

# THE CONCORD

“...And Also with News.”

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Luther Seminary

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## You are Welcome Here: An Overdue Statement

JOSHUA MOSS  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

Southern folks are keenly aware of the many ways our neighbors and coworkers fall short of God's grace. If you don't believe me, just ask Betty Bowers, America's Best Christian. Throughout the Old Testament, sin comes in a wide variety of forms, yet its essence is unchanging—all sin is an act against God: “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned” (Ps. 51:4). Despite knowing that and witnessing the variety of actions against God happening around us daily, many Christians fixate on homosexuality. I am deeply saddened that an irrepressible act of love is what many hate most.

Right at the outset I feel obligated to state that I do not believe being gay is a greater sin than smiling on the Sabbath. I read the Bible academically, and my understanding of theology is informed by logic and rationale, driven by facts and data, and applied in a life-affirming way. The idea that a person chooses their sexuality as one chooses a swimsuit is antiquated and moot in the light of modern science and reality; no one consciously chooses to live in the ugly darkness of fear and separation. To expect a person who identifies as LGB or T to live in celibacy is as absurd as expecting someone to change their skin color simply because it displeases you.

Let me be clear: when I talk about homosexu-

ality, I mean the natural attraction and practice of loving and respectful relationships between adults. It is within the safe boundaries provided by a loving relationship that people are free to realize their faults, practice forgiveness, and learn how to become whole. These same concepts can be applied to all people who live in community with one another as well. I am not advocating promiscuity, rape, or any other unhealthy practices that can and do occur as frequently in heterosexual populations.

When I began to explore and follow my own call to ordained ministry, it was important to find a loving, accepting community where I would not be expected to hide my sexuality. I had been living a semi-closeted life and the weight of that burden had become so wearisome that I could no longer bear it. Many conversations with faculty, staff, and students on both sides of the equality argument led me to believe that Luther would be a safe place to learn and grow. Luther is not a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) institution, four other ELCA seminaries are and at least two others are currently discerning a call to become RIC, but at the time that was of much less importance than many other factors. Participation in a community that points toward God and to God's astonishing love for each person no matter who we are or how well we live up to our calling

as followers of Christ Jesus was and still is paramount. We do that at Luther. We do it well. It was happening before I arrived and it will continue to happen long after I depart. It is who we are, it is our culture, it is our call, and it drives us in so many ways.

Now that I have affirmed that Luther is a loving and welcoming community, let me explain why it is important for us to name and claim that, for us to publicly declare it and make it known. For many individuals, especially those from less accepting areas or denominations, they have come to know of Christ from a place of despair. That is a real and tangible miracle. Despite the voices of hatred and prejudice spewing from the loudest and most visible Christians, the sound that remains and calls to us is the voice of God repeating the words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism—you are my beloved, in you I am well pleased. Those words are true of Jesus and as a result of our baptism, they are true of us. We are God's beloved and because we are reconciled in Christ, there is nothing we can do that will diminish that truth. Yet regardless of my own love for and understanding of our community, many who are seeking a place like ours may not know it exists here.

*Continued on Page 3*

## RIC: A Global Perspective

IRENE AMON  
M.A. SENIOR

As an African who grew up in Ghana, which is enormously different from the US context, I never had to think of who should be welcomed in the church and why. We didn't have to engage in that, everyone was and still is welcome to the church. This is because my context didn't have to worry about issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and genderqueer members coming to the church. I must confess, it was one of the cultural shocks I had when I first arrived in the United States to hear people talked openly about issues like that which will be considered in my context as “taboo.”

Personally there were things I didn't know, have to do, or even talk about as a Pastor's Kid, since there were rules guiding whatever I did. Additionally, one of the former presidents of my country, John Evans Fiifi Atta-Mills, remarked openly at a festival that the government would not decriminalize homosexuality and LGBTQ persons should “stop the practice.” The festival theme was, “Promoting Our Cultural Heritage to Eradicate Social Vices.” He characterized homosexuality as “dehumanizing” and “inimical to the fundamental human rights of people.” This is not to say that there aren't some individuals who practice this in my country, they are very few in number and they are secretive. This is the context from which I come.

Nevertheless, after coming to Luther and having had the opportunity to put faces to the issue was a cultural clash and conflict for me. Especially, when I had to sit in chapel here at Luther and listen to a sermon from an LGBTQ pastor who even went ahead in the sermon to introduce her spouse who was also a woman and she was just next to me on the pew in the Chapel of the Incarnation. There and then, something happened to me. I realized the practice of LGBTQ was not done by caricatures or some heathen, non-church, etc. as I might have considered. But people who are creatures of God, beloved, valued and are partners with God in mission (*Missio Dei*).

Until now I have more struggles than answers because now I have some nice people I call friends who are LGBTQ. I keep asking myself, how do I remain grounded in my core values and beliefs yet be genuinely loving and compassionate towards people I like in my community? That includes here at Luther, out there like the LSS homeless youth shelter where I am doing my contextual learning, and my church, Transfiguration Lutheran. One of the Lutheran communities has declared publicly to welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and has been accepted onto the Reconciling in Christ roster. And I witnessed the certification of that. So the deeper question for me is not Luther going ahead to embrace this or not. But for me, it's more of

how can Luther have these conversations while respecting the cultural clashes and the conflicting concerns it might raise for numerous people, and how do we create greater understanding and insights, especially for the international students, coming from contexts like mine?

A typical example is the detachment of the Makena Yesu church in Ethiopia from Luther due to the public statement of the ELCA on issues like this. For instance, the Human Rights Campaign describes the ELCA as saying “*Gay and lesbian people, as individuals created by God, are welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*”

The Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program for congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other Lutheran organizations, to me, is not a wrong move due to the context here. But like I said, we must tread with caution and in appreciation of the cultural differences we present here at Luther. And like I have heard most groups start the process of consideration by engaging in a study program or series of educational meetings. Hearing the experiences of LGBTQ people and their families can be our starting point to gradually gather qualitative data. This will then inform our decision as a community, where we can intensely be passionate, deeply loving, and boldly connecting with each other in a more meaningful and respectful way.

# What Does it Mean to be RIC?

JENN HERRON,  
M.A. SENIOR

Gay clergy. Marriage equality. LGBTQ rights. What thoughts are going through your head right now? Pay attention to your feelings.... don't judge them, simply accept them for what they are. Chances are good that you have mixed feelings about the terms whether you support, oppose, or are not quite sure what to think. You are not wrong and you are not alone. The fact is that there are many layers toward reconciling anything having to do with human life. As long as there are humans, there will be people across the spectrum of acceptance about what it means to be human. I would argue that this constant is what makes the world go round. It certainly has kept the conversation of Jesus Christ alive for thousands of years, and more recently the conversation of Reconciling in Christ (RIC). What exactly is RIC? What does it mean and why is it important?

RIC stands for Reconciling in Christ, a formal program through an organization called ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation, which has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and community. The RIC program is for congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other Lutheran organizations that publicly welcome LGBTQ people. ReconcilingWorks, originally called Lutherans Concerned for Gay People, has been building on this effort since its inception in 1974, decades before the ELCA made any statements regarding human sexuality, and has been known to be the organization that pushed these statements into fruition. ReconcilingWorks.com has a plethora of resources for all things having to do with LGBTQ and Lutherans, feel free check it out. But for this article....

What does it mean to be RIC? Theologically speaking, RIC means to be reconciling in Christ, which implies an intention to be loving and accepting of all people because Christ loves and accepts all of us. Formally speaking, RIC is an actual process that an institution will walk through in an effort to authentically communicate and extend welcome to LGBTQ people. Practically speaking, RIC declares a journey of welcome which is why the word reconcile is an active verb because it is not a one and done deal. The RIC program has been in existence since 1983 and currently has

over 600 settings on its roster. There are different ways that faith communities can begin the RIC process but most of them have engaged in study programs or educational meetings. Hearing the experiences and stories of LGBTQ people and their families can offer personal insights which can lead to a greater understanding of why this process is important.

Why IS the RIC process important? Or is even important at all? Is it really necessary to put forth effort into a formal process of welcome when welcome is obvious because we are a Christian community? Most of our churches' welcome statements specifically state, "All are welcome", isn't that enough? Well no, not according to our LGBTQ neighbors or other non-majority groups in our Lutheran institutions today. The move from communicating a general welcome statement to stating an "Affirmation of Welcome" can be the difference between apathy and inclusion. Silence speaks volumes. Sometimes we need to intentionally speak to the people who are not used to hearing the words. Confession: I do not fancy myself a biblical scholar; but I am fairly certain that the Samaritan woman at the well, the blind beggar, and many others were transformed because of the intentionality of Jesus Christ. Now hear me out, I am not reviving "WWJD" because we cannot do what Jesus did. We do not have the same motivations behind our intentions, we are not God incarnate. What we can do is to figure out how to be reconciling in Christ, whatever that means for each one of us, so that we too can offer encounters of authentic welcome and inclusion.

Luther Seminary is exploring the option of becoming a RIC institution, hence the focus of this month's Concord issue. The journey began last semester with thoughtful conversations, formal meetings, a workshop training called Building an Inclusive Church, and it continues to expand in an effort to include everyone via comfortable means. Over the coming months, we will be inviting students, staff and faculty to share stories, insights, and feedback through various formats, please watch for these announcements. EVERYONE is invited into the conversations, and when you find yourself engaging in these conversations, remember: don't judge them, simply accept them for what they are. It's all part of the journey.

## RIC CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS

4/4--INTRODUCTION TO RIC--NW  
Hall 100--6:30-8:00PM

4/5--INTRODUCTION TO RIC--OCC  
Lecture Hall--11:30-1:00PM

4/14--Risks and Benefits--OCC Lec-  
ture Hall--11:30-1:00PM

4/21--Creating a Statement--OCC  
Lecture Hall--11:30-1:00PM

## Love and Lent: A Devotion

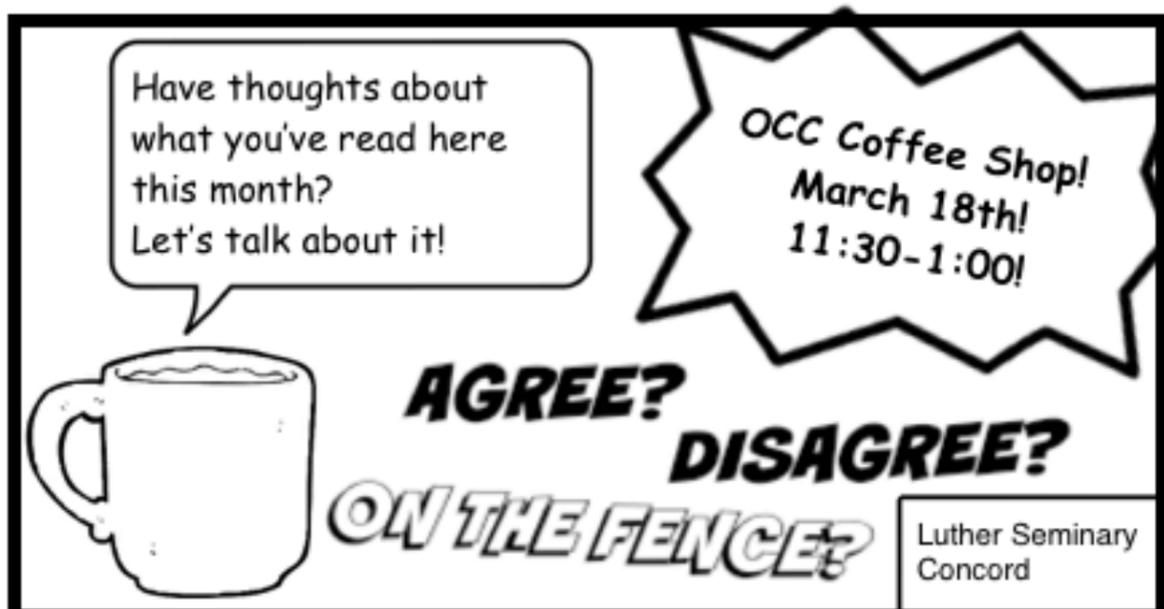
CAROLYN STAATS,  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

My most central faith conviction is that God is love. Super simple, yes, but also profound in its meaning and implications. This idea is seen all over Scripture, included in the most widely-quoted verses and even sometimes abused to implicate superiority. But thinking about what God, a spiritual Creator, can do because She is love, is radical. Our powerful God loved us, so He joined us as a human in our unique experience. God loved us, and led Her people out of slavery and into a steadfast promise. God loved us, and created us uniquely and beautifully in His image. God loved us, and commanded that we do just that for each other. How then can we do anything but love in our faith lives?

During Lent, we often call ourselves to name the parts of our own human experience that limit us from being the fullest, most self-loved human we possibly can be. Sometimes these limits need removal from our life (caffeine, chocolate, etc.) or they need to be added (daily time for prayer, meditation, etc.). Figuring out how to love ourselves is the most difficult, visceral and real thing we can do for ourselves and those we also love and serve pastorally. Love can be messy and difficult, but it is always kind and full of grace. The solemnity of Lent allows us to reflect seriously on that which is messy and prevents us from radical self-love. But the joy of Easter and the loving power of Christ's triumph over death allow us to find joy in our brokenness as well. What parts of our beautiful humanness can we refuse to love when we have been loved from the very moment we existed?

This Lenten season I strive to add more of that which reconciles love in the world around me. My thoughts and love may seem insignificant at times, but as with any concern in our world, the individual actions add up. I often consider Bishop Desmond Tutu's saying: "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." I find joy and feel privileged to be able to speak out for love on a much larger and more important stage: LGBTQ+ advocacy and allyship. Working with Reconciling Works and the RIC process allows me to advocate for and openly support love in the world. This work is for love between humans and self-love of who God so beautifully created people to be. So what better way for me to spread the word of God as a future pastor than to center it in love?

*Note: An abridged version of Carolyn's devotion appears on Reconciling Works' website.*



# On the Road to Emmaus

TIM SCHROEDER  
M.Div. MIDDLEBURY

As a co-coordinator of Emmaus (Luther's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered + Allies) student group, I write to share my story. I am a second year MDiv student; seeking ordination in the ELCA. Yes, I am a gay seminarian. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I have to come out every day. It might be in casual ways when someone asks about my relationship status, or it might come up in class as we discuss our hermeneutical lens of how I read scripture. Or maybe it is when I am witnessing injustices in the community, correcting adults as they choose demeaning language to improperly articulate their feelings or opinions, or people are being abused or verbally harassed because of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual identities. I come out every day.

I am not going to share my coming out story here (it's really not that interesting), however I do want to talk about my perspective of what it would mean for Luther Seminary to be a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Seminary. RIC is a program for congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, and other Lutheran organizations that want to formally affirm that they are welcoming to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered people. Reconciling Works is the organization that accompanies these organizations in becoming an RIC institution. As a student leader of Luther Seminary, I want to be bold in claiming the type of community that I know Luther Seminary to be. Luther is a place of full inclusion and welcome of all people into our community. I have never felt bias in the classroom, nor have I had difficult conversations with classmates, faculty or staff while I have been on campus.

So you may ask "Why do we have to be RIC if you have felt welcomed into the community?" - It is because I have only gotten to know this welcome on campus by experiencing it. As I was discerning my call as an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament, I was also discerning my path in which I would receive my education. As I searched through schools and visited campuses, I did not explicitly find in Luther's resources

an open welcome to the LGBTQ community, or any formal welcome statement for that matter. In Luther's long history dating back to the pre-1900s, our community has not been known to be the most open and progressive seminary in the country. In fact, I have heard many different narratives that explicitly state the opposite- that Luther is the most conservative. But through conversations with some colleagues and mentors during my discernment and making multiple trips to campus, I discovered that Luther is in fact a safe place for me to be.

Our culture on Luther's campus has changed over the years of its existence. We may have been the more conservative campus, with perhaps more conservative faculty, however we have turned a page in our history books in which our church does recognize the leadership and call to vocation of the LGBTQ community. I want Luther to be a place that openly welcomes all people to campus, prideful of the future leaders of the church that we are educating and training. My goal is to make this welcome public through the RIC program. I do not want to ostracize anyone or their beliefs. I don't want this process to appear as a barrier in which students who don't have these similar beliefs wouldn't be welcome to campus or in the classroom. We are a learning community that values differences; we honor higher education and respect that it is necessary to be in healthy and respectful conversations with one another.

I invite everyone in our community to participate in our panel discussions and conversations that we will be hosting throughout the month of April. You will have opportunities to hear stories from our LGBTQ students, alumni, faculty, staff and allies. We welcome your questions in this time of exploration and discernment in where we are claiming our identity as Luther's Community. In our panel discussions and presentations we will be using digital resources to make these conversations available to our Distance Learning Community/commuting students. Please join us on the road to Emmaus, we seek to walk and talk together on a journey toward a greater understanding of God and of ourselves.

# Overdue Statement, cont.

Through my participation in various resource groups and as a result of several conversations during the Scholarship Weekend event, I have become aware that Luther is not widely known as the community I described above because it hasn't always been that way. During the last decade, there has been in a shift in our community just as there has been a shift in our culture. People at all places in their spirituality are recognizing the many and varied gifts that LGBT people bring to ministry. I invite you to consider how the church has developed since we officially recognized the many and varied gifts of women in ordained ministry. It is unfortunate and embarrassing that the church came to that realization much later than culture.

Imagine what would happen if the church drove culture instead of culture driving the church? Is it difficult to agree with the statement that the church stands as the living embodiment of the forgiven? And where there is forgiveness, ought not the next logical move be reconciliation? Consider the profound nature of reconciliation and how it came to be that we are aware of it. It is only because God has come near to us in Christ that we are able to trust our own reconciliation with God. So it stands to reason that only once the Christian community begins to believe in the power of reconciliation and also practice it, can we faithfully live out the gospel.

God comes near us through Christ. Forgiveness and reconciliation not only matter, but they are deeply connected. Recite the words of the Abba Prayer: forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. Just as God has forgiven us, and we have become reconciled through the power of Christ Jesus, is it not our duty to practice reconciliation with the whole of creation? I believe it is. It is through the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation that we embody the intentional universality of God's loving nature, and this is how the church leads the world in understanding that God's kingdom has come near us and will do so again.

By claiming and naming our belief in what it means to be Reconciling in Christ, we will effectively send the message to all people, not just LGBT people, that we are a safe place, a community that is dedicated to growing together in our call to Christian leadership. By affirming our status as a RIC community we can practice our participation in forgiveness and reconciliation and live into God's beloved community. It is who we have been, who we are, and who we will continue to be long after we depart from this place. It's time that we name that identity and we claim it as true.

We would love for you to join the conversation by writing for The Concord! We would like to pay you to write about your experiences here at Luther Seminary. This is your best opportunity to have your voice heard on campus and to prepare for public ministry.

## Sexual Violence Awareness Week

Mon/April 4th Potential "fish bowl" course-Singleness, Marriage, and Family in Context

12:30 - 3:20 p.m. / BH 116

Safeguarding God's Children workshop

6:00-8:00 p.m. / NW 232

Tues/April 5th Presentation on Advocacy Skills

11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m./OCC Auxiliary Dining Room

Wed/April 6th Feminist/Womanist Theology Reading Group

11:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m. / OCC Auxiliary Dining Room

Thurs/April 7th ELCA Social Message on Gender Based Violence,

8:00-9:00 a.m. / NW 251

Dr. Dahl preaching in Chapel, 11 a.m.

Miss Representation

4:00-6:00 p.m. / NW 100

Fri/April 8th Chapel (service of healing), 11 a.m.

# RIC: Perspective from the Global South

KRIS COFFMAN  
M.DIV. INTERN

I don't write this piece under any pretension of speaking for the international student community here at Luther Seminary. Rather, I write this as a student of church history and as an ELCA member whose mother and paternal grandmother were born and raised in the Global South.

As a Luther Seminary student, one of my joys has been the opportunity to engage with and learn from colleagues who hail from all over the world. As a student worker for the Admissions Office, I took great pride in pointing out the flags in Northwestern and highlighting the different churches that chose to send their students to study at Luther Seminary. I believe that Luther Seminary is not simply a seminary for a white, western church. Because I hold that true, I cannot support an effort to have Luther adopt the Reconciling in Christ label. I cannot support that effort because it fails to recognize two things: 1) It fails to recognize the patronizing manner in which western churches continue to deal with the churches of the global south. 2) It fails to recognize Luther and the ELCA's place in global Christianity.

None of our decisions are made in a vacuum; whether we like it or not, our actions will always be seen in the context of a larger discourse. In the case of whether or not Luther Seminary should adopt the Reconciling in Christ label, the larger discourse is the way in which the West has continuously asserted itself as superior to the Global South. To put it lightly, tinges of intellectual superiority continue to color western responses to conservatism in the Global South. Most infamously, Episcopalian Bishop John Shelby Spong criticized African bishops in the Church of England Newspaper, saying "They moved out of animism into a very superstitious kind of Christianity...If they feel patronized, that's too bad. I won't cease being a twentieth century person for fear of offending someone in the third world." And while we may not couch our responses in such stark terms, we continue to patronize students from the global south when we assume that they don't agree with us because "they don't understand" or "they're legalistic" or "they don't know higher biblical criticism." As a seminary, we need to break the cycle of paternalism that assumes that we know better and that the people in Africa and Asia will understand once we teach them the truth that we've discovered. We need to listen when the churches in Africa ask the question, "Do we not see here, in the ready assertion of superior wisdom, a new imperialism?"

I have trouble with labelling Luther a "Reconciling in Christ" seminary because it will {potentially} cut off conversation with students from churches that don't agree with the ELCA. The churches that don't agree with us constitute a huge swath of Lutheranism, including every Lutheran church in Africa and many across Asia. Labelling Luther will send the message to them that we've made a decision and that we don't care what they have to say. In point of fact, this cutting off of the conversation has already begun. In 2013, in the middle of my first year at Luther, the Evangelical Ethiopian Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) decided that the ELCA no longer was listening. They withdrew their students from

American seminaries and they severed ties.

The example of the EECMY points to my second difficulty with labelling Luther a "Reconciling in Christ" seminary. At 5.6 million members, the EECMY is the second largest Lutheran church in the world. The largest Lutheran church, the 6.4 million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, has a similarly tenuous relationship with the ELCA. By way of contrast, the ELCA now stands at just over 3.7 million members. Since our inception in 1989, we have lost almost two million members, or 30% of our church. The reality of the situation is that we are shrinking. Now, more than ever, we must resist the myopic view that the ELCA speaks for global Lutheranism. Here at Luther, we have the opportunity to become a truly global seminary, but it will require us to think beyond the confines of the ELCA. We have a unique opportunity for humility as an institution, but it requires something much harder than another declaration. It requires us to listen. We can work to strengthen our ties with Christians of the developing world, but it will require us to accept them as full discussion partners, not as primitive people who will eventually catch up to our more enlightened views. We cannot hold the Global South hostage with our money and our education system forever. The fact of the matter is this; we, at Luther Seminary and in the ELCA, need the global church, not the other way around. Just as we in the ELCA no longer have any need for the dying churches of Europe, the day is quickly coming when the churches of the Global South will have no need for us. The question is, when that day comes, will they continue to regard us as partners in their work of educating Christian leaders, or will they remember us as that patronizing church that refused to engage in conversation?

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## RIC: Applicant's Perspective

SHANNON FARRAND-BERNARDIN

As a newly admitted M.Div. student, I have spent the last several months discerning what it is that I am seeking in a theological institution. One of my priorities was to find a seminary where a variety of perspectives, and a diversity of students are welcomed and valued. I sought a community where everyone has a seat at the table, so that their unique perspectives and backgrounds could contribute to the fabric of the institution.

For this reason, I was encouraged to learn that discussions are planned for Luther to consider becoming a Reconciling in Christ seminary, that publically welcomes and is fully inclusive of LGBTQ individuals. When I mentioned to students during my campus visit that this was an issue that matters to me, they asked if I would consider writing an article describing my reasons.

Several years ago I completed an M.A. at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. A number of my friends at Union identified as LGBTQ, and were discouraged by their churches and denominations from pursuing the vocations to which they felt called. These individuals were forced to hide their sexual orientation from their call committees and prospective employers. Many who did share those facts were passed over in the hiring process, or discouraged from continuing along their vocational paths. Even among those who found employment, secrecy was often a requirement for the continuation of their work.

In each of these cases, it was not only my friends who lost something. The Church, in my view, also suffered a tremendous loss. These individuals were some of the most compassionate, loving, gifted and faithful Christians I have met. They would have served congregations and Christian ministries admirably, but instead they slipped through the cracks of theological rifts and denominational bureaucracy.

The Protestant church in the United States is struggling. While there are a myriad of reasons for the changing religious landscape in which we find ourselves today, I have a hunch that one reason for the declining social relevance of the Church is the degree to which our institutions have become focused upon exclusion, rather than radical welcome and hospitality. People don't come to the Church to find judgment, and they will stay away if that is what we have to offer. People come to the Church seeking wholeness and love. When we use our pulpits and our text to rebuke our LGBTQ siblings, we go against the Spirit of Christ's ministry by inflicting pain and creating division.

I recently finished my February read, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*. The book's author, Rachel Held Evans, spent a year attempting to tease out the Bible's message for how women should live. She concludes, as you may have guessed, that the Bible simply does not offer a straightforward or consistent answer to that question. Held Evan's quest reminded me that our Christian text is blessedly rich and complicated, and one in which we are called to delve deeply, rather than peruse for easy answers.

Likewise, in my view, the Bible does not present a straightforward or consistent message about human sexuality. Jesus welcomed sexual minorities, outcasts and strangers into his fold. Therefore, as Christians, if we choose to hold our LGBTQ siblings at arms length from our Church and its offices, we stand on shaky ground. If, on the other hand, we extend a radical welcome, and employ a hermeneutic of love, we can participate in something truly holy.

# IgbTqia?

## Gender Identity in the Church

JESSICA PUTLAND  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

For many people across the country, the idea of a person identifying as “Transgender” probably was not on the forefront of their daily thoughts until news of Caitlyn Jenner’s transition hit the tabloids. As this news hit, it became evident across social media platforms that a large number of people were woefully ignorant as to what it meant to be transgender and how difficult it can be to come out of the closet to people in your life, let alone the world. Countless posts circulated the Internet, complaining about how Caitlyn Jenner was not brave for what she had done in coming out in the media. Furthermore these posts misgendered, misnamed, and bashed even the idea of transgender identities.

What’s more is that some of the people who posted these offensive things were Christian. What does it mean for a Christian to slander a person’s identity like this? How can we be a church that welcomes people of all gender identities and encourages their congregations to be understanding and hospitable to these people? How do people who identify as transgender fit into the larger conversation at Luther Seminary as we work towards becoming Reconciling in Christ?

Let me begin by stating that because I am a white cisgender, heterosexual female I cannot and will not claim any expertise on this subject. I cannot tell you what it is like to be transgender, and I cannot state scientific, sociological, or theological facts about transgender identities.

What I can tell you is that a person who identifies as transgender is someone “whose self-identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender” (Miriam Webster Dictionary Online). It is important to remember that while some transgender people, like Caitlyn Jenner, show a traditional binary switch – from male to female or vice versa – this is not the only way a transgender person can identify. Sex assigned at birth is usually binary, male or female. But sex is not gender. Many transgender people find that they are better able to express their gender identity on a spectrum rather than as “one or the other.” Gen-

der fluidity or gender non-conformity are other ways in which people in our communities may express their identities. These people, transgender, gender fluid, and etcetera are notoriously unmentioned in our church communities.

Ok, but what does this mean for the church and for Luther Seminary?

What this means, is that as a church and as a seminary, if we are going to be open and reconciling to all in Christ, we must accept transgender people in our communities as the identity which they express to us. It is not our place to question their identity. It is our place to affirm every person’s belovedness in Christ. Every person is beloved as they were created, and some people were created transgender.

To affirm someone’s belovedness in their identity and to welcome them into a community, we can do a few things.

Using gender neutral pronouns to address classes and congregations can be very helpful. Even in one-on-one situations, though “sir” or “ma’am” may feel polite, it may offend someone who is transgender or who does not identify as a binary gender. Providing gender neutral bathrooms and safe spaces can also make a person who identifies as transgender feel more welcome.

Furthermore, it is important to not simply “welcome all people, regardless of identity.” This is not honoring someone’s identity, just as we honor a person’s experience with race or ethnicity, we must honor a person’s gender identity or sexuality. This means not simply throwing a blanket statement out of acceptance, but naming that we accept all members of the LGBTQIA community and more. Transgender, Bisexual, Asexual, Intersex, and however else a person might identify, must welcome them as those identities, not as an overarching statement of acceptance.

Why is this important? Because as we work to become Reconciling in Christ, or at least begin the conversation, we must prepare ourselves to welcome and affirm all of God’s beloved people, regardless of their gender identity or sexuality. We are called to love our neighbors as they are. We are called to be hospitable to all people, LGBTQIA or other, in the name of Jesus Christ. Let’s be careful not to limit it to the LG, lets embrace the whole spectrum.

# Luther in 2009

KYLE HANSON  
M. DIV. MIDDLE

My email address is khanson002@luthersem.edu. It is not uncommon for people to have a 002, 003 or 004 after their name because someone else, who had the same name, already attended Luther Seminary in the past. However, my address is a little different because the 001 was also me.

In the spring of 2009, I decided I had fought my call to ministry long enough and applied for the MDIV program at Luther Seminary. I was in the beginning stages of discussion with the ELCA synods about candidacy but, at the time, the ELCA didn’t ordain openly LGBT people. I am not sure the seminary knew what to do with me, nor did the synod. Things in the ELCA were reaching a boiling point, and the outcome was unclear. Here at Luther Seminary there were fierce arguments taking place on both sides of the argument and a boiling point of its own was happening within these walls. It was a painful time for me, to be present for such heated discussions. Eventually I was accepted to Luther for study and given the usual period of time to go through the candidacy process with the ELCA. I had a few options, I could seek out another denomination or wait out the ELCA. In late summer of 2009 the ELCA voted to change its rules and I could have officially started the process for candidacy, but the birth of my youngest son delayed my process.

So here I am now, seven years later, fully immersed in the program and process. I have to admit that coming to seminary as a LGBT person can be quite isolating at first. You come, unsure of which professors or administrators are safe. You come, unsure of which students feel that you should be here. You come, fulfilling God’s call, trying to be brave enough to share your own story, knowing that not all want to hear it.

I had some assumptions when I came to Luther. I assumed that since the church had voted to allow ordination of LGBT individuals I would find open arms here at Luther. And while generally that has been the case, neither organization-the ELCA nor Luther- is RECONCILED but rather both are unofficially RECONCILING. This is an important distinction, as I have discovered; the conversations are not completed, the discernment isn’t over and I find myself in the middle of a very important “ING” process. There are still professors and students who see my participation here in opposition to their beliefs. There are still many churches that will not consider me for a call because of who I love. The call process can be especially difficult for LGBT individuals. Currently half of the Lutheran Seminaries are Reconciling in Christ, intentionally reaching out to LGBT students and boldly expressing their acceptance of LGBT people as fully equal members of the church and society.

So, here I am as a “002” and a great deal has changed, and yet so much still has not. Luther has been a place of great welcome, but also a place of old wounds surfacing, a place of reconciliation and forgiveness. I refuse to believe that when the Holy Spirit is present, people cannot come together through true discernment, and prayer, not by simply agreeing to disagree, but by moving toward a true understanding of each other and the radical inclusiveness of God. There is a movement toward being reconciled in Christ. Here at Luther I see that happening, I see a place that is figuring out how to be the Gospel for all. These conversations are never easy, but as we know, deep discernment never is.

## DR:BC Correction

Dear Luther Seminary,

I wanted to draw your attention to a mistake that was made by Dismantling Racism: Living into Beloved Community during our month of events in February. In planning this month, we were concerned about placing our events at the same time as Black History Month because we believe it is important to talk about race, racism, black history, and the like, at all times of year. However, we wanted to kick off the semester by hosting events and generating momentum surrounding DR:BC.

In an ironic twist of events, by not talking about Black History Month and by calling February “DR:BC Month”, I accidentally co-opted February as DR:BC Month. I would like to take this opportunity to apologize for my misstep. It was an unintentional co-opting and also a good learning opportunity. Please watch the DR:BC Facebook page for articles, videos, and books that speak to Black History Month.

Thank you to Rev. Tiffany Chaney for lovingly pointing out this co-opt to me, your mentorship is greatly appreciated.

Birgitte Simpson

# Replacing Dr. Barreto

LAURA SLEZAK  
M.DIV. MIDDLEL

Diversity. Race/Racism. Cultural competency. These are words that have peppered conversations held around our community at Luther Seminary over the past eighteen months. Add to those other words such as curriculum, program outcomes, and strategic planning and you have just summarized a significant portion of the dialogue. In particular, we have had conversations about the intersections between theological education and the issues of diversity and race. If I am being honest with you, when I started at Luther Seminary in August 2014, I had barely begun to contemplate such ideas and realities. The events in Ferguson, MO opened my eyes to a world I had not previously known existed. And if I have learned anything over the past months, it is that change starts with individuals engaging in their own inner work. But change only begins at an individual level and can be tremendously magnified when undertaken by communities. And change does not happen only by engaging in discussion around it. On a very practical level, action is also required. We have an opportunity on the horizon at Luther with the departure of our beloved faculty member, Dr. Eric Barreto. We have an opportunity to support all of the dialogue we have been engaged in with action. We can hire another faculty member of color as Dr. Barreto's replacement.

I am not suggesting that we seek diversity for diversity's sake. We have a theological imperative to address issues around diversity and train culturally competent leaders. When asked, Dr. Barreto himself responded, "The future of God's church is a future marked by diversity. That diversity is a gift from God. Therefore, theological education that is faithful to this gift will equip leaders that are interculturally competent. That

kind of education will require a faculty that reflects the diversity of the world in which our students will serve. Just as important, however, is that a diverse faculty ought to place at the center of theological inquiry questions of diversity and difference. Fundamentally, at a seminary and in the church, these are not questions of sociology or demography so much as questions of theology, questions about where God is leading us." And I am not writing this article without support from other members of the faculty. When asked about Dr. Barreto's replacement, Dr. Chan responded, "Dr. Barreto's loss will be keenly felt at Luther Seminary. His passionate commitment to theological education, exceptional leadership skills, and generosity of spirit contributed significantly to the Luther Seminary community, and in ways both seen and unseen. It is important to note that many of Dr. Barreto's most important contributions to the church and to his field emerge precisely out of his experiences as a deeply reflective Hispanic male. These experiences not only shape him as a person but also as a teacher of the church. As we look toward the hiring of a new faculty member in the area of NT, it is my hope that we will seriously consider the value of having diverse theological voices around the table. At this point in America's history, what we desperately need are Christian theological voices that are committed to teaching and preaching the radical freedom of Christ's Gospel, and to partnering with God in creating a society that works for the wellbeing of all."

Consider this, we as an institution spend a great deal of time talking about our role in training Christian Public Leaders. Our faculty members themselves serve as Christian Public Leaders on this campus and in the greater community. I can see myself in such leadership roles, in part, because I have examples of women serving as members of our faculty. And I benefit from see-

ing the ways multiple women fulfill those roles from Dr. Kathryn Schifferdecker to Dr. Amy Marga and others. Diversity exists within leadership styles of people who have the same gender and race. What will we say to students who arrive and do not see themselves reflected in a single member of our faculty? How will we justify a lack of examples for them?

I have heard the argument around campus that hiring one faculty member of color will not substantially change the dynamics and diversity issues that we face around campus. Then I ask you, how will we start to see the diverse reality of God's creation and our world reflected in our community? One of the suggestions made at the Assessment Forum on Race, Culture, and the Curriculum was to ask professors to invite guest speakers to offer diverse perspectives around the topics being covered in each class. I think that this sounds like a wonderful idea and we need to implement it, but if we leave diversity in perspectives to guest lecturers or one week's reading assignments, what is the underlying message that we are presenting? Are we implying that diversity and race have their place in our curriculum, but only if they are confined to certain weeks? I am not suggesting that one additional faculty member of color will be able to speak to an entire cultural perspective that is diverse within its own right. However, if we fill the opening left by Dr. Barreto with another faculty member of color, we are backing up our claims around the importance of diversity in theological education with actions. Issues of race and cultural competency are not overcome with words and sweeping changes alone. We make progress as individuals and communities through incremental steps. I ask that members of our community: students, staff, and faculty would consider making this faculty position one of our next steps.

## Hosting the Guest

EDWARD FOSTER-GRAHAM  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

Lately hope has grown harder to maintain in grasp, especially in this day and time, where race is still a significant issue in society. On every front, we are bombarded by social media blasts, one after the other, where race is at the core of violence, oppression, and division. True unadulterated hatred, degradation, humiliation, and hostility are circling the bowl of our domestic and global societies, because we persist in adhering to our human tendency to want to conquer and divide. Racism is pure and simple ignorance on the highest level, makes no sense, and has absolutely no purpose except to perpetuate hate. It is rocket scientist level complexity to find reason as to how people fail to see discrimination of any kind, and it is downright evil of the worst kind.

Lives are being taken, ruined, and drastically impacted by this ugly, haunting, ghost whose mission is to destroy. Bigotry is an evil spirit, a portal of sorts, where hatred breeds, lives, and mutates, which will ultimately erupt into something so detrimental to the peace and love which God has intended for us all. Civil unrest is inevitable, if we the future spiritual leaders, do not speak out strongly and boldly for the righteousness of God's will.

Yes! I will dare to hold all Spiritual Leaders,

no matter if you're denominational or non-denominational, to a higher call to action. As leaders of God's people, we have been called to nurture, guide, educate, and spiritually feed to the flock the love, which is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There is absolutely no question as to what our Savior would want us to accomplish concerning this issue of race. Surely, God would want us to stand in the gaps for truth and righteousness, whatever the cost. Hatred of any kind, on any level, has no place in the house of the Lord, nor the body of Christ, but yet, even we "who for much is given, much is required", cannot muster the courage to advocate for the will of Christ when it comes to this catalyst of evil. The scripture Matthew 22:14, which states "Many are called but few are chosen," is very real and present.

It should be unimaginable for such hatred and indifference to exist especially in seminary, of all places, where God has called us to always be about His business, to do His will, and to demonstrate His love, truth, and righteousness. I know everyone is not here for the same reason, but ideally, God's will should be the priority, or I am definitely in the wrong place. It appears despite knowing what God would want us to do to ad-

dress this issue, we want to discuss, debate, and brainstorm over what God would have us to do, as though we do not know the God we serve. The God who is love.

Our work is clearer than crystal. Stand up for God and march forth as strong, fearless, victorious soldiers of God. Let's advocate for the One who has called us, and has willed us to have power in His name. 2 Timothy 1:17 states "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind." Now is the time, more than any other in history, for the Spiritual Leaders God has chosen to serve and lead His flock, to stand faithfully in harm's way, at every turn, for the sake of peace and love. If there is any question that has to be asked, let it be "where does it all start to change for the better?" The answer is clear - right here on the campus of Luther Seminary.

Again, it is unimaginable that the table has not been set properly for the guest. How could there not be a cultural sensitivity component to the curriculum, a more diverse faculty, and a guest list that is inclusive in every sense of the word,

*Continued on Page 7*

# Let's Talk About... Respectful Discourse

EMILY MARTIN  
M.DIV. INTERN

With this month's focus in *The Concord*, I thought it best to have some conversation about having respectful discourse. Since so many social justice issues such as race, gender, and sexuality have been at the front of our minds recently, it can be tempting to desire immediate change. However, immediate change does not always lead to a healthy community where everyone feels heard and considered.

Having been raised in a socially liberal environment, and having also been educated in one, I have to say that working in North Dakota hit me with a bit of culture shock. For the first time since being aware of the issue, I watched marriage equality become a reality. By the time I really knew what marriage equality was, it was already legal in Iowa, and it became legal in Minnesota right before I moved there. Once it was legalized here, in North Dakota, I became frustrated that the community was not prepared to change immediately. Why weren't they as excited as I was? Why weren't they prepared to move forward? What was holding them back? It certainly has been a growing edge of mine to acknowledge that these kinds of changes can not be immediate in order to be a healthy change for a community.

The healthiest thing a community can do is to start off with some open and honest conversation where people on both sides of an issue can be heard without judgement of their character, their questions, or their life experience. What you will find below are some pointers that may help you when engaging in these kinds of conversations.

## #1 Before you walk in the door.

Before engaging in the conversation there are some things you need to consider. If you know, for instance, that the person you will be talking to has an opposing view of an issue you wish to discuss, it may be helpful to think about why you have come to the conclusion that you have come to. Consider the different variables that may have led them to the conclusion they have reached. Remember that the lens through which you view the world probably isn't the same as theirs. And, more than your differences, consider the similarities of each of your paths. Finding common ground is a way of establishing a mentality that neither individual is fundamentally a bad person, even though there is disagreement.

## #2 When you're approaching the conversation.

This tip is especially important if you have any kind of relationship (professional or personal) with the person or people you'll be having a conversation with.

In his book, *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancy makes the point that "No one ever converted to Christianity because they lost an argument." The same can be said with most discourse. So, if maintaining any kind of relationship with this person, or these people, is important to you, it's imperative that you do not go into this conversation with the goal of "winning," where "winning" is defined as "the other person agreeing with you wholeheartedly." It's a good bet that the other person has the same intention. Absolutely use the opportunity to educate the person

about the issue, and why you believe what you do, but you must, in turn, listen to what they have to say. Coming into conversations like these with appropriate expectations can determine whether the conversation will end peacefully or if the relationship will end up harmed or severed. In the heat of the conversation, this will probably be the first concept to go, but I urge you to keep it in mind for the sake of loving your neighbor.

## #3 When you're having the conversation.

General Nonviolent Communication rules apply here. Avoid accusatory language, as well as exaggeration such as, "You never listen to anyone," or "You're being ignorant." Try to keep your statements to either facts, observations, or your own feelings. Telling someone how they feel, think, or what they believe will not help your conversation move forward in a peaceful way.

## #4 When you're leaving the conversation.

It can feel like a conversation like this one isn't a success unless both parties leave in complete agreement. I feel very confident in saying that this expectation will only lead you to disappointment and broken relationships. I know that we're results-driven people. And it may feel as though the conversation was a waste of time if you didn't recruit the other person to your side. However, I urge you to consider the conversation a success if it met the following criteria:

Both sides were heard without interruption or judgement.

There were no hurtful, slanderous, or violent names thrown around.

The conversation ended with the relationship either in the same place or better.

You walked away from the conversation without any regrets toward what you said or how you acted.

Look, people have disagreed on various things forever. It is very true that some of these disagreements have a much more drastic outcomes, such as civil rights, and some have less serious outcomes, such as vegetarianism. The bottom line is this; if you have an opinion, there will be someone somewhere who disagrees with it. It is our responsibility as civil, loving, and arguably intelligent people, to be able to live peacefully with others while still having room to respectfully talk about our differences.

In the spirit of respectful discourse, please join us on March 18th in the OCC Coffeeshop from 11:30-1:00 to talk about issues that have been brought up in *The Concord*, as well as issues on campus that you would like to see us cover in future issues. This is YOUR student newspaper, and we would like to hear from you, so please join us for coffee and conversation.

## Hosting the Guest, cont.

here at Luther Seminary, where we are being prepared to do God's will in a very diverse society? This spiritual journey is embedded in equality and fairness to all. Is the assumption, as students called to ministry, that we should already be equipped to serve, witness to, and spiritually nurture the flock, despite cultural differences? If so, why are we so indecisive as to how we should address race on and off campus? Why is Luther Seminary being asked to address the lack of a more multicultural existence by the accreditation committee? Why is the ELCA 97% white in the year 2016? We all have to admit something is horribly wrong, not only from a humanity standpoint, but even more so on a Christian standpoint. What about this reality is the will of Christ, or remotely resembles His will? Someone in charge of the guest list is not doing their job from a Christian perspective.

It stands to reason, if we are going to extend an invitation to a more diverse guest list, we should be good hosts, and educate ourselves on how we can be more hospitable. We have to learn the needs of our guests, so that the banquet will be welcoming, festive, and gratifying for all who are called. Let's act accordingly. This is how we should proceed, by being the change we want to see. To take the stance "We do not know how to address this issue," is an excuse to avoid the very intense hard work involved in doing what is righteous, what is human, and more importantly for Luther Seminary, what is Christian. If we have to make it extremely simple on how to rectify this wrong, think of it as planning a huge banquet, where all God's creation is invited. What must be accomplished, orchestrated, or executed in order for all to be welcome and made to feel included? Attention to the needs of the guest list is of utmost importance. If we don't know their needs, what better way to find out, than to ask the hard questions, pay attention to the answers, and genuinely act from Love? God Bless!

## The Shibboleth

PETER SUSAG

This month, "Anonymous" asks, "Is it me, or does nobody indent anymore?"

It's definitely a trend. With technology so dominant in our lives, people seem to conflate the conventions of writing different types of texts. Text messaging and Email have made communication so efficient that extraneous key strokes have been actively suppressed. As evidence of this, try indenting a paragraph in Gmail by using the "tab" key. Instead of indenting, it directs you to the "send" button. (As an aside, it's worth noting that the use of indentation in computer coding is also heavily debated.)

Indenting is thought to have developed in Medieval monasteries as copyists attempted to increase the legibility of manuscripts. And in this way, it still has relevance for us today: to help our readers interpret the text. In larger or more formal works, it is still mandatory, I'd argue, as it lends greater clarity and success in academia is largely determined by one's ability to show mastery of various scholarly conventions. So, when you indent a paragraph, you're not only writing more clearly, but participating in a centuries-old theological tradition.

# Responses to February's Appologetics

## RESPONSE A

JOHN W. HOYUM  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

### *The Buddhists are Wrong*

The last issue of The Concord featured an article that entertained the idea that our Buddhist neighbors are correct that all things in life are ultimately meaningless, futile, and full of suffering. This concept, known to Buddhism as dukkha, discloses to us that all our striving in life brings us nowhere in the end, and that the sooner we come to terms with this truth and accept it, the better off we'll be. So despite the best attempts of Westerners to romanticize it into giving us something meaningful, Buddhism's eschatology is finally tragic. Are they right?

I'll note that the Buddhists have stumbled upon something here that is actually true. In particular, they have rightly observed that all human striving — for worth, for satisfaction, for peace, for anything of lasting or ultimate value — is futile, and will never be rewarded.

Right they may be, but they haven't gone far enough. Christians will push much further, asserting that even the realization that there is no reward in the end for our toil and travail will free no one. All things — human effort, naive attempts at interreligious dialog, and even the the greatest good, the law itself — will be put to death in the end.

Nonetheless, Jesus Christ, the God made flesh, has traversed this impenetrable darkness, truly taking upon himself the futility of all our striving and the curse of the law. This risen Lord has defeated them, and actually makes all things new with a word that will never pass away (Matthew 24:35): the word of promise that bears and bestows the forgiveness of sins itself, making a new creation. In ourselves, we are without hope; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:57).

## RESPONSE B

LYDIA SVENDSEN  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

### *Embodiment of Faith - It Is A Way Of Life*

People seem to be in the pursuit of more because they operate under the assumption, both consciously and unconsciously, that more will bring happiness. However, as we have been told over and over again, more does not, in fact, bring happiness. This happiness we so relentlessly pursue seems to have remained elusive over the centuries, but it is entirely possible that our siblings are correct. However, it is not only our Buddhist siblings that live with a connection and compassion for all beings and all creation. When we look at religions and lifestyles practiced all over the world and through the ages, we are able to see a plethora of people from different cultures and walks of life that are connected to one another and creation. We can learn from our Native American siblings, our Buddhist siblings, our Christian siblings, our Jewish siblings, our Islamic siblings, and so many more. All of these ways of life, not just faith but way of living, have an embodiment and connective aspect.

If we take the time to pause and reflect on our lives, we will notice that while we walk around and sit around in our physical bodies, we do little else to connect with them. How do we bring our bodies into focus with our faith and with our way of life? It is simpler than it sounds. We have spent so much time pursuing happiness that we have not paused to realize that maybe it is just enough to be. It is enough to be physically present, to take a walk with bare feet, to feel the breeze on our skin. So instead of wishing you all the happiness in the world, I wish you to be enough. Enough in every moment because in a world that says you are never enough, that is simply not true.

# Seniors: You're Invited!

BEN EISELE  
M.DIV. SENIOR

Hey, you. Senior. Yep – you, the graduating M.A. or M.Div or whatever you are. Do you know everything you need to know for ministry? You don't? Of course you don't. As prepared as we may be, there's always more. Life is learning. And there's an upcoming opportunity to do more of it – particularly those things which we seniors say we need help knowing. On Saturday, April 2, from 10:00am to 2:30pm in Gullixson Hall, a bunch of folks will be offering a bunch of sessions on a bunch of stuff: Church Finances, Interviewing, Salary Negotiation, Congregation Admin, Running Council Meetings, Continuing Education, Tending to Spirituality, Connecting with Local Nonprofits and Community Resources, and more.

Sound good? Great. Interested? You should be. Sessions specific to MA or M.Div will be held separately. Many will cross over. There will also be lunch. And coffee. Always coffee. Partners welcome to attend.

If you want to attend, please RSVP to Sarah Luedtke Jones (sluedtkejones001@luthersem.edu) or Ben Eisele (beisele001@luthersem.edu) by Friday, March 25. See you there.

### **General Info:**

**What:** "Stuff You Don't Know But Want To Know" Senior Learning Event  
**When:** Saturday, April 2nd from 10am-2:30pm  
**Who:** FOR graduating seniors (MA, M.Div) entering ministry, BY people who know things  
**Where:** Gullixson Hall, Luther Seminary Campus  
**Why:** Because there's always more to know.  
**How:** Talking, Listening, Watching, Responding  
Coffee, and Yoga.

# Appologetics: Our [Muslim] Siblings are Right

STERLING LYNK  
M.DIV. JUNIOR

God, Allah, has sent prophets to every nation. He did this so that all humans may know and be obedient to His will for the world He created and sustains. God has done this because he is both just as well as compassionate. In fact, your fundamental problem as a human being is how easy it is to be disobedient to God's will.

Islam fixes the fundamental problem. Islam is a collection of God given and integrated practices. This collection is designed to ensure we follow God's will in every way, in all things. Just one example is prayer. The Holy Quran and Hadith tells us that while the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) was on his night journey God obligated 50 daily prayers. Then Moses (PBUH) counseled Muhammed (PBUH) to go back and ask God to ease this obligation. Moses (PBUH)

had personal experience with a people who found it hard to be obedient to God. When the Prophet made this supplication God reduced the obligation by five prayers. Again, Moses (PBUH) thought forty-five was too many and the Prophet made supplication again. In fact the Prophet ended up going back a total of nine times. Each time God reduced the obligation by five prayers. Today our obligation is five daily prayers. This is still a lot of required prayers, and the second Pillar of Islam are these prayers. These prayers happen at prescribed times: the first before sunrise, the second after the sun has passed its zenith, the third before sunset, the fourth after sunset, and the fifth at night. When it is prayer time a person should stop and pray where one happens to be at the moment. This reminds us again to submit to God's will as revealed through the prophets, especially the seal of the prophets - Muhammad (PBUH).

Editor's Note: What do you think? During this

semester we will be posting a series of these pieces, each focusing on a different perspective we encounter in the world. We would like to invite you to respond to the case being made. Each issue we will print one or more of the responses, and then offer the next worldview to consider. We also plan on asking the brilliant minds that make up our faculty to offer their thoughts. In your response you may agree, disagree or reframe the issue – it is up to you. Sharing a response is a gift – it will help all of us be better at our current and future ministries. Please send your response to concord@luthersem.edu by 11:59 pm on Monday, April 4. Please shoot for 300 words or less.

*Did this spark your interest? Do you agree? Disagree? Tell us what you have to say. Send 300 words or less in response to concord@luthersem.edu.*

# The Funcord Northeast Beer Review

PETER CLARK  
M.DIV. SENIOR

Again, I face the daunting task of drinking an entire beer and giving you my opinion of it. This month, I have elected to go with a local classic: Grain Belt Northeast. I have added two layers of nuance to this: first, it is an aluminum can tallboy of Northeast, so I will be drinking more beer than last time; second, I am drinking it while I watch the Republican debate, so we'll see if that makes me spit or swallow more. Maybe it will make me lose my appetite altogether. Here we go.

First impressions: It has an aluminum taste, normal of a beer straight from a can. Nice malty flavors, though, and fairly full bodied. If I could see it, I would guess it's a more amber colored beer that probably has a good, thick head when pulled from a tap. But again, this is not from a tap, this is beer how grad students drink it: right outta da can.

Chuggable? Oh yeah. Get a can opener, punch a hole in the bottom, and shotgun this bad boy. The belches will be epic, as I'm sure the head rush will be as well. Would not chug more than one in a row, though. It is a fairly well-bodied beer and you would get full pretty quickly.

On a side note, I'm watching this debate by AirPlaying it from my phone to my TV, so Donald Trump keeps randomly pausing or losing audio. I think this makes him more coherent.

Mid-bottle: The body continues, and I can see this beer pairing well with pretty much anything. It would go especially well with a pizza or a hamburger. It does not pair well with how quickly Marco Rubio is talking. Good God, man, this isn't high school debate. Aaaaand I made the mistake of taking a drink right as Trump referenced his penis. That was a mistake. Fortunately, I kept it down and it helped to wash away the little bit of vomit in my mouth.

Ted Cruz is talking! Chug to kill your brain cells out of mercy! Fortunately, this beer is still chuggable and the belches are helping to drown out the strange nonsense coming out of the TV machine.

By the numbers: This beer is a 4.7% alcohol by volume. It is an amber lager, which contributes to the mellow flavor and filling body that I love so much. I have to admit, that I will miss this beer when I move away from here. I will not miss Rubio and Trump yelling at each other. I would look up the International Bitterness Units, but it is pretty much irrelevant. This beer is not hoppy at all, and I'm sure it's something entirely unim-

pressive, kind of like John Kasich's charisma. It's there, but nobody will notice.

Ok, taking two big chugs has made me a little light-headed, as predicted earlier when I discussed its chuggability. It still tastes the same as it did two thirds of a can ago, so it is consistent, even if it doesn't "tell a story." I mean, who wants their beer to tell them a story? I want my beer to taste good, to be refreshing, and to get me a little tipsy after a few of them. This beer does that.

Bottom of the can: I drank it a little quickly, so finishing this can is full of regret and questions about what happened. It's the Republican Super Tuesday of beer drinking experiences. Either chug it and go all out, or sip it and enjoy it. This beer can fulfill either role, but don't try and make it do both. A tallboy just has a lot more beer in it than I'm used to drinking out of something other than a pint glass.

Final thoughts: If you're into tallboys, this is a good beer. Good flavor, smooth taste, well-bodied, and light carbonation make for a pleasant beer drinking experience that lasts just a hair longer than I normally go for out of a beer can. I do not regret buying a six pack of this, but some of it will probably be used for cooking a venison roast I have in the freezer.

## The Eighth Commandment

Sterling actually lives in St. Paul and only tells people that he lives in Madison so they'll think he is super dedicated.

Paul Drees is a spy. Do not trust him. (We'd have to ask Paul if we can publish this but I think he'd say yes.)

Peter Clark drinks beer and plays the mandolin at the same time. Not really a rumor but more a skill.

Editor in Chief Julia Olson rumored to only be in school to keep from paying back loans.

Keyla only went to seminary to find someone "suitable to bring home to mama."

MDiv Junior fills in for Adele at North Carolina show. Video at <http://www.mightypurpose.me/mdiv-junior-fills-in-for-adele.html> (here's a shortened url that is more paper friendly - <http://bit.ly/21jDJKq>)

Carolyn misses Wisconsin so much she became a fromagere. That's why the spare bedroom in the M.Div. house is empty, it's full of cheese.

Anders Nelson is actually an incognito off-Broadway star, only here to research his upcoming role in Book of Mormon. Scandinavian name is kinda overkill...

Emily Martin, while said to be on internship in Fargo, ND actually moved there in anticipation of being an extra in the Fargo movie sequel. No

one has the heart to tell her that a sequel is not in the works... nor will it ever be.

Editor in Chief and MTh student, Julia Olson, repeatedly claims to be in love with entire Concord writing staff. None of the staff could be reached to comment on any reciprocal feelings.

Carolyn, Peter, Sterling, and Jessica caught plotting to move Luther Seminary to Madison, Wisconsin. No one actually objects to this plan. Spotted Cow for all.

Conspirators on Campus Watch including Eric Christenson allegedly planning to institute martial law across the premises.

Rainbow windsock in House Christenson front yard rumored to release neurochemicals into the wind that induce people to want to vote for Bernie Sanders, as well as promote feelings of overall love and happiness.

**This gossip column is to be used strictly for entertainment purposes only. Please do not use as fact.**

## Tiny Word Search

L L X S M J J E N Q Q M S D X  
O U A N H U H G A Y C O G W Z  
U M C M P O A Y I R T O N H C  
I U N I P H O L E T T N I M G  
S A T E L L I T E S Z H R E H  
N E F C B U C N I U V I H R T  
R F M S E O A V J N Z T A C E  
S K R K M L V E W A G P X U W  
N A C E P A I N S R A T S R I  
M R T A S Z Z U F U U M A Y P  
J A U Y L T L S D C S H N H H  
K X H T A B A B K Q B J X H W  
X N U L A D C R E N U T P E N  
L K P A Y S M E T E O R J Q I  
Y T H A H U J Q D M Y D L J W

BLACK  
COMET  
EARTH  
HOLE  
JUPITER  
MARS  
MERCURY  
METEOR  
MOON

NEPTUNE  
PLANET  
RINGS  
SATELLITE  
SATURN  
SHOOTING  
STAR  
STARS  
URANUS  
VENUS

# Ask a Biblical Character: Jonah

Dear Jonah,

My boss wants me to go to this massive city and give the entire place some really bad news. Now, I know this news is going to mess up my credibility with people, and I don't think my boss is going to follow through with it anyway. Is keeping my job worth risking my rep in a whole city? What should I do?

Signed,

Jumpy in Joppa

Dear Jumpy,

There comes a point in every person's life where one must prove what one stands for. Or, in your case, what one runs for. Because that's my advice, my friend. Run. Do you think an entire city is going to listen to you and change anything? No way! It's not like that many people will respond to you, much less at any impressive rate of speed. No, for you my friend, my advice is to run in the opposite direction as fast as you can.

Happy fleeing!

Jonah

Dear Jonah,

Things recently got out of hand on a spur of the moment sailing vacation I was taking. What I'm gathering from the crew here is that while I was napping, a very large storm seems to have come over the ship and now we're in a bit of a pickle as to what to do with our luggage, which is apparently quite heavy. They also seem to be implying that this whole disaster is my fault, can you believe it? I'd love to nip this whole thing in the bud before we dock so I can fully enjoy the sights. Any advice on saving my vacation?

Signed,

Touring Tarshish

Dear Touring,

I hope this letter is reaching you in safety, but I've got some bad news if it is. This whole storm thing sounds like you cheesed off the wrong person, and now you've probably got to pay for it. I don't want to rain on your entire vacation but you're probably going to have to jump ship, literally. If you really want to look valiant, tell the crew to throw you off. That'll add an extra moral conundrum for them, and also will make you look super cool. You may be ending your vacation early, but at least you'll leave one hell of an impression. Chances are this isn't sayonara, so don't fret. The person who's doing this to you probably won't stay mad for long. There's always bigger fish to fry, am I right?

Here's hoping you know how to swim,

Jonah

Dear Jonah,

I'm having a real "I told you so" moment. My friend was going to do something and didn't do it. I knew this would be the case from day one! But I still had to go along with it. So now, my friend decided not to do the thing, and here I am, wasting my time tripping around the countryside for nothing! I'm so mad I could spit. Any advice on what I should do?

Signed,

Angry in Assyria

Dear Angry,

It sounds like you have every right to be angry. Whatever the outcome was supposed to be, I'm sure it was pretty disappointing that your friend didn't follow through. I mean, what if this was a life and death situation, right? Where would you be then? Here's my advice: take some time away from everything. Go out alone in the desert. Bemoan your life. Sure, some people might use words like "pouting" or "whiner" when they talk about what you're doing but at least you won't have to hear them. Hey - maybe you can build a little house out there, take up gardening, and just call it a day. Don't forget the pesticide!

Hoping you'll enjoy the fruits of your labor,

Jonah

Like what you see in our new comedy section "The Funcord"? Have some ideas as to what you would like to see in this section? Let us know or write up some of your own comedy! [concord@luthersem.edu](mailto:concord@luthersem.edu)

## Movie Review: Beasts of No Nation

ERIC CHRISTENSEN  
M.A. SENIOR

I didn't make it to the theater this past month and I sadly have yet to see Deadpool. But, I wouldn't have reviewed it anyway because I don't think anyone needs guidance on whether they want to see that- and I haven't heard, even once, that it is bad. So, I watched the Netflix Original film *Beasts of No Nation*. As an uncompromising view of the lives of child soldiers and the atrocities of war, it will likely prove to be a hard film to review. But then, it was a hard film to watch.

The movie opens on Agu, a boy of an unspecified but clearly very young age who lives in an unnamed West African village in a buffer area of a war zone. The first few scenes show us his character in the context of a happy life- he's rambunctious, but you can't help but love both him and his family. Because of how plots work, this obviously can't last. In the aftermath of a gunfight between government and rebel soldiers, Agu's entire family is executed in the street. Agu narrowly escapes but quickly stumbles into the middle of a rebel camp, led by Idris Elba's character the Commandant.

When you realize they're not going to kill Agu, you spend a couple seconds thinking "maybe this will be another run-of-the-mill revenge story." It's hard to miss the multitude of child soldiers in the Commandant's unit though, and before long, Agu is submitted to a brutally violent initiation. We get to spend the remaining two acts watching Agu slowly die inside and the escalating evil

committed by the whole unit.

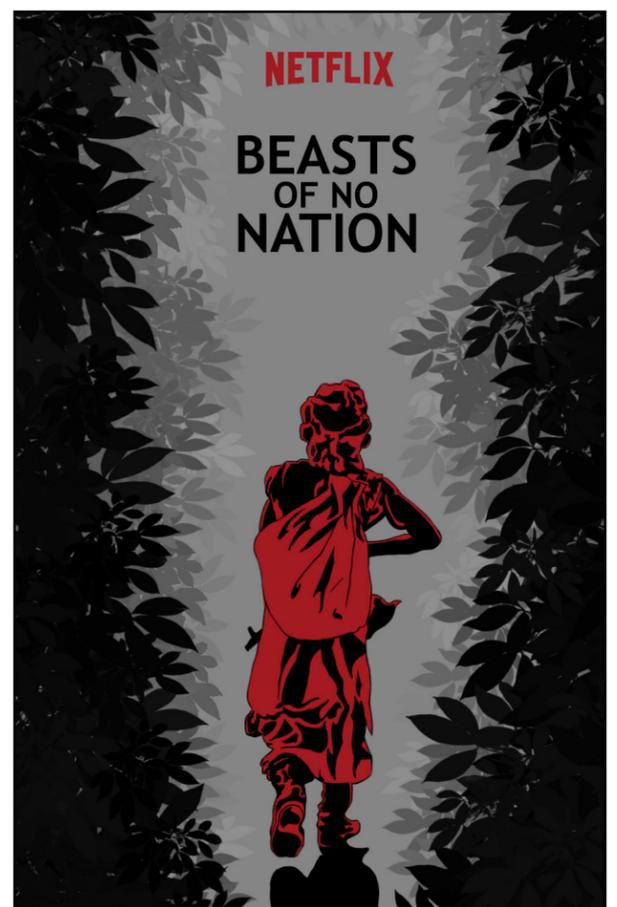
The film takes the themes of war and recruitment of child soldiers and boils it down to a character story. Agu and another boy, Strika, are the personal bodyguards of the Commandant. He turned them into killers and they continue to fight for him even after he's raped them and Agu's occasional narration reveals him to be deeply regretful of the things he does. While the lion's share of the atrocities throughout the film are either committed or ordered by the Commandant, he acts as an embodiment of these things, a symbol of the same horrors done by men like him in the real world.

The film ends on a hopeful note for Agu's story, which makes it possible for one to walk away from it feeling not completely empty. But it's hard to forget that in similar scenarios in reality, most people end up the way the rest of the characters do- broken inside and ultimately dead at an abominably young age.

The final question is: should you see *Beasts of No Nation*? Being that it's only available on Netflix, there's virtually no monetary cost for you to watch it. Despite the stellar acting and very well-done cinematography, it's not entertainment. It's a harsh picture of present day reality in some parts of the world. Despite the lack of a specific location ever being named, it still doesn't need to have "based on a true story" tacked on to it to make you feel like what you're watching is actually real. This is accentuated by the fact that almost none of the film's most brutal shots feature any suspense or even drama. Awful things just happen and the movie doesn't even stop to

make a point of it like fiction usually does.

So if you're ever feeling TOO content with life and you want to feel a little more dead inside, but not, like, *Requiem for a Dream* levels of dead inside, go ahead and submit yourself to *Beasts of No Nation*, preferably with a good friend or loved one.



# Serial: Darkness in the Trees - Part I

ERIC CHRISTENSEN  
M.A. SENIOR

Some of the most dangerous places are the ones we mistakenly believe are safe. Walk around Luther Seminary and it seems like a perfectly safe place. Save for the slight bustle during business hours on weekdays, it's a quiet place. Cozy even. And maybe if you're one of the few students still living down the hill, you might take the path through the woods to get to class.

And why wouldn't you? It's a shorter route. There's a fairly well-beaten path. Even if you somehow managed to get lost, it would last all of two minutes before you pop out on some edge of them and realize where you are. Yes, the woods are downright harmless. In the daylight. But how many of us walk through them in the darkness?

As a newly hired member of the Campus Watch Staff, it's my job to walk around at night, long after most other people would have any reason to be outside on campus. Presumably we do this just in case we actually find anyone and to make sure they have a good reason. Always in pairs, for safety. We don't have to walk the woods though, probably because it would make a poor rendezvous spot for criminals, which actually isn't true. It would be perfect.

Anyway, I lied about the darkness earlier. The woods look dark from the outside but once you get in there you realize that all the path lights and power pole lights poke through the trees and you can actually see pretty well. You'd think this would make it less creepy, and you'd be wrong. It's not like the deep shadows and murkiness of a large area of thick woods. Here, the light that bounces through the trees and makes tons of little shadows that dance around as you move causes you to doubt what you see.

You're probably wondering how I know all this and why I've been in there at night if we don't have to patrol it. Well, one Friday night, someone wanted an escort down the hill. I don't even remember who it was, which is weird because I pretty much know everybody. A call came through on the little old flip phone we have to carry and the voice asked for an escort to Burntvedt. I met them next to Stub, followed them to their building, and now that I think about it, they didn't say anything the whole way.

On the way back, I must have been daydreaming or something (which is a pitifully inadequate word, since it WAS night, but I wasn't asleep) because I ended up walking through the woods. I came to the intersection of the paths, which is a perfect little clearing for performing witchcraft—maybe I could've convinced my Demonic class of a little extra credit project. That's when I saw it crawling out of the woods. It looked like a pile of scraggly, dirty fur a little smaller than a basketball. There was no discernible head from the body, just a homogenous mass scooting along on four sharp little rat feet. Even though it was pretty bright, I wasn't sure what I was looking at, mostly because it didn't look like any normal animal.

Then it turned and looked at me. I froze. It didn't really have a face, just two big bright eyes buried in the fur and shining in the light. Think lemur eyes, but bigger. They look curious, but also somehow, a little... I don't know, dead? Like there was no soul in them, they just wanted to

eat. I debated running for my life and screaming bloody murder versus lunging at it with a big stick. I landed on stay frozen and keep staring.

It turned away from me again and scooted off down the left path, toward the reeds. The one I never go down. It got just far enough way that I could barely still see it, stopped, and turned back to look at me. Like it was waiting. I don't know why, but I followed. It all felt like a dream at this point. Before I knew it, I was following it all over the woods. It would scuttle up a tree, out to the end of a branch until the branch bent real low, then just plop to the ground, walk to the next tree and do it again. It wound around and around between the trees, looking back at me every once in awhile. I followed it for at least an hour or two. The woods must be bigger than I thought or that thing moves really slowly because I don't remember crossing my own tracks even once.

Then somehow, I lost track of it. I walked to the last place I thought I had seen it at the base of one of the bigger trees. All I found was a pile of what I'm pretty sure were rabbit bones. ...Yeah, almost definitely rabbit bones. Like probably a big rabbit. Adventure concluded, I went to head out of the woods toward my house and realized I had no idea where I was. I was the only idiot to have ever gotten lost in this tiny little patch of woods. I decided that this was okay because I was in the only spot in them that was actually really dark, which I didn't even know existed. So I would just put in my two minutes, pop out somewhere, and head home.

Two minutes turned into twenty, which turned into two hours. Then after my phone died, I completely lost track. I walked in what I was pretty sure was a straight line until my cheeks burned and I couldn't feel my toes. It wasn't until the sun started to come up that I finally hit sidewalk and looked at the street sign. Victoria and Roselawn? I checked: that's over four miles away from campus. There's no stretch of woods between here and there—how did I end up over there if I was in the woods all night? It took me all morning to figure out which way was home and then walk it. I was ravenous by the time I got there.

A friend came over while I was wolfing down some lunch. I really wanted to tell him all about what happened to me the night before. But before I could get into it, he asked me why I wasn't in class the day before. Because I don't have class on Friday, I told him, puzzled. Ok, he said, but today is Tuesday.

Tuesday.

Tuesday.

I've been seeing more of those little piles of rabbit bones. Seriously, that first pile I saw in the woods must have been from a BIG rabbit.

Look here next month for Eric Christenson's ongoing series. Are you working on a book, or do you write short stories? Send them into the Concord, and we will pay you for the privilege of printing them.

# Book Review: Luther and Liberation

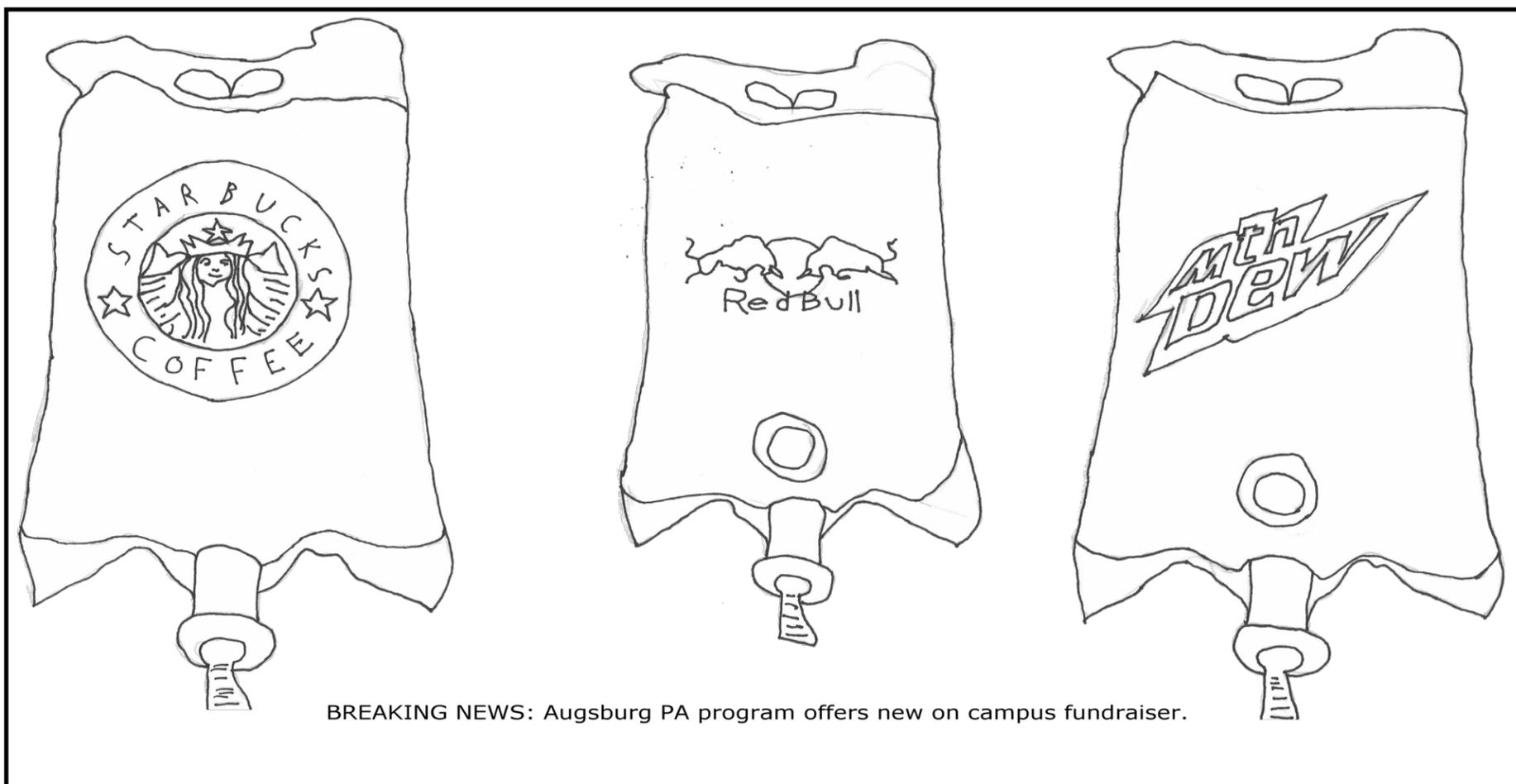
BRACH JENNINGS, M.DIV.  
M.TH. SENIOR

There has been a renewal of interest in Martin Luther's life and writings with 2017 so close on the horizon. Fortress Press is in full celebratory mode with numerous new titles about Luther coming off the presses almost as fast as Luther nerds can buy them. I was overjoyed to find out that the Brazilian systematic theologian Walter Altmann (who spent a year as a guest professor at Luther Seminary in the late 1980s) has a new version of his groundbreaking book, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, among those titles released in celebration of the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. This book had previously been released in the early 1990s and was the book that convinced me to begin to deeply engage with liberation thought. However, Altmann's new release is not merely a reissue of a book to make a few extra dollars; rather, it is a delightfully large expansion of the original text that is three times longer than its predecessor, and reflects the most recent scholarly developments in Luther's theology. The new length makes the \$39 list price automatically worthwhile, in my opinion.

Altmann unapologetically reads Luther's life and key theological insights through the lens of Latin American Liberation Theology. This may seem obvious from the book's title, but I am emphasizing this fact because Martin Luther is not generally associated with liberation movements in North American and European scholarly contexts. There is much to learn from Altmann's take on Luther as a result of this fact. Let's not let Europeans and North Americans have the only insights to offer about a great biblical theologian!

Prof. Altmann explains Luther's understanding of justification in such a way that it is devoid of any kind of quietism. Luther's evangelical discovery was revolutionary from an ecclesiastical perspective (it obviously led to his excommunication), but it is also revolutionary from a social-political perspective. If we have been justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, then we are free to truly live for our neighbors. This is standard "Lutheran speak," right? Actually, it's revolutionary Lutheran speak! If we are free to truly love our neighbors for Jesus' sake, then we are free to work for justice and to stand against injustice in all of its forms. Altmann offers a way not commonly seen for political action from a Lutheran lens using the insights of Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and other prominent liberation theologians as fruitful dialogue partners.

This book is not a hagiography of Luther, as if the Reformer could be automatically plucked out of the context of sixteenth century Germany and set into a Latin American environment without any difficulties. Altmann also makes it clear that we cannot accept everything Luther said or did at face value, calling attention to Luther's character faults, and addressing his failures in the Peasants Revolt and his attitude toward the Jewish People. However, he makes a strong case for reclaiming the evangelical boldness of Luther's central theological insights in order that the Gospel can be proclaimed today, and that Martin Luther may have relevance into the future. This is a powerful book, and I most highly recommend it.



# Scrambled Eggs

## Easter Word Scramble

1. owphsir

2. eaetr

3. ntalme

4. ierruretsnco

5. efsnncoosi

6. ogd

7. gripsn

8. rcmye

9. dboy

10. etln

11. bbtahsa

12. alatr

13. sjuse

14. alpsm

15. cross

16. xiqueno

17. mnimoouc

18. eovl

19. sheusnni

20. ebakr

21. trlugiaicl

22. loobd

23. gerfosviens

24. grcea

25. opatsr

26. arepyr