



Lutheran School of
Theology at Chicago



Joint report to synods from LSTC & Wartburg Theological Seminary

Dear Partners in Ministry in the Northern Illinois Synod,

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) and Wartburg Theological Seminary (WTS), the two seminaries that the Northern Illinois Synod supports, stand united with a vision to form compassionate, ever-evolving leaders for a changing church.

This year brought transitions in our individual communities, accompanied by a global context none of us could have predicted. As the pandemic unfolded around us, each seminary remained committed to offering distinctive opportunities for seminary education with bold visions for the future of our work.

Both LSTC and WTS continue to invest in preparing and growing their diverse student bodies. A few examples of these efforts are highlighted below.

Implementing new strategic plans to promote sustainability and innovation

- WTS implemented a new strategic plan in 2020, which unfolds over three academic years. This plan will not only direct WTS's work and priorities, but will hold WTS accountable to institutional learnings along the way. It is designed as a process of ongoing discernment and regular assessment, creating space for adaptations as needed, in support of WTS's mission: "learning leads to mission and mission informs learning." A hallmark of this strategic plan is the Process of Innovation, under which all of new experiments and initiatives are assessed.
- LSTC's strategic plan steering committee, composed of a variety of internal and external stakeholders, identified successes, named problems and raised questions. In October 2020 they made a proposal on a new three-year plan, appropriately titled "For such a time as this." This plan was approved by the board of directors and then introduced to the full LSTC community. LSTC's new 2021-2023 strategic plan will allow LSTC, alongside faithful partners and supporters, to address three main themes: "Who do we hope our students will become?;" "How do we hope our school will continue?;" and "What do we hope our changes will enable?;" A full map of the strategic plan, including 2021 priorities, can be found on the LSTC website.

Curating dynamic institutional leadership to teach, advise and form students for ministry

- WTS made several key hires in 2020, welcoming three new faculty members and two new members of the Administrative Cabinet. Dr. Man-Hei Yip, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Rev. Dr. Jan Schnell, Associate Professor of Liturgics joined the faculty in July 2020, and Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández-Marcial, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible joined the faculty in July 2021. WTS also welcomed the Rev. Liz Albertson, Vice President for Student Services, and the Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largen, President. The Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largen most recently served United Lutheran Seminary and Gettysburg College as Professor and Associate Dean.
- In 2020, LSTC hired two new faculty, Dr. Eliseo Perez-Alvarez, Associate Professor of Lutheran Systematic Theology and Global Lutheranism and Rev. Dr. Brooke Petersen, Pastoral Theology Lecturer and Director of MDiv and MA Programs and Coordinator for Candidacy. LSTC also welcomed Chris Huang as Registrar and Director of Institutional Effectiveness.

Pivoting in the pandemic to continue preparing students to lead faithfully

- Existing WTS programs and technology made it possible for WTS to meet challenges brought on in the pandemic without disrupting the daily rhythm of life at WTS: worship continued; every single class met as the community transitioned to fully online learning; searches for faculty members and a new president pressed on—all with no required technology upgrades. Wartburg community life “Together, Wherever We Are,” is not due to matching shirts, shared lingo, or the right Zoom link. It is because of who Jesus is and what God in Christ does in, with, and through each of us.
- Providing an exceptional student experience during a pandemic presented challenges, but LSTC rose to the occasion. Starting in March 2020, all of LSTC’s classes switched to an online format. In the summer, the institution pulled data and resources to build out an online teaching platform and invested in information technology, which enabled classes in the fall semester to be offered fully online. LSTC will now offer online learning options indefinitely alongside in-person learning opportunities once it is safe to return to campus. In addition, formerly in-person events transitioned to Zoom events throughout 2020, allowing LSTC to engage with global students, alumni and partners in an efficient and effective way. Events centered on eucharist practices, Latinx church leadership, spirituality in a digital age, and many more topics garnered great interest and unprecedented participation. Event recordings are available on LSTC’s YouTube site.

Through these avenues and others, the seminaries proudly produce qualified, eager, and visionary leaders. Both seminaries are positioned to continue to do so, with over 410 students enrolled in coursework from across the country in both seminaries.

Please know that you are welcome at our seminaries, at any time, online or in person! Participate in an upcoming educational opportunities. Join us for community events. Worship alongside our students in chapel. Bring someone you know with gifts for ministry. Consider rostered ministry in the ELCA. Come create a meaningful connection with the future leaders that you and your synod support through your gifts to Wartburg and LSTC.

Your partnership is essential for LSTC and Wartburg to continue our shared mission of providing effective theological education and developing leaders for the many ministries of your congregation, synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are so grateful for you and our shared collaborations for the sake of the gospel in service of the church and the world. We could not do this work without you! Thank you for your time, thank you for your talents, and thank you for your financial support.

To learn more about your seminaries and the innovative ways that we are forming leaders, please visit www.lstc.edu and www.wartburgseminary.edu.

Yours in Christ,



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The Rev. Kristin Johnston Lergen, Ph.D.
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