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Field of Dreams

Edgar Johnson is using his farm to give back what God has given, and make dreams come true for future church leaders.

Edgar Johnson looks out at his fields of golden wheat and rows of green-leaved soybeans and sees a gift from God.

“All that I have has come from God. It seems appropriate to give it back,” said the Wheaton, Minn. farmer.

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Matching gift programs make a difference!

In the fiscal year 2001-2002, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans’ antecedents Lutheran Brotherhood and Aid Association for Lutherans provided $264,705 in matching gift dollars to Luther Seminary. Lutheran Brotherhood matched $178,955 of $445,052 in donor/member gifts. AAL matched $85,750 of $184,578 given by donors/members.

Luther Seminary thanks Thrivent for its generosity and all the seminary donors/Thrivent members who took advantage of the gift matching program.

Consider your own creative giving!

There are many different ways people can create gifts using a multitude of assets—ways that can both bless Luther Seminary and help individuals and families through tax incentives and life income agreements.

Did you know?

Luther Seminary has nearly 300 volunteers. These Good Neighbors, as they are called, use their gifts in diverse and interesting ways. In addition, they meet together on campus twice a year for fellowship, a meal and the opportunity to share volunteer experiences with one another.

More Good Neighbors are needed! Whatever your skills or interest, chances are there is a volunteer position available. To obtain a copy of Luther Seminary’s resource directory of volunteer ministry opportunities, contact Mary Steeber, volunteer programs coordinator, at 651-641-3596, or via e-mail at msteber@luthersem.edu.

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Faithfulness in Ministry Cross 2003

The Faithfulness in Ministry Cross award recognizes faithful servants of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Three awards, which are given annually to graduates of Luther Seminary or its antecedent schools, recognize faithful service in three categories: small town/rural ministry, urban/suburban ministry, and specialized ministry. It is with thanksgiving that Luther Seminary honors this year’s recipients: Milo Mathison, Jack Niemi and Robert Quam. Each will receive their award during Mid-Winter Convocation in January.

Milo Mathison, small town/rural ministry

The recipient of the small town/rural ministry award, Milo Mathison, was ordained in 1958 and served rural parishes in northwestern Minnesota from 1966 until his retirement in 1999. In the words of longtime colleague Rev. Jerry Erickson, he “represents the very best of Lutheran piety linked with pragmatic populism, always serving with a heart for the plight of farmers.” He challenged his parishioners to ministry and mission in the community and in the world not only by his words, but by his deeds and examples. Mathison made outreach to prison inmates part of his calling to share the gospel. “He has the most effective jail ministry of any pastor I have ever known,” nominator Arthur Rammered said. Mathison faithfully visited the regional jail every Sunday, a commitment that touched countless lives with hope and encouragement.

Jack Niemi, urban/suburban ministry

“A pattern of emphasis on church growth is apparent in all of Jack Niemi’s Christ-centered congregations,” nominator Ted Johns said. Niemi spent 29 years serving suburban congregations before joining the administration at Gustavus Adolphus College in 2001. He is being recognized for his faithfulness in urban/suburban ministry.

As pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Naperville, Ill. — the largest congregation in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod — he led the congregation in overall stewardship growth, branching out from local outreach to support outreach work building a church and seminary facilities in Slovakia. He also demonstrated his commitment to connecting congregations in united mission while serving St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Walnut Creek, Calif., by developing a strong partnership with an inner-city church in Oakland. He exhibited debt leadership and strategic planning skills by helping steer several congregations through extensive debt-reduction and building programs.

His outstanding work as a parish pastor, his visionary thinking, and his ability to communicate effectively and persuasively led to his appointment as vice president of church relations at Gustavus Adolphus, wrote Gustavus Internim President Dennis Johnson. “Connecting with post-modern men and women is a passion that informs Jack’s programs and preaching. He is constantly concerned to know the intersection of the scriptures, theology, and modern society.”

Robert Quam, specialized ministry

Bob Quam’s faithfulness to the call of the gospel to identify and shape leaders for the mission of Christ in today’s world has borne much fruit during his 27 years as director of Christikon Bible Camp near Big Timber, Mont. Many young campers have returned to serve on the camp staff, and a significant number of the staff have gone on to serve as rostered, ordained and lay leaders in the ELCA. Former Christikon staff member Molly Sasser-Goehner, a current master of divinity student at Luther Seminary, attributes this to Quam’s careful and prayerful treatment of staff and his obvious love and respect of the church’s liturgy, music and the scriptures. “At Christikon, young people and their families experience their faith and the gospel of Christ through fellowship at meals, Bible study, worship and the created world. Pastor Quam is intentional about ensuring that these elements are kept in place and that they maintain a distinctly Lutheran interpretation,” Sasser-Goehner wrote. ‘His deep faith and hope in the gospel is evident in his selection of biblical texts for the program and his reverence of worship and music.” “I know of no person who has so ably advocated for the vocation of ministry in the church,” said Mark Ramseth, president of Trinity Lutheran Seminary and former Montana Synod bishop. “His influence and care has resulted in dozens of candidates for ministry.”

In addition to his passionate leadership at Christikon, Quam has served the church through involvement with the ELCA’s Board for the Division for Ministry and on the board of directors of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. He also sits on the advisory board for the theological journal dialogue.

The Faithfulness in Ministry Cross was established in 1991 by the Luther Seminary alumni/ae Council to “identify, recognize, celebrate and give thanks for alums, both clergy and lay, who have lived lives of faithfulness in ministry.”

Candidates must have demonstrated exemplary faithfulness and service throughout their careers in ministry, and they must be nominated by fellow alums or other colleagues.

Look for nomination form in the next issue of Story.
Exploring the North American Mission Field

Students find good fit/peer support in new Luther Seminary D.Min. in congregational mission and leadership

When the 12 students of Luther Seminary’s new doctor of ministry (D.Min.) program in congregational mission and leadership gathered for the first time on campus, it didn’t take long for them to bond. That’s because they had already introduced themselves online. Along with general information, they discussed their beliefs, values and ministries via the Internet before attending the first seminar in July. It was no accident that these individuals would come together as a cohesive peer group. The new D.Min. is structured so that cohorts of 12 students go through the program together in order to maximize peer learning. The students are also bonded by their desire to revitalize congregations and develop new ones in the challenging contexts of a growing mission field: North America.

Peers strengthen learning process

Melanie Wallschlaeger is the youngest person in the D.Min.’s first cohort. A 1998 graduate of Luther Seminary, she serves as a mid-sized rural congregation in Sioux Falls, S.D., is 1,800 members strong and growing. “Leadership needs to change and grow with it,” Wallschlaeger said.

She expressed appreciation for the breadth of experience her D.Min. peers provide, and for the cohort aspect of learning.

“We have developed peer support. We learn from each other,” she said.

Weekly online interaction has been particularly important in maintaining peer learning, Wallschlaeger continued. “We have weekly assignments: required readings, responses to the readings, and responses to each other’s writings. There’s even an online prayer group.”

The peers also become accountable to each other. The times she has been missing from online discussions, Wallschlaeger’s colleagues have sent her inquiring e-mails and have even phoned to make sure all was well.

Cutting edge skills for suburban “missionary work”

For Michael Peck, the D.Min. program seemed a good fit for his interests and needs in his present context. He is senior pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Overland Park, Kan., a suburb of Kansas City. Peck describes his congregation as “young, dynamic and growing. We serve many young families that come from limited church backgrounds. As a staff, we are constantly reminding ourselves that we are doing ‘missionary work.’”

Peck sees the context in which he serves as very post-modern. “Holy Cross must seek new ways to reach out to the community and new ways to develop the disciples within our congregation. The D.Min. program is helping us think long and hard about the relation between mission and context.

“I hope to improve my capabilities as a leader and to help the wider church capture a new sense of mission in a rapidly changing culture,” he continued. “We can no longer do things the way we have always done them as a church and expect to survive.”

Learning to be a missional pastor

Robert Sachs’ ministry is decidedly different from Peck’s and Wallschlaeger’s. Sachs serves a mid-sized rural congregation in Cordova, Neb., 50 miles west of Lincoln. The congregation will celebrate 120 years of ministry in 2003.

“Over the past five years I have been searching for a program that would help me develop understanding and skills as a missional pastor. Until now, I didn’t know of any school that offered a D.Min. program in congregational mission and church leadership development,” he stated.

Sachs saw in Luther Seminary’s D.Min. program “the opportunity to apply my studies to the community and the communion in which I am serving, along with the privilege of being in a new community and in communion with fellow students and seminary faculty who are all learning and re-discovering biblical and contextual ways of following Jesus in our North American culture.”

Sachs seeks to prepare himself to serve in this new mission field. “I hope to be a better witness to the gospel in our North American culture … I hope to be a more visionary leader in these changing times among ALL the people of God, not just the church or the ELCA. I would invite the opportunity to be sent and start a new congregation in an area where there is no ELCA presence.”

Vignec named 2003 alum in residence

The Doctor of Ministry Program in Congregational Mission and Leadership is accepting applications for the next cohort until March 1, 2003. Applicants will be notified of acceptance by April 1. An online application and additional information are available at www.luthersem.edu/dmin

The Alumni/ae Council named Pastor Ron Vignec, Tacoma, Wash., as the 2003 Alum in Residence. He will be on campus Feb. 24-28. As alum in residence, he will meet with students and faculty, participate in classes and preach in chapel.

Vignec is pastor of Salishan/Eastside Lutheran Mission in Tacoma. Salishan, the largest low-income housing project on the West Coast, is home to more than 3,500 in 850 homes. Most of the residents are immigrant families from Cambodia, Vietnam, Mexico and Russia. “Ron Vignec is ably suited for this ministry that runs outside the boundaries of most parish experiences, yet is firmly anchored in the proclaimed word and the shared table of the Lord,” wrote Pastor David C. Wold, in his nomination of Vignec. “He is an able teacher and interpreter of how God is at work in the midst of the city.”

Architecture for Worship

A new Luther Productions video series, Architecture for Worship, takes a close look at Sovik’s creative designs that have forever changed church architecture.

This three-part series captures the essence of architect Sovik’s motivation and heart for worship space design. Sovik, himself, provides on-camera guidance to examination of his own buildings around the country.

The video presentation is hosted by Mons Teig, professor of worship at Luther Seminary. Also featured is Carol Frenning, an adjunct instructor in the Art History Department of the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Mn., and a liturgical design consultant.

For further information or to order a copy, contact Luther Productions by phone: 651-644-3219; by fax: 651-641-7711; by mail: 2481 Como Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108 or by e-mail luthpro@luthersem.edu.

Luther Productions presents Architecture for Worship

Architecture for Worship is part of the Faith Discovery Series by Luther Productions. It offers everything churches or individuals need for an adult forum, church committee, or church-wide meeting on the importance of well-designed liturgical space—including a study guide that accompanies the videos. It is an excellent resource for congregations thinking about remodeling or building new worship spaces.

The video presentation is hosted by Mons Teig, professor of worship at Luther Seminary. Also featured is Carol Frenning, an adjunct instructor in the Art History Department of the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Mn., and a liturgical design consultant.
The ‘50s
Paul A. Ranum, ’56, was appointed to serve as intern bishop of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. He will succeed Bishop Stanley Olson, ’72, who became executive director of the ELCA Division for Ministry in November Ranum will serve the synod until a new bishop is elected in June 2003. He retired in 1994 after serving six years as a synod council member.

The ‘60s
Halvor Ronning, ’62, lives and works in Jerusalem, Israel, with his wife, Mirja. They founded the Home for Bible Translators in Jerusalem, Inc. The Home provides complete study courses in the Hebrew Bible and heavily subsidized housing in Jerusalem. Ronning has been a lecturer in history and geography and a licensed guide of the land of Israel. The Ronnings have resided in Jerusalem for more than 30 years, and have three children and six grandchildren.

The ‘70s
Ronald Marshall, ’75, had an article published in the Sept. 2002 issue of the Soren Kierkegaard Newsletter. The title of his article is “Kierkegaard’s Cure for Divorce.” He also had an article published in the July issue of The Bride of Christ entitled “The Bishop’s God’s Righteous Frown.” He serves as pastor at First Lutheran Church of West Seattle, Wash.

Timothy Wengert, ’77, presented a paper on the United Methodist and Lutheran understandings of justification and sanctification at the Lutheran-United Methodist dialogue that convened in Oslo, Norway, Sept. 12-16. Wengert is professor of Reformation history at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. The aim of the dialogue was to consider key theological issues as they affect the possibility of the two churches entering full communion.

D. Randall Faro, ’76, was installed as pastor at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Chehalis, Wash. Previously, he led congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada for more than 26 years.

The ‘80s
Bill Gafkjen, ’85, began ministry as the district conductor to the bishop and director for candidacy in global mission and campus ministry in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in September.

The ‘90s
John A. Kroschel, ’90, received his doctor of ministry degree from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, N.Y. His doctoral thesis is entitled, “Dialectic Preaching in a Postmodern Ethos.”

Hans Wiersma, ’91, was awarded a supplemental stipend by the Evangelical Church of Germany and the ELCA Wittenberg Center for his studies at the center located in Wittenberg, Germany. He is working on his Ph.D. dissertation “The Recantation, Rehabilitation, and Reformation of Jakob Probst, Luther’s former chaplain and Friend in the Low Countries.”

Steven R. P., ’93, and Evelyn J. P. Weston, ’91 and ’02, accepted calls to serve as co-pastors at First Lutheran Church, Renville, Minn. Evelyn was ordained in September 2002.


Karl, ’99, and Anjanette Rist, ’99, were guest speakers at the Church Youth Fest at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, in November. They are pastors of First Lutheran Church in Fremont, Neb.

The ‘00s
Karl Hester, ’01, serves as an associate pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Aberdeen, S.D. Part of his ministry includes youth and family ministry. He was ordained in July 2001 at his Youth Leadership site, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Eagan, Minn. His e-mail address is khester@aol.com.

Marc Hander, ’91, and his wife Jerilyn (Dunlap) Hander, ’99, have three children. The birth of their first child in November. Marc is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Greenville, Texas. He was ordained in February at Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Thrall, Texas. Jerlyn is a claims analyst with Trust Services Inc., in Greenville.

In memoriam
Orin Dean Thompson, ’42, died Sept. 12, 2002 of an aortic aneurysm. He was 86. He served parishes in Montana for 49 years. He was associate pastor of Central Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, for 20 years before retiring in 1981. Two years later he was called as chaplain at Ebenezer Lutheran Church and Home in Minneapolis where he served for 10 years. He is survived by his wife, Doris, daughters Susan White, Ann Foshee and Farh Burch, son Mark Thompson, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Donald H. Lee, ’54, died in June 2002 after a long illness. He is survived by his wife, Margaret, his children Maia, Kari, Tora, Marcus, Anton, Gustav, Ivan, Katherine and Kristofer, and 11 grandchildren.

Fred Ringham died Sept. 8, 2002. He served as chair of the boards of Lutheran Seminary antecedents Northwestern Seminary and Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary. In 1982, he co-chaired the merger between Luther and Northwestern seminaries. He is survived by his wife Norma, son Eric, daughter Jody Ronshoe and Kathy Teigland, and seven grandchildren.

Church youth help promote healthy lifestyle
The youth of Mayville-Gran Lutheran Church in Mayville, N.D., who were visiting their congregation find health of body and soul. They partnered with the Health Cabinet to put on a Family Fun Fair as part of Rally Sunday. The fair featured games and activities that promoted physical activity and mental stimulation. Participants were treated to healthy snacks after completing an activity.

Congregation makes something positive out of declining Sunday school enrollment
Faced with declining Sunday school enrollment at their congregation, the members of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Spearfish, S.D., combined fellowship with evangelism by bringing together eight people for an evening of dinner and conversation. The group meets monthly. At each meeting, the group hosts a meal for eight people (such as new or prospective members from church) to join the group for the evening. The other four participants bring salad and dessert to complete the meal.

The groups were created by randomly pairing interested individuals and groups are reassigned after the three-month rotation is over.

Knit one, pray two
Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wis., has an outreach ministry knitting and crocheting prayer shawls for those in need of comfort. The church takes prayer requests and then knits or crochets the shawls according to the needs of the person asking for them. The shawls are delivered to their congregation find health of body and soul. They partnered with the Health Cabinet to put on a Family Fun Fair as part of Rally Sunday. The fair featured games and activities that promoted physical activity and mental stimulation. Participants were treated to healthy snacks after completing an activity.

Congregation meets and greets newest additions via newsletter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minn., uses its monthly newsletter to not only update members on new family additions, but to tell more of the story to the church. The newsletter includes details about why the parents chose that name, siblings and brothers, and baptism plans. "Dinner for Eight" program combines fellowship with evangelism
You don’t have to be a gourmet cook to understand the nourishment that comes with gathering over a good meal. The “Dinner for Eight” program at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in Spearfish, S.D., combines fellowship with evangelism by bringing together eight people for an evening of dinner and conversation. The group meets monthly. At each meeting, the group hosts a meal for eight people (such as new or prospective members from church) to join the group for the evening. The other four participants bring salad and dessert to complete the meal.

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Paul A. Daniels, Lutheran Seminary archivist/curator and Region 3 archivist, was elected vice-president of the Lutheran Historical Conference at the organization’s biennial meeting at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The LHC is an association of historians, archivists and librarians from the various Lutheran synods committed to the study of American Lutheranism. Daniels has been a board member since 1998.

Gracia Grindal, ’83, professor of rhetoric, had five reflections published by Christian Century. They centered on the texts for the Sundays during the months of September and early October. Also, Fazer has just published a collection of Bible and spiritual songs for solo voice by Finnish composer Kari Tikka with English translations by Grindal.

Mary Jane Haemig, associate professor of church history, was awarded a stipend by the Evangelical Church of Germany and the ELCA Wittenberg Center to study at the center in Wittenberg. Mary Haemig is on sabbatical writing a treatise on “Advent/Christmas/Epiphany: Text, Germany and the ELCA Wittenberg.”


Mark Swanson, associate professor of Islamic Studies, lectured on “Islam and Christianity. Religious Resources for Living with Differences” at Augsburg College in November. His presentation was part of Augsburg’s 2002-2003 Convocation Series, “Living with Differences.”

Lutheranism was a strong presence in Russia until the Bolshevik revolution. During the Soviet period the Lutheran congregations were dissolved and all Lutheran pastors were deported to Siberian labor camps because they were German. All but a few of these pastors died. In the 1970s and 1980s, Lutheran congregational life began again, but was strictly regulated, allowing for little growth. By the 1990s, only one bishop and his wife were doing Lutheran ministry for all of Russia. Established in 1994, the Lutheran Seminary at St. Petersburg is preparing students for much needed pastoral and lay leadership needs for all of Russia. Luther Seminary raised many thousands of dollars to help establish the seminary outside St. Petersburg. Brusic gave a talk to the students and faculty. The entire tour group participated in a Q and A session. Both Americans and Russians were eager to learn from each other. Brusic presented a copy of Luther Productions’ Church History Tutor to the Rev. D. Craig Barnes and the Rev. Susan Birchel will be the keynote speakers. Barnes is professor of pastoral ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, and former senior pastor of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Birchel is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a writing associate for the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People of Faith.

Convocation 2003 will offer participants ideas on how to develop, nurture and shape effective proclamation in congregations. Participants will also receive resources for integrating what is proclaimed on Sunday in their lives Monday through Saturday.

Advance registration is required. Space is limited so register early. Registration will close when full or by Dec. 15, whichever comes first. For more information, call (651) 641-3419 or visit www.luthersem.edu/convoco for details and fast, convenient registration.

Mid-Winter Convocation focuses on proclamation

Pastors, lay leaders, ministry directors, study groups and congregation members are invited to learn how proclamation equips congregations and individuals for faithful living at Mid-Winter Convocation, Jan. 8-10, 2003. The Rev. Dr. M. Craig Barnes and the Rev. Susan Birchel will be the keynote speakers. Barnes is professor of pastoral ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, and former senior pastor of National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Birchel is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a writing associate for the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People of Faith.

Convocation 2003 will offer participants ideas on how to develop, nurture and shape effective proclamation in congregations. Participants will also receive resources for integrating what is proclaimed on Sunday in their lives Monday through Saturday.

Advance registration is required. Space is limited so register early. Registration will close when full or by Dec. 15, whichever comes first. For more information, call (651) 641-3419 or visit www.luthersem.edu/convoco for details and fast, convenient registration.

Pre-Convocation seminar explores small group ministry

How does small group ministry affect a congregation’s vitality? This question and the role of small groups in congregations will be explored at the pre-Convocation seminar, “People Together: Small Group Structures for the Vital Congregation” on Jan. 7.