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STORY
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Re-forming Theological Education: Disruption in Service to the Gospel

DEAR FRIENDS,

The story in Acts 16:6-15 describes how God’s Holy Spirit moves in unexpected ways and disrupts the status quo. I have been dwelling with this text for some time now as we listen to ways that congregations, pastors, deacons, young people, our returning students and new students and bishops are seeing the disruptions of the status quo in their own places of ministry.

As we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I am mindful of the ways that theological education and the church are paying attention to the disruptions and finding ways to continue being reformed. We are asking new questions of how God is calling us as a seminary to innovation for a world in such great need of the reforming grace of God. Our question is, “How might we better come alongside to support the innovation and education that leaders need for this reforming work of God?”

We are reimagining what a 21st century theological education and institutional vitality need to look like for the next 500 years. In this issue of Story, we are highlighting the ways in which graduates are using their Master of Arts degrees. We recently redesigned these degrees to ensure they continue to meet the needs of those who are called to a variety of vocations in the world and in the church. Our new M.A. concentrations include one in Leadership and Innovation for Ministry, which Dr. Dwight Zscheile, associate professor of congregational mission and leadership, expands upon in this issue, stating that it shows how Luther Seminary is “bringing cutting-edge thinking from innovation theory to bear upon the church and other Christian organizations.”

This is just one example of the work that is happening in order for Luther Seminary to provide innovative, gospel-centered education that meets the needs of communities today and into the future. I am excited about the groundwork we have done and the ways we are continuing this reforming work to adapt so that we may bear faithful witness to God’s reforming work in the world. Stay tuned for a new chapter of disruptive innovative ideas that we will test so that we might bear faithful witness to God’s love and grace for a world in such need of the transformative power of God’s Holy Spirit.

Peace and joy,

Robin Steinke, President

Luther Seminary educates leaders for Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God’s world.

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Reformation Festival

On Oct. 27-28, members of the Luther Seminary community gathered to commemorate 500 years of Reformation history. The Reformation Festival consisted of a series of workshops conducted by theologians and musicians. Deanna Thompson presented a keynote address on Luther in the digital age, and Don Saliers presented a keynote address on the musical legacy of the Reformation. On Friday night, the National Lutheran Choir performed a new choral work titled “Holy Spirit Mass” at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis. The event concluded Saturday afternoon with a worship service at Central Lutheran Church that featured preaching by ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and massed choirs from area churches.

You can see photos from the event at flickr.com/lutherseminary.

Commencement

Luther Seminary celebrated its 148th commencement ceremonies on May 20-21, sending 112 graduates out into the world to faithfully serve Christian communities. On Saturday evening, the graduates and their families worshipped together at the Baccalaureate service. Dirk Lange, associate dean, GTE; Professor and Frederik A. Schiotz Chair of Christian Missions presided over the service, and Craig Koester, academic dean and Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament, preached. On Sunday, graduates, professors, friends and families gathered at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis for the Commencement ceremony. Kathryn Schifferdecker, associate professor of Old Testament served as the faculty speaker, and Joshua Kestner, M.Div., was the student speaker.

You can see pictures and video from the weekend at luthersem.edu/commencement.

Festival of Homiletics


For more information about the Festival of Homiletics, visit www.festivalofhomiletics.com.
WITH THE START OF THE 2017-2018 SCHOOL YEAR, LUTHER SEMINARY HAS INTRODUCED A NEWLY REVISED PROGRAM FOR ITS MASTER OF ARTS (M.A.) DEGREES, DESIGNED TO BETTER SERVE STUDENTS AND PROVIDE MORE FLEXIBILITY FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.

Changes include a shorter time frame to graduation, which could allow students to complete a degree in as little as a year; a tightened focus on classwork that provides multiple opportunities for future vocations, and a new push to make M.A. degrees more readily available through the seminary’s distributed learning (DL) program.

Craig Koester, academic dean and Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, says the changes have been made after extensive study and time spent listening to current and past M.A. students about how to best meet their needs.

“Our M.A. programs are designed to serve people with various kinds of vocational interests,” Koester says. “The largest portion are people who are looking at some kind of congregational ministry, but not as ordained pastors. They don’t see themselves preaching and leading worship in the traditional way, but they do want theological training to help them in various kinds of ministry. We also have some students who are on an academic M.A. track. They may not see themselves going into a congregational setting, but they do have an interest in theology. They may see themselves going in the direction of teaching or working in a nonprofit, and the academic track serves them better.”

Koester says making changes to the M.A. program advances two key goals for students in that it makes it easier to gain a degree more quickly, and, in turn, helps students save money.

“We’re aware that theological education is an investment of both time and money,” Koester says. “We want to be sensitive to giving students the most substantive education that we can, while also helping students complete the program more quickly.”

The new changes accommodate both students who intend to attend school full time, as well as those who are seeking a part-time option.

“Our M.A.s have been a two-year degree, and we previously required 18 or 20 semester-length credits for graduation,” Koester says. “Now it’s down to 16 for all M.A. programs. If somebody wanted to go full time over a full-year period, they could get through the program in that time. But for people who are already working adults, it’s very easy to adapt to a part-time schedule so they can continue their jobs, and that also works very well.”

Under the redesign, the seminary now offers three professional M.A. tracks, where students can pursue degrees in Children, Youth and Family; Leadership and Innovation for Ministry; or Christian Ministry.

“Children, Youth and Family ministry has been one of our most widely subscribed M.A. tracks,” Koester says. “The
program was shortened a little bit, but otherwise it remains pretty much as it’s been. The second was formerly called Congregational Mission and Leadership, and it was designed for helping congregations focus on ‘What is your mission?’ But not everyone sees a traditional congregational setting as the focus of their ministry, so we’ve redesigned it and now call it ‘Leadership and Innovation for Ministry.’ We hear over and over again about the challenges people face in serving in various contexts where change is an ongoing reality, and this newly redesigned concentration really places emphasis on that innovative aspect. ‘What does the church look like in the next generation? And how does one lead through change in a community of any sort, whether you’re talking about a traditional congregation or something else?’

The third track, formerly called Congregational and Community Care, is now simply Christian Ministry.

“We used to talk about this as ‘pastoral care,’ anything from working with people in a care center, families in crisis, marriage counseling, chemical dependency and so on,” Koester says. “We find people now want to go into Christian service but they may not be entirely sure what that will look like. The new focus provides a useful place for people to explore different dimensions of ministry, where it might lead to work with the chemically dependent or community outreach in a congregation. Or people might have a special passion for working with the elderly, and you can do all those things under that category of Christian Ministry. This also serves people well who come from a broader ecumenical group, because not all churches require a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) to become a pastor. For denominations or nondenominational groups that don’t expect a M.Div., this helps them. And the M.A. is also a very important degree program for our international students, who are often already involved in ministry in their home country.”

In addition to the three professional M.A. tracks, the seminary also has made changes to the academic track, where students can now choose concentrations spanning subjects including the Bible, History of Christianity, Justice and Reconciliation, and Systematic Theology. There also is an affiliated track for Studies in Lutheran Ministries, as well as a non-affiliated track in the same field.

“Most of our academic track M.A. students are headed toward Christian service,” Koester says. “The academic side became a way for people who might have a deep interest in one of the disciplines such as biblical studies or Christian history or theology to pursue that. We formerly had a whole variety of tracks that people could choose from, but it seemed people needed something that was simple in design and gave them the flexibility they needed to make it work. We streamlined that track as well, and it’s now just 16 credits. If they want to do Bible, that’s great and they can specialize in Old Testament, or New Testament if they wish. Or if we get people from nondenominational backgrounds who say, ‘I’m already involved in ministry, I just need to know the Bible more,’ they can sign up for that, and we’ll provide a good grounding in biblical studies that will serve them well.”

Another change to the seminary’s M.A. offerings is an increased focus on providing degrees through the seminary’s DL model, where students can take some or all of their classes online, with in-person intensive classes held regularly at the seminary.

“The DL program was initially designed for our M.Div. program. It’s a combination where students take some online courses and some courses as one-week intensives on campus,” Koester says. “That’s a very effective means of teaching, but we had never been as intentional in doing that for our M.A. students. We decided that M.A. students would really benefit from the same combination of online and intensive courses, and we really want to let people know that. The academic M.A. track is something that can even be done completely online,” Koester adds.

Viewed as a whole, Koester says the changes made to the seminary’s M.A. programs are designed to simplify them, increase their flexibility and make it even easier for students to pursue additional theological education.

“As we’re looking at the emerging trends within the churches and church life, and cultural trends as well, we

“People needed something that was simple in design and that gave them the flexibility they needed to make it work.”
“As we’re looking at the emerging trends within the churches and church life, and cultural trends as well, we realize that it’s not a one-size-fits-all world,” he says. “Our M.A. degrees now have a lot of flexibility to them, where people can get theological training that could take them in any number of directions.”

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Faith and Science Intersect

By Emily McQuillan, M.Div. Middler

There are certain paired concepts that popular culture takes for granted as opposite. Maybe some of these come to mind for you like local versus global or science versus faith. Yet, that cultural narrative of contrasts ignores the many connections that actually exist between these dynamic forces. There are significant ways that faith and science intersect or that local and global realities come together. These places of intersection are exactly where Luther Seminary M.A. student Peter Jensen finds and develops meaningful community.

Jensen, a junior high science teacher with a Catholic background, is working on a M.A. in theology and community development. After visiting “all the big seminaries in the Twin Cities,” Jensen says he chose Luther because, “I didn’t want just a general theology degree, I wanted to see how to use theology.”

Jensen lives this out in his work teaching locally and in doing humanitarian work in Latin America. A teacher at the Benedictine school Hill-Murray, Jensen has been able to use what he has learned and his life experience to develop original science curriculum that incorporates stewardship and community. His goal has been to merge faith and social justice concepts into the teaching of science.

Jensen explains, “I really want my faith to be integrated practically.” His students are 12-14 years old, and Jensen’s hope is that “they can learn to integrate tough concepts like love for the neighbor and care for the earth into the study of science.” Jensen has students live this out by going on service trips such as volunteering at the White Earth Indian Reservation and by participating in the school’s social justice club.

Jensen’s push for local service opportunities for his students mirrors the passion and dedication he brings to traveling on school breaks to serve in Latin America. His work in countries like Peru gave him organizational experience, but Jensen says, “What I didn’t know on a theological level, a spiritual level, was how do these big problems we are serving intersect with what we are doing and how we live our individual lives.” This
STORY

is what he has set out to understand more deeply through his studies at Luther with professors like Alan Padgett and Andy Root.

In the summer of 2017 Jensen got a chance to study international leadership in Brazil through a graduate fellowship from the Murray Institute. The experience allowed him to reflect and learn more about what it means to be a Christian public leader, as concepts from his classes at Luther met with what he was learning from leaders in Brazil. Jensen says, “I believe that pastors, theologians and leaders graduating from Luther are international leaders whether they want to be or not.”

What Jensen learned in Brazil is that to be an international leader is to be a whole-hearted leader, which he explains means to understand ourselves and others and to engage in seemingly impossible situations. Jensen says, “We have to not only act with justice toward others, but also be able to connect and be wholly human ourselves.” He adds, “Living out my faith, I can’t just look out the window, I have to look in the mirror. I see Christ in others and others see Christ in me. We are all connected as human beings.”

“Living out my faith, I can’t just look out the window, I have to look in the mirror. I see Christ in others and others see Christ in me. We are all connected as human beings.”

Through his studies at Luther, his international travels, and in his work as an educator, Jensen has discovered the ways that seeming contrasts like faith, science, the individual, and the local and global community connect in a way that show how God is working. Jensen says, “Everything I do at Luther comes back to that idea of connection to myself and connection with others because that is partly where I find the mystery of God.” He concludes, “God calls us into the messiness to deal with humanity in order to connect with one another because that is how we connect with him, see him and grow.”

Jensen with his 9th grade physical science class at Hill-Murray School.
Many people feel this pull, but it doesn’t necessarily translate into the desire to preach. Halle Siebert first felt her calling in high school; however, it took her a few years to find the right path.

“Since my senior year in high school I felt a call to seminary; however, I knew that I wasn’t called to be a pastor,” Siebert says. “After completing a bachelor’s degree in speech pathology and audiology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I knew that career wasn’t for me.”

She began her journey searching for a program that satisfied her passions both personally and professionally. She discovered Luther Seminary and suddenly everything made sense.

“I looked into the degree programs offered by Luther Seminary, and I noticed a previous partnership with St. Mary’s University and a Marriage and Family Therapy program. Immediately, I knew Christian counseling was the vocation I was being called to. Since this program was no longer available, I decided to enroll in a M.A. in Congregational and Community Care since much of its concentration is on pastoral counseling. Though this isn’t my final degree, I knew having a theological education would be important in my career of Christian therapy.”

By Laura Malm Weber, Correspondent
Set to graduate in spring 2018, Siebert has thoroughly enjoyed her studies thus far. Entering the program as a M.A. student gave her a unique perspective and unexpected opportunities.

“Coming into seminary as a M.A. student rather than a M.Div. student, I wasn’t sure how much I was going to learn about the theological specifics of Christianity seeing as my degree is focused on pastoral care,” she recalls. “However, I have been pleasantly surprised that I have a lot of freedom to take classes like ‘Lutheran Confessions’ and other systematic theology courses.”

While she loves the courses in her concentration, she’s also enjoyed having the option to take so many courses to help her understand the theological foundations, confessions and history of Lutheranism and other denominations.

“To me, this shows how committed Luther Seminary is to creating well-rounded faith leaders, whether they are pursuing ordination or not,” Siebert says.

The congregational care classes she takes are also a big part of why she feels so prepared for her future.

“I have really enjoyed the holistic education that many of the professors have provided,” she stresses. “I have taken classes such as ‘Faith, Forgiveness and Healing,’ ‘Ministry with Those with Mental Illness,’ and ‘Ministry with Those with Addiction.’ In all these courses, the professors have not only provided theological perspectives to these topics, but also crucial information, current research and community resources.”

She notes how much she appreciates the emphasis her professors have placed on the individual and the importance of retaining his or her dignity.

“Courses such as these remind us, as faith leaders, that we are not only called to theologically educate the community but to truly and lovingly serve all of God’s beloved children,” she says.

Of course, it’s not all work and no play for Siebert. She enjoys spending time with her friends and adores the campus community. She fondly recalls an impromptu adventure to celebrate Mardi Gras earlier this year. After driving to Bistro La Roux in Circle Pines – 20 minutes north of campus – the students enjoyed fantastic food and celebration.

“Serving King Cake is a fun Mardi Gras tradition in which a tiny figure of a baby is hidden in the cake, and the guest whose piece of the cake contains the baby is predicted to have good luck in the coming year and wins a prize,” Siebert explains.

At the event she bought a few pieces of cake and one of her friends found the baby in hers. It was an unforgettable evening of fun and friendship.

“I think this experience is really symbolic of life on campus,” she says. “Not only is Luther located between two lively cities, but everyone on campus is so eager to try new things. It’s awesome, as someone who just moved to Minnesota, to have others who are willing to go on these adventures with me.”

After graduation, Siebert hopes to attend Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Penn.

“Having this degree from Luther will help me approach therapy from an educated, theological perspective rather than just my own faithfulness,” she says. “This will be a huge help in seeing situations and beliefs from others’ faith perspectives, even if they differ from my own. This adoption of others’ beliefs will hopefully assist me in being the most helpful and versatile therapist I can be.”
IT MAY SEEM STRANGE TO SAY, BUT AT ITS HEART THE CHURCH IS IN THE INNOVATION BUSINESS. GOD’S STORY IS ABOUT BRINGING FORTH NEW LIFE, EVEN AND ESPECIALLY OUT OF PLACES OF UNCERTAINTY AND DEATH. OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN THE BIBLE, GOD CREATES NEW LIFE AND COMMUNITY WHERE THERE SEEMS TO BE ONLY NOTHINGNESS, DECAY OR DESPAIR.

In today’s cultural contexts, where many established congregations and church structures find themselves undercut by rapid and disruptive change, what is needed is faithful innovation. Faithful innovation is the carrying forward of the rich treasures of Christian tradition in fresh forms so that they speak to people in the vernaculars of the contemporary world. The Reformation was such a moment of faithful innovation that opened up, clarified and translated tradition. We face another today.

This fall, Luther launches a new M.A. concentration in Leadership and Innovation for Ministry. This degree carries forward some of the deep commitments of our previous M.A. in Congregational Mission and Leadership, with courses in areas like evangelism, leadership, congregational transformation, theology of mission and starting new ministries. It also adds a new course, “Innovation with Congregations and Nonprofits,” that brings cutting-edge thinking from innovation theory to bear upon the church and other Christian organizations.

One such approach is design thinking, which emerged in Silicon Valley as a process for listening empathetically to neighbors in order to address challenges or problems they’re facing through prototyping and testing solutions. Design thinking, which already has begun to be taught in other courses at Luther, develops the church’s capacity to draw close to neighbors, define challenges they’re facing and prototype solutions that make sense to people where they are.

Another key framework is adaptive leadership, which recognizes that the challenges facing churches today have no easy fixes but rather require grassroots learning on the part of everyone. Leaders must cultivate the spaces and practices by which the people are able to discover a new future that carries forward the best of the past.

Luther’s approach to innovation doesn’t just draw on secular organizational theory. It also places at the forefront the reality that the Holy Spirit is the primary innovator in the church. This means discernment is a core practice for Christian communities seeking faithful adaptation. The work of leadership and innovation for ministry is deeply theological work, pushing the church deeper into its own core stories in Scripture and the tradition and cultivating the practices by which we recognize the new life God is bringing forth in our midst.

Luther’s M.A. programs in Congregational Mission and Leadership and now Leadership and Innovation for Ministry have drawn students from around the world who want to be prepared to lead their communities deeper into the faith and deeper into connection with their neighbors. This involves a lot of close listening and an agile approach to leadership, where the answers aren’t knowable beforehand but must emerge through a process of trial and error. As many old structures for church life come under stress and seem to be disintegrating amidst cultural change, faithful innovation allows the church to claim and carry forward God’s promises in new and life-giving ways.
On Dec. 2, 2007, Luther Seminary published the first Working Preacher commentaries. Since its launch, the site has hosted nearly 20 million visits from 7.6 million users. Today preachers in more than 230 countries and territories find weekly inspiration, interpretation, and imagination on WorkingPreacher.org.

Give today at WorkingPreacher.org/10years to help this ministry grow for years to come!
Welcoming New Students to Campus

New students began orientation on Monday, Aug. 28. Orientation included workshops addressing spiritual life, financial management, boundaries and intellectual life. New students began the process of building community, understanding the standards and expectations of academic outcomes and community life and became familiar with the campus and resources available to them.

*Photos of Orientation are available at www.flickr.com/lutherseminary.*

Rethinking Church

The most recent installment of Luther Seminary’s Rethinking series tackled the subject of church itself, taking on the title Rethinking Church: Better Questions, Bolder Experiments. At the heart of this gathering was the call to ask different questions than simply how to get people to attend church. Stepping beyond measuring attendance and offerings, speakers Tod Bolsinger, Elizabeth Drescher, Mihee Kim-Kort, Jodi Houge, Brian Hughes, Kenn Inskeep and Rolf Jacobson challenged participants to explore new models of church.

*You can see photos from the event at www.flickr.com/lutherseminary.*

Working Preacher Presents: The Craft of Preaching

On Oct. 2-4, Luther Seminary hosted the second annual Working Preacher Presents: The Craft of Preaching. Pastors from around the country gathered to hone their own homiletical skills, practice with colleagues and learn from the masters. Amy Butler, Raquel St. Clair Lettsome, Karoline Lewis and Barbara Lundblad preached during worship and then took time to dissect and critique their own sermons following worship. Along with a number of workshops, some also enrolled in a master class that provided participants the option to preach a sermon to a small group of peers and receive feedback.

*You can see photos from the event at www.flickr.com/lutherseminary.*
IN LATE JULY, TWO LUTHER SEMINARY PROFESSORS JOINED A DISTINGUISHED GROUP OF HUNDREDS OF INTERNATIONAL MARTIN LUTHER SCHOLARS IN WITTENBERG, GERMANY, FOR THE 13TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR LUTHER RESEARCH, AN EVENT HELD EVERY FIVE YEARS.

Mary Jane Haemig, professor of Church History and director of the Reformation Research Program, and Steven D. Paulson, professor of Systematic Theology of Luther Seminary, both attended the week-long event and also delivered short presentations to the group.

Haemig spoke on “Promises and Pleas: Luther on Prayer,” and Paulson spoke on “Deus Absconditus in Luther’s Early Sermons (to 1517),” which refers to “the hidden God.”

“This is a meeting of Luther scholars coming from all over the globe,” Haemig says. “Attendees came from Australia, China, South America and many other regions. It really was an international meeting and that’s part of the excitement, that you meet other Luther scholars and have a chance to interact with them.”

Haemig has served on the 10-person Continuation Committee involved with planning the event since 2007, as one of three North American representatives. She and the planning group met in Wittenberg in 2014 to determine the week’s events.

“This is a meeting of Luther scholars from all over the globe.”
“We had plenary addresses four of the mornings, and on the fifth morning, there were short presentations in separate rooms,” Haemig says. “In the afternoons, we met in small groups, which is consistently a part of the Congress that people rate very highly. You stay in the same small group all week and explore one particular theme, so you might present work in progress or discuss a particular piece by Luther. I, for instance, was in one on preaching. It’s a nonthreatening setting to discuss all of our ongoing work on Luther.”

“The exchange of ideas at this event is wonderful. You hear people who have very different perspectives.”

In past years, the Congress has met in different areas worldwide, including Helsinki, Finland, southern Brazil and even at Luther Seminary itself in 1993.

“The exchange of ideas at this event is wonderful,” says Haemig. “You hear people who have very different perspectives and who are dealing with very different contexts, and Luther, of course, can resonate differently in different contexts. It allows us differences in perspective and to appreciate differences in context, and it really helps keep alive the question, ‘What is Luther for today?’ In fact, Luther is a voice that continues to inform and shape our churches around the world.”
Bricks to Bread: God is at Work Here

By Rev. Angela Denker, M.Div. ’13

WHEN KELLY MROCZEK HEARD THAT HER DAD WAS ATTENDING A CLASS ABOUT HOW TO MAKE BRICK OVENS, SHE AT FIRST ASSUMED IT WAS JUST ANOTHER ONE OF HIS OFFBEAT INTERESTS.

Besides working with bricks, Mroczek’s father, Jeff Larson, also knows how to work with iron and metal, and he operates his own metal forge in his backyard.

But something clicked a few months later, when Mroczek talked with family friend Nancy Alvarado, who’d served in the Peace Corps in Costa Rica, and recently had returned from a trip to visit friends in tiny San Marcos de Cutris, in the impoverished northern region.

Cristina Perez, a friend of Alvarado’s from her time in the Peace Corps, was struggling. Their family had been turned upside down after a corporation purchased the land from a nearby forest reserve where Perez’s husband had worked for many years. With the destruction of the forest reserve, he lost his job – and the family lost its main source of income.

Perez had sold crafts and orchids to try and help the family get by, and two of her sons toiled long hours at a nearby pineapple plantation. But it wasn’t enough. Daughter Laura had left her nanny position in San Jose to come home and help the family, but no one was sure where to turn next.

Alvarado knew that Perez and her daughter had marketable baking skills, but without reliable electricity or a large commercial kitchen, she couldn’t see a way ahead for the family.

Enter Larson and his brick-oven-making skills – and Larson’s enterprising and fluent-in-Spanish daughter, Mroczek.

Mroczek, who earned a Master of Arts from Luther in Congregational Mission and Leadership in 2007, felt her passion for Latin America, drive to empower women and families, along with experience and skills in working for nonprofit organizations beginning to come together.
“It’s amazing how you look back over your education and all of your experiences and you see it come together in the end,” Mroczek said.

She had traveled to Costa Rica in high school and went back in 2009, three years before Alvarado reconnected with the Perez family. Mroczek was also shaped by her connection to Pueblo de Esperanza, a Latino church plant in St. Paul, Minn., where she volunteered during her time at Luther. Mroczek had always dreamed of putting together her passion for Latin America, new ministry plants and empowering others.

Soon, Bricks to Bread was born.

“Originally we made this for one family,” Mroczek said, recounting how she and her dad, together with Alvarado, worked with their friends and connections to raise more than $15,000 to build a large brick oven – with prep and clean-up station – for the Perez family.

That first oven has been a big success. Just a few months after Alvarado’s visit to Costa Rica, Larson, Mroczek, Alvarado and friends made trips and took donations to install a large brick oven on the Perez property in San Marcos de Cutris. Since then, members of the Perez family have been able to make more than 1,000 sweet breads and specialties every weekend. They sell empanadas, cinnamon and pineapple rolls, corn biscochos and even take special orders for pizzas, cakes and doughnuts – with a 50 percent profit margin.

“They’ve taken the extra steps to get all the licenses to be a commercial bakery,” Mroczek said of Cristina and Laura Perez, adding that Bricks to Bread finished the final phase of construction this summer at the Perez home, a room for processing and packaging.

From facing poverty and loss of home to creating a mother-daughter entrepreneurial team in Laura and Cristina Perez, Mroczek sees Bricks to Bread turning from being about brick ovens and baking to being an organization that focuses on women empowering women.

Mroczek was the driving force behind moving from one brick oven for family friends to creating an official nonprofit: what is today Bricks to Bread. Partnering with a board of business leaders, attorneys, and even students with a passion for Latin America – Mroczek, Larson and Alvarado created their own nonprofit, something that had once seemed like a faraway dream.

“I had that feeling of ... I wish we could turn this into something, and now here we are,” Mroczek said.

Through partnerships with the Peace Corps and Habitat for Humanity in Costa Rica, Bricks to Bread has identified two more families to receive the next brick ovens. The
A mother-daughter team of Jenni Bustos and 16-year-old Nicy Bustos are hoping to support their family and supplement father Carlos’ income, which is $56 per week during the winter for cutting grass.

As another brick oven recipient, Daysi Sandoval Hernandez, a widow whose husband died last year of leukemia, will team up with daughters Vanessa (20) and Katherine (15) to build a bakery business.

Bricks to Bread is hard at work raising the $30,000-$40,000 it will need to install two more brick ovens and provide support to the families, such as education in how to run a business and obtain the necessary licenses.

“Nobody is going to be left behind,” Mroczek said. “It’s not just, ‘build a brick oven and leave.’ We want to build a supportive network for these families.”

For Mroczek, Larson and Alvarado – that means moving from a primarily word-of-mouth, personal connection-built charity to something larger. Bricks to Bread held its first-ever large-scale charity event this past summer, and Mroczek’s goal is to earn enough grants and support to underwrite operations, so that all fundraising money can go directly into brick ovens. She currently volunteers about 15-20 hours each week for Bricks to Bread, along with the rest of a fully volunteer team.

Mroczek’s husband, Phillip, even learned block laying for a brick oven at Alvarado’s home in St. Louis Park, which is used to bake bread as a fundraiser for future ovens in Costa Rica.

That oven has become a neighborhood attraction. One neighbor even left a $3,000 donation after his death for Bricks to Bread.

For Mroczek, the best part of the story is not the completed ovens, the money the families make, or even successful fundraisers. Instead, it’s that the Perez family themselves have found a way to use the oven to give back.

They give away bread to families in their community experiencing homelessness. And each year since 2012, the Perez family holds a Christmas party with sweets from their oven and gifts purchased with funds from their bakery.

“Children walk for three hours to attend,” Mroczek said. “It’s one of those things where we’re all getting so far with what little we have it’s just amazing; one of those things where it’s clear that God is at work here.”

To learn more about Bricks to Bread, visit BrickstoBread.org.
FOR LINDA BOBBITT, RECEIVING A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE FROM LUTHER SEMINARY IN MAY 2017 WAS HER MOST RECENT STEP TOWARD FINDING NEW WAYS FOR PEOPLE TO CONNECT WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER IN A TIME WHEN THE CHURCH IS UNDERGOING GREAT CHANGE.

Bobbitt, 52, is from Thornton, Colo. Her journey to seminary took a number of twists and turns along the way, starting with a later-in-life turn to Lutheranism to now entering the candidacy process to become a deacon with a call to the ELCA’s Churchwide Organization.

“I was not Lutheran, actually, for most of my life,” Bobbitt says. “I was Catholic as a kid. Then my parents got divorced and I started going to the Episcopal Church. I spent most of my younger life as an Episcopalian. But when my husband and I moved back to Colorado in the mid-90s and went back to the church where we’d been married, I found it dysfunctional. They’d gone through a big split over the gay/lesbian issue, and the church split into two.”

Pregnant with her second child, Bobbitt says she didn’t want to have him baptized into an unhealthy environment. Coincidentally, about that same time Bobbitt met a woman through her administrative job within Health and Human Services (HHS) who belonged to a nearby Lutheran church. The woman wanted to speak

with the HHS department about partnering on an at-risk youth program.

“I thought that was really a great thing, a church that wanted to collaborate with us instead of demanding things from us,” Bobbitt said. “When the time came to look for another church, I said I’d like to go see that one. That first day, more people said ‘hello’ to us than had the entire year before at our old church. And we decided to stay.”

The church Bobbitt attended, Our Saviour’s in Fort Collins, Colo. viewed community collaboration as a big part of its mission. Bobbitt says she convinced her pastor to collaborate on a number of new efforts with the HHS, such as developing and running programs for the homeless. She jokes that as payback, he nominated her for the Region 2 Rocky Mountain Synod Council. She was elected, and eventually was elected to serve as vice president of the synod for two terms totalling eight years.

Bobbitt, who holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s in counseling, continued working at HHS while serving on the council. As such, she said she approached her synod work as she would her day job.

“As vice president, the first thing I did was try to figure out, ‘Well, what are the metrics of this synod thing?’ because everything else I did in my life was all about outcome measurements,” she says. “At HHS, we worked with the United Way and other funders to say, ‘What are the actual needs of this community and how are our funds addressing those needs?’ Then we examined data and figured out what we needed to do to make a difference. But when I looked at the church stuff, all I found was how many people were showing up and how much money they had given. That doesn’t tell you what the church is doing, and it doesn’t say what it’s about.”

As a result, Bobbitt ended up creating a survey tool to ask congregation members to share information about themselves and how they viewed their congregation. She worked
with the ELCA Churchwide Organization to deploy it and tabulate results for the wider church. Those results were also reported to survey respondents.

“When we showed congregations how they responded to the survey, they wound up having really productive conversations from it about ‘What does it mean to be connected with God, one another and the world? What is our sense of mission and how does worship nurture faith? How are we seeking out and using the gifts of people and incorporating those people into our congregation? How are we talking about our faith outside our congregation and having an impact on the community?’ That’s the kind of stuff church should be about, right?”

When her term ended on the synod, Bobbitt spoke with the churchwide organization, saying she thought there was more potential to be found in the survey tool. One thing led to another, and she was eventually hired by the ELCA as a contract researcher and project manager for the Congregational Vitality Project (www.congregationalvitalityproject.com), which “was created to deepen the ELCA’s understanding of congregational vitality: what it means, how vital the ELCA is now, how vitality can be cultivated, and how the ELCA can foster cultivation.”

While doing this work, Bobbitt says she often interacted with clergy members and others within the church, but says she sometimes found she lacked a common vocabulary with which to communicate on these topics.

“My degree expanded my understanding of and imagination for what God is doing and how our congregations and the wider church can better participate in God’s mission,” Bobbitt says. “Learning more about leadership and theology also helps me communicate and engage more effectively with pastors and other lay and rostered leaders. I’m now better equipped to join other leaders in the continuing transformation of the ELCA.”
Faculty and Staff Notes

Adam Copeland, director of Stewardship Leadership, published a book he edited, “Beyond the Offering Plate: A Holistic Approach to Stewardship” (Westminster John Knox Press). With Jason Misselt, he also published “Luther Seminary: It Takes a Village” in Currents in Theology and Mission. And with three co-authors, the Iowa Journal of Communication published his article “Creating Digital Displays of Grief: Appropriateness, Relationality, and Mourning Loss.” Copeland was a featured speaker at the Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference, the Montreat Conferences on Worship and Music, Stewardship Kaleidoscope, Generosity NEXT, the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area and in a number of congregations.

Terri Elton, ’07, associate professor of leadership, led a women’s retreat and staff training at Flathead Bible Camp in June. In September, Elton led the Eastern North Dakota Theology Conference on the theme “Creating a Culture of Call Through Seasons of Change” and the Southwest Minnesota Synod Council Retreat on “Leading in a Connected World.” Elton spoke at the Hope Leadership Conference in West Des Moines, Iowa in October. In November, Elton led the Region 3 Bishops and synod staff retreat in South Dakota.


Mary Jane Haemig, professor of church history and director of the Reformation Research Program, was the keynote speaker at the Northwestern Ohio Synod Assembly in May. She lectured and preached at Trinity Lutheran Church, Sheridan, Wy., in May. She was theologian in residence at Hope Lutheran Church, Walker, Minn., in July, giving several workshops and preaching. She gave a plenary address on “Promises and Pleas: Luther on Prayer” at the International Luther Research Congress in Wittenberg, Germany, in August.

Mary Hess, professor of educational leadership and chair of leadership development, presented the paper “Exploring the epistemological challenges underlying civic engagement by religious communities” at the Good Society conference held at Tufts University in May. Hess presented a paper in July entitled “Storying faith amidst digital cultures: Renewing religious education in the 21st century” to TheoCom2017, a conference sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Catholic Communication Collaboration. In October, Hess presented “Learning from the Antigonish and Highlander movements: Adult education as a concrete way to support universal basic income” in Toronto at
a conference sponsored by the Dominican Institute and the University of St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto.

Arland J. Hultgren, professor emeritus of New Testament, made a presentation at the Fort Dodge Forum, Fort Dodge, Iowa, on “Jesus and the Servant Songs of Isaiah: Perspectives on Faith and Scholarship regarding a Venerable Tradition.”

Andrew Keck, director of library services, presented “The perils and promises of deep collaboration between a college library and a seminary library” at the American Theological Library Association’s Annual Conference in June.


Dirk G. Lange, associate dean, Graduate Theological Education, Fredrick A. Schiotz Chair of Missions, and professor of worship, developed, prepared and oversaw the worship life of the 7th General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Windhoek, Namibia including the global commemoration of the Reformation on Sunday, May 14 with more than 10,000 persons in the Samuel Nujoma Stadium, Windhoek. In May 2017, he gave a lecture in Bose, northern Italy, alongside Cardinal Walter Kasper on the implications of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. In July, Lange presented a lecture on “Lutheran Identity” at the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg, France and attended the meeting of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission in Opole, Poland. He gave lectures on the Reformation and liturgy including at Gustavus Adolphus College, the ecumenical conference “A Journey of Renewal with The Saint John’s Bible,” the 2017 Fall Theological Conference Northeastern MN Synod and the Saskatchewan Synod Leadership Conference.

Lois Malcolm, professor of systematic theology, gave three talks on the Holy Spirit at St. Andrews, Lutheran and two talks on the same topic at First Presbyterian Church of Stillwater in October. She also preached at the joint bilingual service at Faith Chinese and Galilee Lutheran Church and was a keynote speaker at a conference on “Salvation and Mission” at Rochester College in October. For the Reformation celebrations at Colonial Church in Edina, she was a speaker and preacher. She participated in a panel on the Reformation at Austin Seminary and spoke in one of its classes. She also preached at Theresa Latini’s inauguration as president of United Lutheran Seminary in November.

Matthew Skinner, professor of New Testament, has a three-volume project being published in coming months by Baylor University Press called “A Companion to the New Testament.” Volume 1 will be available in November; volumes 2 and 3 will be available by the end of January.

Dwight Zscheile, ’08, associate professor of congregational mission and leadership, led the Rostered Leaders’ Retreat for the East Central Wisconsin Synod in May and is the lead consultant and coach on their Reimagining Church learning community process. In the fall, he delivered the Paddock Lectures at General Theological Seminary in New York and serve as keynote speaker at the annual conventions of the Episcopal Dioceses of Central New York and Nebraska. He has been consultant to the review of the Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry Program of Wartburg College. His latest book, “Participating in God’s Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America” (co-authored with Craig Van Gelder) will be released by Eerdmans in January.
Alum News

‘10s
Andrew Bruhn, ’14, won the IL American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) Composition Contest including a $1,000 prize and a premiere at the state conference this summer.

Denise Hilton, ’11, launched the blog WebEmployed (www.webemployed.com) to share legitimate sources for part-time jobs for students so they can make money online during their semester breaks.

Lydia Posselt, ’11, was called to Family of God Lutheran Church in Buckingham, Pa. Posselt delivered the sermon at the closing worship of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia, in May.

‘80s
Bradley Jenson, ’84, presented a paper titled, “Luther and the Jews: A Three-Phase Journey in his Thinking,” at the 2017 LCMC Augustana District’s Annual Theological Conference. The paper has been accepted for publication in the Reformation 2017 edition of LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology.

Ann Ziegert, ’88, passed away due to a car accident in December 2015. She had been pastor at Lutheran churches in Granville and McNabb, Ill.

‘00s
Tony D. Ede, ’06, graduated with a Master of Business Administration degree from Upper Iowa University. His concentration was on organizational leadership and development with focus on church growth and conflict management.

Todd Hobart, ’09, published his first book, “Martin Luther as Youth Worker.”

‘70s


‘90s
Linda Hatcher, ’95, retired in March. Hatcher’s last call was chaplain at Artman Home in Ambler, Pa.

Mari Larson, ’96, is now senior pastor of Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kan. She also serves as vice president of the Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-faith Representatives Network of the ELCA.

Kristine Totzke, ’92, began a new call in September 2016 as the bishop’s associate for leadership formation and congregational care for the Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana Synod.

‘60s


For more alumni news, or to submit your own, visit www.luthersem.edu/alums.
Events Calendar

MLK Day
Jan. 15, 2018
Luther Seminary

Mid-Winter Convocation
Faith and Science
Jan. 24-26, 2018
Luther Seminary
www.luthersem.edu/convo

Scholarship Weekend
March 4-5, 2018
Luther Seminary
www.luthersem.edu/visit

26th Festival of Homiletics
Preaching and Politics
May 21-25, 2018
Washington, D.C.
www.festivalofhomiletics.com

SAVE THE DATE
JAN. 24-26, 2018

Faith and Science

2018 Mid-Winter Convocation

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