learning spaces. You may notice some differences in the amount of content that is available for courses. The amount of content that is made publicly available is currently provided at the faculty member's discretion and in some cases, sensitive or copy-written course materials will not be publicly available.

We are excited to be launching the new website designs for our online courses, and we hope that you find them useful and informative. Please share with me your experience in using our new designs. I would love to hear from you.†

Ryan Torma
Director of Learning Design & Technology
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Romans with Dr. Arland Hultgren

Dr. Hultgren, a New Testament Professor at Luther Seminary, is teaching Romans online this fall.



How long have you taught online?

I have had preceptorials online for several years, but never a full course en toto. This will be a new experience for me, and I look forward to it.

What do you find most rewarding about online education?

Its major benefit is to make theological education accessible to persons at a

distance. But it also provides opportunities for interaction among participants at a level that is not possible in the traditional classroom. For many, it also puts theological education more directly and intentionally into parish or other contexts for ministry.

What do you find most challenging?

I tend to be a "take charge" person when teaching in a classroom. In this new environment I'll have to do much more listening. I look forward to it. In some ways the "take charge" stance of a teacher can also be a defense mechanism. The teacher can take up time dealing with his or her own concerns and dealing with questions related to them. But to listen in this new environment makes the teacher more vulnerable, dealing with questions that are not so predictable as when an agenda is set by the teacher.

What adaptations have you made to the course to transfer it from a traditional classroom setting to an online format?

The transfer has demanded a lot of planning and new thinking on my part. The goals of the course will be the same as those in a traditional classroom. But we'll achieve them by different routes. There will be more reading and certainly more conversation.

Anything else you would like to add?

I enrolled this summer in a course at Luther to learn more about online teaching and learning. I learned a lot! Luther Seminary has a fine team of persons to provide support in these efforts. I feel that we can provide excellent opportunities for teaching and learning like never before. With a bit of good will all the way around, we can do excellent work.†