



SOUTHERN BULLETIN

FALL 2023

FEATURES

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

Sharing stories in ministry and media

Curiosity and the call

Supporting first responders and family

Conversation and unity

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Rector's Letter

In Memoriam

Rector Reads

GET IN TOUCH

The Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer
Rector and Dean
chad.rimmer@lr.edu

© 2023 Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, NC. Lenoir-Rhyne, founded in 1891, is a private liberal arts institution affiliated with the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Southern Bulletin is a publication of Lenoir-Rhyne University and produced for friends of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos are taken by Mikeala Skelton or the Marketing and Communications department.



LWF Assembly participants take part in a team-building exercise during a workshop session. Photo: LWF/Albin Hill

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope

LWF 13th Assembly affirms commitment to unity and progress

At its 13th Assembly in September 2023, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gathered in Krakow, Poland, under the theme "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." The seven-day agenda allowed ample opportunities for attendees to worship together and to address a host of global issues that included climate change, refugee and migration crises, equity and inclusivity, and humanitarian aid alongside issues of theological education and ecumenism.

The final message of the Assembly, authored by delegates from around the world and delivered by Bishop Kaisamari Hintikka of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, affirmed the LWF's commitment to unity and progress. "The incarnation [of Jesus Christ] challenges us to recognize God in every person and in all of creation, acknowledging our deep-down unity. But we live in a divided world, where bodies are hurting, rejected, excluded, and the earth, our

shared home, is suffering from the effects of growing environmental and climate emergencies."

The Assembly opened on September 13 with a Holy Communion service and continued through September 19 with daily worship services. The week's program also included business sessions, approvals of public statements and resolutions, study sessions and an emotionally powerful visit

CONTINUED PAGE 3

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Sharing stories in ministry and media



Matt Hansen '24, social media lead at the LWF Assembly, confers with church leaders.

When Matt Hansen '24 decided to leave marketing for ministry he couldn't have anticipated he'd end up overseeing social media operations at the 13th Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assembly.

"The Assembly was incredibly meaningful because each day I was meeting new people from all over the world who share an identity as Lutheran Christians. You can learn a great deal from people who come from different contexts but share the same traditions," Hansen observed.

Hansen was new to the LWF but eager to get involved when he learned preparations for the Assembly were underway. "Last spring the LWF published a call for communicators, and I applied because my prior occupation was in digital communications. Then I was named social media lead, and it was very meaningful

to be able to intertwine my previous occupation with my call to ministry."

Hansen will finish his Master of Divinity in May 2024 and is working toward ordination as a minister of word and sacrament in the North Carolina Synod of the ELCA. He completed his bachelor's degree at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, with majors in political science and sociology. He started his career in marketing as a student blogger for the office of admission.

"My sister died before I started my second year of college, which affected my focus. When I graduated in 2013, I felt aimless, but I had solid marketing experience, so I got an internship and spent the next eight years in marketing and advertising positions," said Hansen.

As Hansen processed his grief, he found he wanted more meaningful work. He came back to his hometown of Andrews, North Carolina, and met with the pastor at his home church, St. Andrew Lutheran Church. After a year of discernment, he enrolled at LTSS, so he could remain near his family.

"I always felt insecure because I didn't think my marketing background fit the ideal of a pastor," Hansen shared. "Through work with churches in the North Carolina Synod to the LWF, I now feel excited about how my marketing background can be intertwined with my vocation of ministry in the years to come." ●

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Curiosity and the call



Left to right, Kjell Bakken '26, the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the ELCA, and Matt Hansen '24.

Intellectual curiosity has driven Kjell Bakken '26 through college, then to LTSS, and, this fall, to the 13th Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assembly as a member of a class of students cross-registered from seminaries around the U.S.

"I spent a lot of time talking to people from around the world, about our hopes and our fears," Bakken shared. "There's a lot of concern about the rise of authoritarianism in different places, but it gave me hope to have these conversations and see the LWF addressing so many current issues in their resolutions."

As an undergraduate at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, Bakken's curiosity and diverse interests posed a challenge.

"I went to college thinking I was going to be a math major," said Bakken. "Then I wanted

to do theater, then social studies, education, history. I bounced around between majors until I had to pick something. I went where my best grades were — religion."

Growing up in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, with both parents as pastors, Bakken spent years resisting comments from parishioners who assumed he would follow in his parents' footsteps.

"I always thought they were making conversation with the pastor's kid. They didn't know anything else about me, so ministry was an easy topic," said Bakken. "I grew up with that connection to the church as a constant part of my life. That's hard to ignore."

After graduating from St. Olaf in 2018, Bakken took a full-time job with Sugar Creek Bible Camp, an outdoor ministry in Ferryville, Wisconsin.

"Working at Sugar Creek, I found some gifts for leadership — especially small group youth leadership — and creative problem-solving in the non-profit sphere," he explained.

Bakken began looking at seminaries and came to LTSS after meeting Macy Kennedy '22 on his campus visit. Earlier this year, he proposed to her in the classroom where they first met.

"I also value the faculty and staff here," Bakken added, smiling. "They set up curriculum and events to meet students where we are and shape our learning to meet our best interests." ●

RECTOR'S LETTER



The Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer
Rector and Dean

Belonging.

The strategic plan that guides the way in which LTSS nurtures, educates and forms leaders for public ministry includes a call to foster a broad sense of belonging. This semester, two LTSS students expanded their sense of belonging to the global expression of the Lutheran church. They were part of an ELCA seminary cohort that attended the Thirteenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation.

Delegates from 149 Lutheran churches around the world gathered in Krakow to worship as a global communion, elect a council and pass resolutions, and learn about the context of the local host church, the Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. The theme for this Assembly was "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." This theme, taken from Ephesians 4, invites us to reflect on our sense of belonging as well as the gift and task of our ministry of reconciliation.

We face many ideological forces that seek to fragment parts of creation that were intended to exist in one holistic balance. Misleading partisan, economic, spiritual, and social narratives characterize people of different national, cultural, religious, gender, sexual or racial identities as "other." These narratives colonize our sense of belonging to the world around us. These spirits of the age dislocate people and culture from lands and separate humans from the Earth. They seek to domesticate differences by imposing cultural, linguistic or political and economic uniformity.

In the face of uniformity, the theme of this Assembly returns us to the Divine wisdom of unity as reconciled diversity. The Trinity is an icon of diversity in unity. The relational nature of the Creator is reflected in

the biological and social diversity that we see in creation. Our baptism reconciles us to a global communion of churches. The musical, cultural and ministerial diversity of the Lutheran communion offers an experience of "the gift of oneness lived in unity and diversity." When we open ourselves to experience diversity, we open ourselves to ever expanding circles of belonging to one another, to all creation, and ultimately to God.

LTSS strives to prepare leaders whose public ministry of reconciliation offers a gracious experience of belonging through local congregations, to communities, the lands we inhabit, and all creatures who share the Earth as our common home. LTSS offers theological education that grounds learning and formation in classroom, congregation, and community. As a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) seminary, we strive to create spaces of belonging that are safe, open, and participatory for all. Our RIC designation affirms that "In a culture divided along lines of age, race, sex, sexuality, economic wealth and more, we commit to being a place of belonging for all our students and partners in ministry."

LTSS' mission is to prepare leaders for the Church's public ministry of reconciling diversity. One Body, One Spirit, One Hope. Here at LTSS, you belong. ●

The Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer, Rector and Dean



The Rev. Dr. Eric Skidmore, left, and Jay Ortiz.

Supporting first responders and family

With a desire to dive deeper into his calling as a public safety chaplain coupled with the support of his peers, Jay Ortiz took the next step in his career by completing the public safety chaplaincy certification program at LTSS.

"I knew the leadership that was behind the program, Chaplain Eric Skidmore and the Rev. Dr. Tony Everett. Couple this with the reputation of LTSS and it was a no-brainer," shared Ortiz, who was most recently named the public safety chaplain in the fire and police departments for the City of North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

One of the biggest takeaways from the program for Ortiz was the relationships he formed with other students and the faculty. "The training was amazing, but the bonds of brotherhood that were established through this course are irreplaceable. It's those relationships that have impacted my life the most," he shared. "The comradery that was built with like-minded people wanting to go deeper in their walk with Christ, deeper in their knowledge and understanding of their role as a public safety chaplain, and to re-present Jesus to their agencies – it is forever life changing."

As part of the first cohort to complete the public safety chaplaincy certification, Ortiz is continuing to feel the impact of his decision to undertake the program. "In my career and my calling, completing the certification has made all the difference in the world. My department went from having no chaplains, to part-time pastors/chaplains coming in, to me being the first in-house part-time chaplain, to me now being the first full-time chaplain in the department's history."

For those who may be considering the program, Ortiz asks you to listen. "Listen to the call on your life. If God is directing you to step into the arena of public safety chaplaincy, heed the call! By no means is it an easy calling, but who God calls, He equips. It's needed in every department in this nation. We need more chaplains to be there for those that selflessly serve their communities and put their lives on the line daily." ●

IN MEMORIAM

The Rev. Clyde E. Bedenbaugh '54 5/31/2023

The Rev. Henry N. Brandt '54 9/1/2023

The Rev. Ted Wales Goins '56 6/27/2023

The Rev. Dr. Charles R. Huggins '61 9/14/2023

The Rev. Larry K. Wolff '68 4/20/2023

The Rev. Jack C. Wray '71 8/18/2023

The Rev. Alfred Fogleman '72 4/11/2023

Dr. William Collins Wood '74 6/3/2023

The Rev. Byron Wilbur White '75 7/20/2023

The Rev. Richard M. Connor '77 7/5/2023

The Rev. Deana K. Voges '83 9/24/2023

The Rev. H. Norton Rosebrock '89 10/22/2023

The Rev. Ellen Cross '96 9/1/2023

Mrs. Barbara Mae Mitchell '04 1/19/2023

Mr. Stephen Roy Abbott '23 6/9/2023

The Rev. Dr. Martin Fredrick Saarinen, Honorary Degree
4/1/2023



In loving memory of Stephen Roy Abbott

Stephen Roy Abbott, M.Div. '23, of Columbia, South Carolina, formerly of Munford, Tennessee, died on Friday, June 9, 2023. Born in Memphis, Tennessee, on March 7, 1979, he was a son of Alva Eugene and Paula Ann Abbott. He was a member of Living Word Lutheran Church in Arlington, Tennessee. Abbott was a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Martin where he earned a bachelor's degree in theater and most recently graduated from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary at Lenoir-Rhyne University with his Master of Divinity.

He served his field education with St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Lexington, South Carolina, and an internship at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina. He was

a very compassionate person who served his community through homeless and prison ministries, as well Koinonia Children's Ministry at Eau Claire Baptist Church. Stephen had recently been hired as a chaplain for Restoration Worship Center in Greenwood, South Carolina.

In addition to his parents, he is survived by his siblings, Ronald Eugene Abbott (Robin), of Homestead, Florida, Carl Alan Berkey-Abbott (Kristin), of Arden, North Carolina, Carol Diane Heard (fiancé, Chris Cartwright), of Byhalia, Mississippi; uncle, Stephen Alexander, of Etowah, Tennessee; three nephews; one niece; and dog, Nena.

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope continued

to the Museum and Memorial of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The first LWF Assembly took place in 1947, bringing together delegates from countries affected by the destruction of World War II and motivated by those events to establish a more inclusive approach to Christianity. Subsequent Assemblies were held every five to seven years, varying over the decades, and each Assembly has moved Lutheranism forward into communion among Lutheran churches and with other faiths around the world.

Issued in the context of a world divided on many ideological lines, the 2023 message was explicit in its call for tolerance: “We reject all forms of violence and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, age, disability, xenophobia, caste, or social background. All people are created in the image of God, with equal dignity that cannot be compromised.”

The message of unified diversity represented by “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” made a strong impression on the two master of divinity students from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary who attended the Assembly — Matt Hansen, M.Div. '24, and Kjell Bakken, M.Div. '26. Bakken attended as part of a cohort of ELCA seminary students from around the United States, cross-registered for the Assembly through United Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia.

“I’m still processing everything I experienced, but if there’s one word to describe the LWF Assembly, it’s *inspiring*,” shared Bakken. “It was overwhelming and exciting to be in a space with people from 150 different church bodies from 99 countries, all coming together to worship and learn from one another. I don’t think there’s a substitute for the experience of being with such a diverse group of people in one room.”

Hansen took a different path to the Assembly, joining the communications team for the event as the social media lead. While he felt the responsibility of sharing the experience with the worldwide Lutheran population, he also cited the deep spiritual connection forged through the Assembly.



Worldwide Lutheran leaders and representatives gather in a workshop titled “Women’s Human Rights Advocacy.”
Photo: LWF/Marie Renaux

“I’m feeling really energized by the global Lutheran church,” Hansen shared. “A lot of the worship sessions felt transcendent, they were so meaningful. You could feel the spirit in the room, and afterward you knew something important has shifted or changed.”

Bakken also witnessed the full scope of the Lutheran church around the world and brought back a renewed sense of purpose and focus for his future in ministry.

“Being at the Assembly really opened my eyes to the breadth and width of the church, the relationship we have with churches in developing nations and how mission work, relief work is a relationship driven by empathy more than authority,” Bakken said. “It’s easy to get caught up in your local congregation or synod, but at the LWF Assembly I feel like I witnessed a vibrant worldwide church that is united in spirit, body and hope.” ●

Conversation and unity: LTSS professor joins Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue



The Rev. Justin Nickel, Ph.D.

Since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1967, scholars from the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church have engaged in a series of dialogues for deep investigation and discussion of church doctrines with the goal of finding common ground.

“The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogues represent a renewed interest over the past 50 years in working toward visible unity in the church,” said the Rev. Justin Nickel, Ph.D., assistant professor of Lutheran studies and one of the scholars selected to take part in the latest dialogue between the ELCA and the U.S. Conference of Bishops.

“This is the thirteenth round of official dialogue that is ELCA-specific. There’s also a separate international dialogue,” Nickel explained. “Each dialogue takes five to seven years and ends with a book on the topic that hopes to offer guidance.”

During the years of the dialogue, participants correspond with one another and meet in person twice a year. The current topic will focus

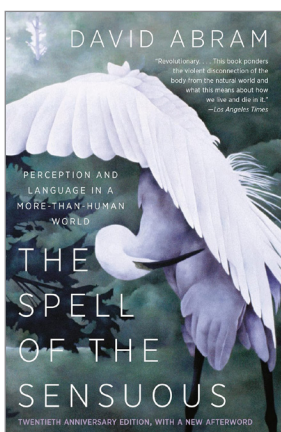
on the theologies guiding ordination of the bishop in the two churches, building on the previous dialogue addressing teaching within the church and who or what is considered authoritative.

“We’re still refining and looking at the topic, but it bears on who is ordained and the distinctions we make between bishops and priests or pastors,” said Nickel.

Bishops and synod officials select participants they believe will fit the likely direction of the dialogue but also those committed to strong ecumenical relationships, as Nickel has demonstrated throughout his career.

“It is a great honor to be asked to do this for the church and to be with such esteemed colleagues,” said Nickel. “We can respect the theological integrity of various traditions but try to overcome disunity, to live into Jesus’s prayer in John’s gospel that all Christians might be one.” ●

THE RECTOR READS



Recently I have been reading David Abram’s book *The Spell of the Sensuous, Perception and Language in a More-Than Human World*. The book really explores the disconnection of our bodies from the natural world, and the way that our language has become disconnected from the land and realities that we are trying to communicate. This means the stories we tell about who we are and where we are are no longer rooted in the lands that give our lives meaning.

One amazing aspect of this book lies behind the text in the author. Abrams was a slight-of-hand magician who set out to explore the relationship between magicians or shamans

and the natural world. What he discovered was that magic is less about things that are magical and more about the way we perceive our surroundings. This led him on a journey to explore the ecologies of magic in indigenous communities around the world and form a deeper appreciation for the relationship between the land and language. The result is a book that takes us through the “flesh of language,” “animism and the alphabet,” the “landscape of language,” and a way to rethink what we know about time, space, and air.

For leaders in public ministry who are engaged in the ministry of the Word, this book is an invitation to reconsider what we mean

when we say we are proclaiming the “Word.” It certainly helps us think more profoundly about what we are doing when we preach, how we use stories, where we look to tell our story, and what is the nature of the story that lies at the heart of the Christian tradition. I encourage everyone to read this book with an eye toward sharpening your perception of the Spirit of God at work in the more-than-human world around us and deepening your understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and the land. And I recommend it as required reading for all ordained ministers looking to expand your theology of the Word and words. ●

UPCOMING EVENTS

JANUARY
26 ELCA Region 9 Stewardship Symposium

FEBRUARY
2-3 LTSS Religious Arts Festival

FEBRUARY
29 Scholarship Day

APRIL
18 Alumni Day/Day of Giving

MAY
8 Baccalaureate Service

MAY
9 Commencement, Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center



4201 North Main Street
Columbia, SC 29203

lr.edu/ltss



INSIDE THE NUMBERS: GIVING

\$1,211,301

DOLLARS RAISED FOR LTSS AS OF MAY 31, 2023

14.6%

ALUMNI WHO GAVE BACK TO LTSS IN FISCAL YEAR 2023

\$353,000

NEW LIFE FUND GOAL FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

\$103,625

GIFTS TO THE NEW LIFE FUND, AS OF AUGUST 31, 2023

A 40.1% INCREASE FROM THIS TIME LAST YEAR!



THANKFUL FOR YOU

Gifts to the New Life Fund, the seminary's annual fund, impact the lives of seminarians at LTSS each day. Through the New Life Fund, those committed to the mission of LTSS can make a major difference in the training of future servants of the church.

Join the many supporters of LTSS in making sure the needs of the seminary and our seminarians are met. Please make a tax-deductible gift prior to May 31, 2024, our fiscal year-end.

LTSS is truly thankful for the loyalty and support of the ELCA's seminary in the South. A gift of any size expresses faith in the seminary's continued prosperity and demonstrates the value and commitment LTSS and its supporters have for its students.

Visit lr.edu/IGive2LTSS.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS: STUDENTS

ENROLLMENT FACTS

65

Current Enrollment

13

Currently on internship

1

Connect Student in Hawaii

1

International Student

4

Students are Veterans

24

Students receive support through the ELCA Fund for Leaders