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### Concordia Seminary Magazine Spring 2024

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# CONCORDIA SEMINARY

SPRING 2024



*Making*  
**DISCIPLES**  
OF ALL NATIONS

THE SEMINARY'S  
GLOBAL REACH

MISSIO DEI IN THE  
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

TEACHING  
ALL NATIONS





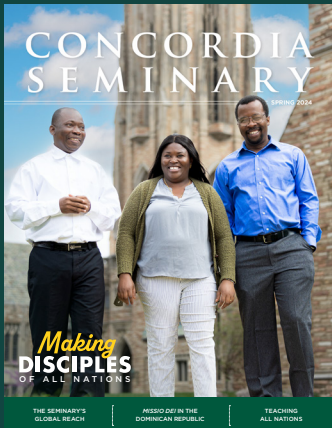




# FIRST LOOK

*Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., the Seminary's Werner R.H. Krause and Elizabeth Ringger Krause Professor of Hispanic Ministries, plays the cello during the "The Ashes Go on Singing" — A Hymn Festival on the Hymns of Martin Luther Feb. 18 in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus. Photo: Michael Thomas*





**ON THE COVER**

Three of Concordia Seminary's international students enjoy some outdoor time on campus. From left, Master of Arts student Celestino Kaka of South Sudan, Master of Arts student Christiana Gbeanquoi of Nigeria and Doctor of Philosophy student Rev. Dixon Gbeanquoi of Liberia. Photo: Tyler Simmons

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President Dr. Thomas J. Egger, left, visits with Biruk Chiksa, a Master of Divinity student from Ethiopia after chapel. Photo: Tyler Simmons



Dear friends,

The work of Concordia Seminary reaches all around the world — a world loved and redeemed by Jesus Christ.

Our Lord gave His disciples a task and a promise: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20 ESV).

To our own day, Jesus has continued to send forth His life-giving Word, on the lips of His pastors and people, drawing people from all nations. Baptized in the name of the Triune God, we too have become His disciples. The Gospel has come to us, thanks be to God! And through us, the Lord continues to spread the Good News of Jesus to others. What could be more meaningful and rewarding than to participate in this Great Commission?

These final verses of Matthew’s Gospel have further significance for me: My pastor chose this passage as my confirmation verse. Little did I know as a teenager that one day I would teach and serve at Concordia Seminary, where students from all nations come to study the Word of Christ. From this Seminary, thousands of workers have gone forth for the Lord’s harvest, serving in congregations and in mission fields in America and all around the world.

This issue of our magazine highlights the worldwide service and impact of Concordia Seminary. Students from dozens of countries come to study with us. Our faculty travel to teach all around the world. What a privilege to carry out this Great Commission work together with and on behalf of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

It also is a weighty responsibility. Yet we labor with joy and confidence, always mindful of Jesus’ help and promise: “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

We are grateful for so many friends who support and pray for this work!

Dr. Thomas J. Egger, President



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### OUR MISSION

Concordia Seminary serves church and world by providing theological education and leadership centered in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for the formation of pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars and leaders in the name of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

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# LIGHT TO THE *Nations*

## THE SEMINARY'S GLOBAL REACH

BY DR. ELY PRIETO

If you have had a chance to visit Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and walk around campus, you probably have noticed the many images of lamps and torches. The Seminary's seal and motto also highlight a theme of light: "Light From Above." Not any type of light, but a Light that comes from above, a divine Light illuminating our learning, teaching and living.

Martin Luther, in his Large Catechism, talks about two types of religion, an "up" religion and a "down" religion. The "up" religion is a religion that began long ago; one we received from our first parents, Adam and Eve. It is a "do" religion, where I can go *up* to God on the basis of my own strength and my own works. The results of a religion like this are either pride or despair. Some say, "I think I'm better than anybody else," while others say, "I can't do it; I'm hopeless."

The "down" religion is when God comes down to us in Christ. As we confess in the Nicene Creed, "who for us men and for our salvation [Jesus Christ] came down from heaven ..." How far does God come down to us? All the way into human flesh, when the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us (John 1:14). All the way to the cross, when obediently Christ suffers and dies! (Phil. 2:8). This is the Light from above: Christ coming

down to us. It is God's doing, the unconditional gift of God, by grace, by faith alone.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee who practiced "up" religion, trying to go up to God from below. He realized that it was not working for him, so he came to visit Jesus during the night. Nicodemus was intrigued by this new rabbi in town, and seeking an answer, he tells Jesus, "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (John 3:2 ESV). Jesus' answer puzzles Nicodemus. Jesus says: "Unless one is born again [from above] he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 ESV). Nicodemus was born from the flesh. But to see God's kingdom, he needed to be born of water and the Spirit in Baptism!

Baptism is light coming from above into Nicodemus' darkened heart! Nicodemus was practicing an "up" religion and Jesus tells him, let Me teach you about a "down" religion! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 ESV). This is true for everyone, including you, Nicodemus. When Nicodemus returned home, it was still dark, but he was illuminated, born into the light, by Jesus' words and teachings! Jesus brought light from above into Nicodemus' heart.

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# Down RELIGION

WHAT IS IT?  
GOD COMING DOWN  
TO US IN CHRIST

# Up RELIGION

WHAT IS IT?  
US COMING UP TO GOD  
WITH OUR STRENGTH  
AND WORKS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7 >

An attentive reader of the Scriptures will notice that throughout its pages, we see this teaching again and again. There are essentially two different religions in the world, a religion of the Law and a religion of the Gospel: In other words, an “up” religion and a “down” religion.

When Jesus met His disciples after His resurrection and told them, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matt. 28:19 ESV), He not only commissioned His disciples, but the whole Christian church. Jesus knew that “up” religion, a religion of the Law, leaves humanity in darkness, lost and in despair. To make disciples of all nations means to practice a “down” religion, a religion of the Gospel. Light coming from above and going to all nations!

Baptism and teaching go hand and hand because both bring the Light from above into peoples’ hearts. In Baptism, we die with Christ and we rise with Christ, so that we might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:2-4). The Light that brings us down to death with Christ brings us up to life in Him and continues to guide us in our walk in the new life, illuminating our path (cf. Ps. 119:105, 130; 18:28).

Probably by now, you are wondering what all of this has to do with Concordia Seminary. Well, the answer for me is quite simple: If there are basically two religions in the world, it is obvious that there are also two basic theologies in the world, an “up” theology and a “down” theology. At Concordia Seminary, we preach, teach, confess and practice a “down” theology. “Light From Above” reminds us of where we stand in terms of our theology. Our motto reminds us that the Light from above is a divine Light that illuminates our learning, teaching and living.

But there is more. When I think about light, I can’t stop thinking about what Jesus says in Matt. 5:14-16 (ESV), “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

When we receive Light from above, we share the light. We also become a light. Our Lutheran forefathers picked up on this too when they said in the preface to the Book of Concord: “from the very beginning of [our] work on this our [statement of] Christian accord



it was never and *still* is not our disposition and intention to keep this salutary and highly necessary work of concord hidden in the dark and secret from everyone or to place the light of divine truth under a bushel or a table.”

Since its inception, Concordia Seminary was established to be a beam of light on a hill, a light to the nations. As its mission statement says: “Concordia Seminary serves church and world by providing theological education and leadership centered in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for the formation of pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars and leaders in the name of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod [LCMS].”

As a light, Concordia Seminary has attracted students from all corners of the world. Currently, we have students from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Latvia, Madagascar, Mexico, Norway, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan and South Sudan, Taiwan, Tanzania, Uruguay and Venezuela, among other countries. Exposed to the Light from above, to the teachings of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, our students return to their home countries to serve and shine the light of the Gospel.

Some of our graduates serve as missionaries and pastors, others as theological educators, seminary presidents and leaders in their churches. Recently Rev. Daniel Akoh, a Master of Sacred Theology student, was elected to be the next president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, a partner church body of the LCMS. Also Rev. Aiji Komiyama, who is finishing his Ph.D. this summer, upon his return to his home country, will have a leadership role in the Japanese Lutheran Church.

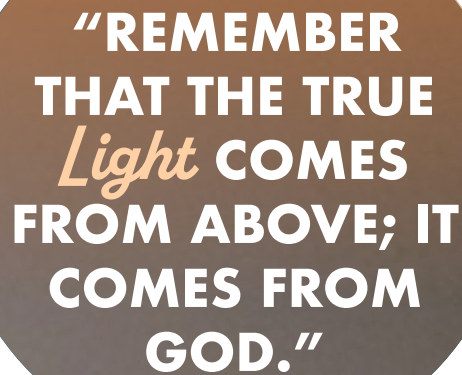
Also consider the impact and reach of our students from the Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS), the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) and the Cross-cultural Ministry Center (CMC, in partnership with Concordia University, Irvine, Calif.). After completing their studies, they are sent out as missionary-pastors in the United States, shining the

light of the Gospel into the immigrant communities scattered across the country.

Concordia Seminary also has a tradition of having international scholars serving on its faculty. In the recent past, the sainted Dr. Won-Yong Ji (South Korea) and Dr. Norman Nagel (Australia/China), and Dr. Victor Raj (India) all served important roles on the faculty. Now, we have Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. (Panama/Chile), Dr. Abjar Bahkou (Syria), Dr. Adam Hensley and Dr. Stephen Pietsch (Australia), and Dr. Vilson Scholz and me (Brazil).

The presence of international students and faculty has not only provided cross-cultural experience for students and faculty, but also has raised students’ interest in studies abroad at our sister seminaries in Argentina, Brazil, England and Germany, or in short-term mission immersion trips to sites such

as the Dominican Republic and other parts of the world. Some of our graduates have received calls from the LCMS Office of International Mission to serve as missionaries and theological educators in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Concordia Seminary’s faculty is constantly traveling internationally, speaking at conferences, teaching at seminaries in mission lands, sharing the Light from above in all corners of the world.



**“REMEMBER  
THAT THE TRUE  
*Light* COMES  
FROM ABOVE; IT  
COMES FROM  
GOD.”**

As you walk around our beautiful campus, keep your eyes open and pay attention to the many images of lamps or torches. Also don’t forget the stained-glass windows in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus, especially the beautiful tones of yellow, red and blue. They use the light to tell the biblical story. As you do so, remember that the true Light comes from above; it comes from God. It is His strong Word that cleaves the darkness, the light of salvation that breathes life-giving breath into us and leads us to shine and sing, “Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light does send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end!” (“Thy Strong Word,” *LSB* 578).

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*Dr. Ely Prieto is an associate professor of Practical Theology, the associate dean of Urban and Cross-Cultural Ministry, and the Lutheran Foundation Professor of Urban and Cross-Cultural Ministry at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*



# MISSION

## IN THE *Dominican Republic*

BY LUCAS MOODY

### Seminarians receive cross-cultural lessons

In Revelation 7, the imagery of the great multitude worshipping Christ points us to God's mission. His mission transcends all boundaries as He works through His people to reconcile the world to Himself.

A group of Concordia Seminary students recently had the opportunity to learn firsthand about this holy work when they landed in the Dominican Republic (DR) as part of an annual short-term mission education trip.

Tori Egger, the wife of Seminary President Dr. Thomas J. Egger, organized the trip with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) Office of International Mission. Erin Mackenzie, a missionary based in the Latin America and Caribbean region who serves as the regional volunteer coordinator for the LCMS, planned the activities and itinerary. She focused on providing the Seminary's travelers — which included eight Master of Divinity (M.Div.) students, two wives of seminarians and two Deaconess Studies students — grounding in the strategic operations and daily life and work of the LCMS in the Dominican Republic.

"On this education trip, students saw missionaries, national workers and local members engaged in spreading the Gospel, planting Lutheran

churches and showing mercy," Mackenzie said. "They participated in ministry experiences across our churches, Lutheran schools, seminary and in a group home for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities."

On Jan. 20, the Seminary team flew into Santiago de los Caballeros, arriving early the next day and quickly launching into the trip's activities. After arriving at the headquarters for all mission activities in Latin America, the students were immediately immersed in a lively regional mission hub.

Staying at Concordia the Reformer Seminary, the team joined the region's existing mission activities and gained valuable cross-cultural experience and exposure. They presented a Bible skit for the Lutheran day school and public school students, traveled to Santiago's unique cultural locales, worshiped with the local community and attended choir practice. They served alongside, visited and dined with other seminarians, deaconesses and missionaries from the country. These interactions deepened their perspective on the church's global nature as they built relationships with one another.

"The trip was a relationally oriented experience," explained seminarian Drake Peterson.

*Left, second-year seminarian Luther Cameron picks up beach trash. Right, Pastor Sergio Maita teaches grade school students about Jesus. Middle, seminarians enjoy the festive atmosphere in Santiago. Photos: Courtesy Jason Groth, Tori Egger and Erin Mackenzie*







“It was a powerful reminder that mission is not an isolated event but a gift that God calls us to participate in all the time with everyone. It was an opportunity to grow closer in fellowship with those belonging to the host culture and to develop Christ-centered friendships with people whom I may have never connected with before.”

The students especially cherished the opportunity to visit, commune and serve with six congregant members at Good Shepherd Lutheran Homes, a foundation that provides care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is one of the original LCMS missions in the DR.

“We met with Rev. Carlos and Deaconess Danelle (Putnam) Schumann, two of the longest-serving missionary partners in the region,” recalled seminarian Avery Hjulberg, who preached at one of Concordia the Reformer’s chapel services. “One of the most memorable stories from the trip was hearing how Danelle and Rev. Ted Krey transformed regional care for people with disabilities by seeking out and ministering to them. The account is an inspiring and significant example of the church going into the dark and sharing the light and life of Jesus.”

Among the activities on which the seminarians and members of the group home collaborated was an unplanned beach cleaning. The group headed out to relax at the beach when trash washed up on the shore. As they began clearing away the trash, God used them to witness to other residents who were out for their beach day. They too soon joined the effort. Such beautifully ordained events allowed the students to embody the Gospel message that sets Christian mission work apart from other forms of volunteerism.

“Rev. Krey delivered a presentation that deepened and developed our understanding of what it means to be a Christian in mission,” said seminarian Jason Groth. “It is beneficial and necessary for the church to undertake projects offering mercy and human care. Yet, even as God calls us to organize health clinics, dig wells and build houses, we do this to deliver the Word that is His Son and to walk with unbelievers, as Christ calls them, into His light and the new life that only He can give.”

**“We do this to deliver the Word ... as Christ calls them, into His light and the new life that only He can give.”**

**— Jason Groth**

The trip made a lasting imprint on the seminarians. The trip equipped and familiarized the team with the mental, emotional and spiritual enrichment inherent to cross-cultural experiences. It also gave them a view of the communion of saints that transcends all cultures and places. It accentuated the need to invite still more people into that community.

“It is a great blessing to see the students become aware of another culture and to build those bridges and relationships, but what is most striking for them is not what is different but what is the same,” Tori Egger said. “Lost people need a Savior. No matter where they are or who they are, they have the same basic need, and the answer to that need is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

*Lucas Moody is a first-year Master of Divinity student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*

*Left, fourth-year seminarian Avery Hjulberg preaches at a chapel service. Right, seminarians and LCMS mission partners in Latin America gather for a group photo at a new church plant’s building in the Cienfuegos neighborhood. Photos: Courtesy Jason Groth and Tori Egger*




## FACULTY GIVE FOCUSED ATTENTION INTERNATIONALLY

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20 ESV).

While Concordia Seminary may be physically located in the middle of the country, in a suburban community in the St. Louis region, its reach extends around the world. One important way the Seminary’s footprint is felt globally is through the work of its faculty members, who regularly teach and lecture in far-flung places. Some are gone for days, weeks and even months at a time as they share their theological expertise with the church’s future leaders in places like Latvia, Germany, Argentina, Kenya, Ethiopia and Brazil. A few professors recently shared some highlights of their international experiences providing theological leadership to all nations for the glory of Jesus Christ. Learn more about why their international involvement is an important aspect of their teaching and hear their advice for those who are considering a career working internationally.



**“Intercultural  
theological  
exchanges  
foster a truly  
global picture  
of the church,  
in which we  
both give instruction  
to and receive instruction  
from friends in Christ.”**

**— Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.**





# *Teaching* ALL NATIONS



## DR. ABJAR BAHKOU

Associate Professor of Practical Theology



### PARIS, FRANCE:

International Symposium of Arabic and Syriac studies speaker in July 2022



### BEIRUT, LEBANON:

Studios of the International Christian Satellite Sat7 film segments in July 2022

### IMPORTANCE:

“Here in America, we live in a melting pot; the world is in our backyard. We cannot afford to preach and minister to one particular ethnic population any longer. We need to learn how to clearly communicate the Gospel in a multiethnic society.”

### ADVICE:

“Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Learn as much as you can about the culture and country you will be sent to. Learn, appreciate, respect and love the culture you will be teaching.”

## DR. JOEL BIERMANN

Professor of Systematic Theology



### SÃO LEOPOLDO, BRAZIL:

Seminario Concordia graduate seminar course in July 2024



### JŪRMALA, LATVIA:

Eurasia regional retreat in August 2024

### IMPORTANCE:

“It is rewarding to see how God’s truth transcends all borders and unites God’s people. My call is

faithfully to teach God’s doctrine. I strive to do that in every available place, here and abroad.”

### ADVICE:

“Traveling and teaching in international settings is always far more enjoyable and usually more successful when you embrace the realities of the situation at hand without trying to impose your usual expectations on classroom settings or students.”

## DR. JOEL ELOWSKY

Professor of Historical Theology, Dean of Advanced Studies, Director of the Center for the Study of Early Christian Texts, Coordinator of International Seminary Exchange Programs, and the Frank and Valerie Fuerst Professor of Historical Theology



### ROME, ITALY:

International Lutheran Council (ILC) and the Vatican study group in February 2024



### BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA:

Concordia Seminary in Argentina ecumenical council in March 2024

### IMPORTANCE:

“I see our international involvement as an integral part of our mission and ministry. We have the goods theologically, but this should be coupled with the humility of recognizing we have much to learn from the larger church throughout the world — lessons we can share with our students here in St. Louis.”

### ADVICE:

“Just do it! Seriously, there is a need. Our theology is a gift that can and should be shared with the wider church here and scattered abroad.”

## DR. THOMAS EGGER

President and Professor of Exegetical Theology



### WITTENBERG, GERMANY:

Pastoral formation meetings in January 2024



### ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA:

Mekane Yesus Seminary Commencement ceremony in June 2024

### IMPORTANCE:

“God has sent His Son as the world’s only Savior, as a ‘light for the Gentiles.’ What we have freely received, we are called to freely share with others — the hope we have in Christ and the bright light of His sacred Word. Concordia Seminary has a rich history in working together with our sister churches and sister seminaries throughout the world.”

### ADVICE:

“Friendships formed through international involvements are a special blessing, as we learn from one another that, as different as our cultures and customs and languages might be, we have the same living hope in Jesus Christ — one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. It is encouraging and invigorating to share such a joyous hope and such a mighty Savior. We are brothers and sisters together, truly and forever.”

## DR. ROBERT KOLB

Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology



### Wittenberg, Germany:

Reformation Studies presenter, preacher and writing a book in summer 2024

### IMPORTANCE:

“Working abroad helps us exercise a more critical stance in relationship to



practices that we have taken for granted but that the Holy Spirit has not set in stone. It helps us appreciate the blessings God has given us in our own settings. It helps us enjoy the community of believers who differ from us in many ways but who share our faith in the Lord Jesus.”

**ADVICE:**

“When we leave our own cultural surroundings, we will be confronted with the need to reexamine our own perceptions, but we will be rewarded with rich perspectives from those whose experiences have given them gifts from the Lord that seem strange to us but that reflect the magnificence of our God.”

**DR. RON MUDGE**

Provost, Chief Academic Officer and Professor of Exegetical Theology



**BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA:**

International Lutheran Council World Seminaries Conference in June 2024

**IMPORTANCE:**

“Concordia Seminary strives to be a positive influence on international Lutheranism and to give excellent theological education to Lutherans around the world.”

**ADVICE:**

“Learn as much of the language and culture of the people you are teaching and working with as possible and ask them about how to apply what you are teaching in their culture. International work is full of things that make you think, ‘That is not the way we do things.’ Ask about those things and see that as an opportunity for you to appreciate another culture.”

*Dr. Peter Nafzger, second from left, poses for a photo with some students who took his class in Kenya. Photo: Courtesy Nafzger*

**DR. PETER NAFZGER**

Associate Professor of Practical Theology



**NAIROBI, KENYA:**

LCMS Regional Missionary Office intensive Master of Arts course in January 2024

**IMPORTANCE:**

“Preaching is always done in a specific context for the benefit of specific hearers. To have a full understanding of the preaching of the church on earth, it is necessary to listen and learn from people who preach in a variety of situations. Each time I’ve taught or studied in a culture different from my own, I learned more about Jesus and His commission to preach the Gospel to all nations.”

**ADVICE:**

“When we listen to Christians around the world we understand more fully the scope of the mission Jesus has given us, which ultimately helps us grow in our understanding of God and His Word. Experiences like this help us see ourselves in proper perspective and recognize that we are a small part of the much larger body of Christ on earth.”

**DR. LEOPOLDO SÁNCHEZ**

Professor of Systematic Theology, Director of the Center for Hispanic Studies, and the Werner R.H. and Elizabeth R. Krause Professor of Hispanic Ministries



**Auckland and Dunedin, New Zealand:**

Laidlaw College and University of Otago teaching in September 2022

**IMPORTANCE:**

“Intercultural theological exchanges foster a truly global picture of the church, in which we both give instruction to and receive instruction from friends in Christ. We bring many of those lessons back into the classroom, workshops and conferences. By sharing in each other’s gifts and struggles, we grow together into a stronger, more faithful and theologically enriched church.”

**ADVICE:**

“Think not only in terms of what you will teach others, but also in terms of what you will learn from them. And if you cannot go overseas, remember theological exchanges are ripe for the picking among ethnically diverse brothers and sisters in Christ right here in the United States!”

*Christie Hampton is a communications specialist at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*





# SHARING THE *Gospel* WHERE THE LORD LEADS

## FROM ETHIOPIA TO ST. LOUIS



*Meseret Gobena and his wife,  
Hiwot Fundusa. Photo: Harold Rau*

BY SARAH MANEY

A woman walks barefoot for miles along the Ethiopian roads, sharing the Gospel with whoever has ears to hear. She walks where the Lord leads, relying on Christian hospitality along the way. She is Meseret Gobena's grandmother. Gobena, a first-year Master of Divinity student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, says his faithful grandmother had a lasting influence on his life and that of his family.

When Gobena was 7, the government changed, forcing citizens to move back to where they were born. Gobena's father, Abebe Gobena Sugebo, moved his family to his birthplace: Gejja, a city in southern Ethiopia. In Gejja, the majority of people follow the state church, where only the priest speaks for God in Gêez, an ancient language of Ethiopia. The church emphasizes praying to Mary, not Jesus.

Gobena said those who do not follow the state church are not only ostracized but are in danger of being physically harmed. Nevertheless, Gobena's father shared the Word of God. He began preaching in a house church with only three other families in attendance.

"It's not going to be easy," Gobena remembered thinking at the time, knowing that his family could be harmed for uttering Jesus' name. "That was not easy for me. But seeing that and actually going through it, I could see the hand of God working through it. The Gospel is true."

After two years of having a house church, the group finally opened a church building in Gejja. A few years later, five churches had sprung into existence from the small house church Gobena's father started. In the span of just a decade, half of the city attended Christian churches that preached the Word of God. Gobena's journey to pastoral ministry, part of his family's



legacy, had taken root, although the path was not exactly a straight one.

From 2004-06, Gobena attended Arba Minch University in Ethiopia to study architecture and urban planning. He landed a job just days after graduating. Three years went by. While he was skilled at his job, he began feeling pressure to make decisions in the workplace that did not honor Christ. “God had a way. He didn’t let me stay there,” Gobena said.

In 2012, something miraculous happened. As a result of a diversity lottery conducted as part of the United States’ Immigration and Nationality Act, Gobena was one of 50,000 individuals selected at random from more than 14 million qualified entries to immigrate and become a permanent resident of the United States. Another miracle: His wife, Hiwot Fundusa, also was allowed to immigrate.

**“The calling is not about you or about anything else. It’s always about God, the One who is calling.”**  
*— Meseret Gobena*

The couple arrived from Ethiopia to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minn., welcomed by Gobena’s family and members of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, part of the LCMS Minnesota South District. His family became active in the church, where the services are in Amharic, not English.

As time went by, Gobena noticed how the children of the first-

generation immigrants in the church were growing up speaking English and immersing themselves in American culture. Along the way, they seemed to be losing sight of their Christian faith as they moved into young adulthood.

“That’s part of why I wanted to go to the Seminary,” he said. “I wanted to cover that gap. If you don’t offer youth a stable foundation about Christianity, the outside world is always ready to welcome them. You have to be strong at your house and at the church to keep them.”

With encouragement from his pastor, Gobena applied to Concordia Seminary. His tuition — as for all the Seminary’s students enrolled in residential Ministerial Formation programs — is fully covered by faithful donors. The Seminary’s tuition guarantee helped make it more affordable for Gobena and his family of five to move to St. Louis. They were excited for what was to come even as they were saddened to leave loved ones behind in Minnesota. “But

the calling is not about you or about anything else,” he said. “It’s always about God, the One who is calling.”

Life at the Seminary has been enjoyable for the young family — and busy. “God blessed us with three beautiful daughters. My wife is dedicated to taking care of them full-time while I am studying,” he said. He is grateful for her support.

When Gobena thinks about the future and about what success means, it’s not based in material things. He thinks back to his grandmother and to his father whose passion was in sharing the Gospel. Their passion is now his.

“My pleasure is always when I talk to someone and they grasp what life means — real life with Christ,” he said. “This is what gives me joy. No matter what the situation, no matter what topic it is, I have that on my heart.”

*Sarah Maney is a communications specialist at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*



*Gobena attends a Bible study Aug. 23 during Orientation. Photo: Harold Rau*





**“More people need to hear and receive the gifts of God.”**  
— *Dr. Cory Rajek*

*Dr. Cory Rajek and his wife, Jennifer. Photo: Courtesy The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod/Erik M. Lunsford*

## *Serving God to the ends of the earth*

BY SARAH MANEY

God uses means outside of us to accomplish His will. For Dr. Cory Rajek that “means” was a hearty breakfast between his father and his childhood pastor.

Age 13 and newly confirmed at the time, Rajek remembers his father coming home one Saturday after the breakfast with important news. “Pastor Hoogland said that he thought you would make a good pastor,” the elder Rajek told his son.

Unconvinced, Rajek wondered whether his pastor said that to all the young men at Faith Lutheran Church in Merrill, Wis.

But that day, that breakfast, became a turning point in Rajek’s life. Nowadays

Rajek serves in Riga, Latvia, as a missionary for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). This summer, he and his family of four will move to St. Louis where he will begin a new position as the executive director for the LCMS Office of International Mission (OIM).

“The Lord uses means outside of us to bring about His will,” Rajek said. “He uses bread and wine, water and the pastor to deliver His forgiveness to His people. And the same can be said of me. It was my pastor who was the driving motivation for me entering the ministry.”

### **PREPARING FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY**

When it came time to consider college, Rajek applied to Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon (CUW). With the

memory of that breakfast conversation planted in his mind, his plan was to enroll in the pre-seminary program and see how it went. Maybe he would become a pastor? He continued on as the Lord guided him to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where he received a Master of Divinity in 2001, and then to his first pastoral call — a dual parish in Iowa.

“The Seminary did a fantastic job training me in Lutheran theology and grounding me in solid Lutheran doctrine,” Rajek said. “Obviously we studied the doctrine of man and what that entails, but even more, the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ.”

That doctrine has helped Rajek understand his own limits and the limits



of those he serves. “But even more so, it puts things into context regarding the love of God, which has no limits,” he said. “Being able to share that message in the parish and then now in the mission field, I consider it a true gift to be able to do that. It is a blessing that the Lord has placed me where He has.”

Rajek often recalls his time at the Seminary and Dr. Norman Nagel’s class on the Office of the Holy Ministry. Professor Nagel, now sainted, told the pastors-in-training that the pastoral call and office were gifts.

“This is the pastor’s calling: It’s Word and Sacrament ministry,” Rajek said. “It’s proclaiming Christ crucified. It’s delivering the gifts of God to His people for the express purpose of the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. And so, in that sense, the pastoral office is really a gift. The Office of the Holy Ministry is bigger than the man occupying it. It’s the office that Christ established, and it’s one of the ways that Christ can be present among His people and deliver His message to His people. It is where He can be the voice from heaven declaring Absolution on His people. This is the gift that God has given to His people.”

## MINISTERING IN LATVIA

In 2022, Rajek and his family moved to Riga so he could teach at Luther Academy, the seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, which is a partner church of the LCMS.

Latvia’s history is intimately intertwined with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. When Latvia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in the late ’80s and early ’90s, the church needed to be reestablished after years of suppression. Atheism and agnosticism were perpetually pushed on the masses.

Before the Soviet occupation, Latvia was primarily a Lutheran country. In fact, the Reformation began just outside of

St. Peter’s Church in downtown Riga in 1522 — just five years after Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the Castle Church doors in Wittenberg, Germany. The Latvian church considers itself the oldest Lutheran church in the world because it signed on to the teachings of the Reformation in that same year.

After the Soviet occupation, Lutheranism remained the country’s largest denomination, yet the number of seminary students dropped to where they were before Communist rule. As a result, the church reached out to the LCMS for help. Rev. James Krikava, the regional director for LCMS Eurasia at

**“There’s a great need for missionaries ... for both laity and pastors on the mission field.”**

*— Dr. Cory Rajek*

the time, talked to some of the bishops of the Latvian church. Together they devised a plan for Luther Academy to offer studies in English in cooperation with the LCMS. The purpose of this new program is to prepare indigenous pastors and church planters who do not have access to seminary training. Currently, the program is comprised of online learning and on-campus intensives, with the long-term goal of shifting to an in-person seminary.

Students enroll from all over the world to learn theology from skilled LCMS professors. Today, Riga Luther Academy, a recipient of EU

accreditation, is the largest Lutheran seminary on the continent.

In 2022, after teaching for a short amount of time there, Rajek was appointed to serve as the LCMS associate regional director for Eurasia. He then became the regional director for Eurasia in January 2023. In this role, he oversaw LCMS international activities in the Eurasia region, including relationships with partner churches, mission activity and church planting.

## CONDUCTING THE MISSIO DEI

This past January, Rajek was called to be the executive director for OIM, a position that he will take on more fully this summer after his family returns to the United States. “So much of what I did as the regional director of Eurasia I will now take on as a global scale,” he said.

“As the executive director of the LCMS Office of International Mission I will oversee and assist our regional directors throughout the world and our missionaries to conduct the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. And that is to make disciples through Word and Sacrament ministry.

“More people need to hear and receive the gifts of God. There’s a great need for missionaries, and I’m not just talking about pastors. There’s a great need for both laity and pastors on the mission field.”

His advice to those who are thinking about becoming a pastor or missionary? “Pray; look for the signs that God has placed in your life and ask Him to guide you,” Rajek said. “Second, talk to someone: your parents, admissions officers at the Seminary, the LCMS Office of International Mission, or — perhaps start by having breakfast with your pastor!”

*Sarah Maney is a communications specialist at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*





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# *Giving* **CHEERFULLY** **WITH CONFIDENCE**

BY CHRISTIE HAMPTON

Ken and Jo Voertman have lived on the East Coast, in the middle of the country and on the West Coast. No matter where they have lived, they can look back on their lives and see the many benefits of being cheerful givers.

The couple now live in a beautiful retirement community in Carlsbad, Calif. They love living beneath the palm trees by a sandy beach overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Their faith is central to their daily lives. For more than 20 years, almost every Monday morning, Ken has met with the same men's Bible study group. Jo attends a women's Bible study group at their church, Redeemer by the Sea Lutheran Church, where her pastor recently led a discussion about the early church apostles.

**“There are still so many people who do not believe and need to be reached.”**

*— Jo Voertman*

“All my pastors have been dedicated men of God,” says Jo, who grew up in a church-going family that taught her how to tithe at a young age. “I would get 50 cents a week and a nickel went to God.”

She was taught to always give to God, and she brought that mindset into her marriage. When it came time for the newlyweds to set up their first budget, Ken was skeptical of his young bride's emphasis on tithing. He thought, “That's

a lot of money for the church.” But to Jo, “It was only 10% of what we earned.” She wanted to give even more. While money was tight for the Voertmans, God provided.

Even though Ken questioned how much to give to God at the beginning of their lives together, he is now the steward of the family's giving. He willingly shares the benefits he has seen from tithing over the years. He encourages people to have faith to tithe and to watch God entrust more to them.

After getting married at Jo's home church in Mount Rainier, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C., the Voertmans moved to St. Louis. Ken became chairman of a stewardship campaign at the Church of the Reformation and the couple helped as offering counters each Sunday. “As we were counting money after the service one day, we were talking to other people there and it became obvious that people who tithed very seldom seemed to have money problems,” Ken observed. “God does not promise that we will not have money problems, but try cheerful giving. It is amazing how God provides!”

For most of his life, Ken was a mechanical engineer. His first major project was designing the monorails for the New York World's Fair of 1964-65. Jo graduated from Fontbonne University and completed her student teaching at Lutheran High School South, where she later worked as a home economics teacher after college graduation.

In the early 1980s, the couple remembers hearing a message from a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) fundraising initiative at their church that really resonated with them. It went something like this: *If we want our*





Jo and Ken Voertman of Carlsbad, Calif. Photo: Courtney Koll

*pulpits and schools staffed, someone needs to educate people for that purpose.*

“We agreed with that and took it to heart,” Jo says. As a way of helping, the couple began giving to the LCMS program. Their gifts grew as their income increased. “This is one of the blessings of tithing,” shares Jo.

When Ken’s work relocated the couple to California, their income grew and they continued generously giving to the Lord’s mission. Now both retired and seeing a considerable number of pastors retiring throughout the church, Jo says the couple wants to help. “If you have an empty pulpit, that doesn’t do much good,” she says. “So, you have

to help provide for the education of future pastors.”

**“It is amazing how God provides!”**

*— Ken Voertman*

That is the main reason why the Voertmans began giving to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. They now support the Seminary through annual giving, which allows the Seminary to use their contributions where needed most. In 2022, the couple even challenged other donors to match their Call Day gift!

The Voertmans have committed themselves to helping prepare future pastors, who will fill those empty pulpits so the Gospel message can be shared around the world.

Next year, the couple will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary, and they plan to continue giving cheerfully and with confidence. “You cannot outgive God. He is generous, so we are generous,” Jo says. “God taught me about being generous. There are still so many people who do not believe and need to be reached.”

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*Christie Hampton is a communications specialist at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*



# WHAT'S HAPPENING



## SMP, CHS students celebrate milestones

On Jan. 12, the Seminary celebrated 27 Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program students who received new calls and completed the program. On Feb. 8, 19 students, including 10 SMP students and nine Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS) students, received their vicarage and deaconess internship assignments. Dr. W. Mart Thompson, SMP director, and Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., CHS director, each voiced their delight, thanks and confidence in the blessed joys and fruits awaiting the students in their God-given labors. The Seminary community celebrates those who have completed their formation program and continues to pray for all students on their paths to becoming pastors and deaconesses in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

*SMP and CHS students were recognized during chapel services in January and February for receiving calls and completing their programs. Photos: Christie Hampton*

## Laudamus spring tour

The Seminary's *Laudamus* choir performed at seven churches and schools during its spring 2024 concert tour March 18-26 with the theme "Not Unto Us" from Ps. 115:1. The choir performed in Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri — leading evening prayer services and performing pieces ranging from a Renaissance motet to a new piece by Cantor Phillip Magness, the Seminary's interim associate of music arts and *Laudamus* music director. "It is a joy to make music with these young men each week," he said. "They understand how the purpose of our music is to care for souls."

*Laudamus performs at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Cullman, Ala., March 17, a stop on the choir's spring tour. Photo: Courtesy Noah Oloff*





## Hymn Writing Workshop, festival held

Concordia Seminary hosted the third annual Prevallet Hymn Writing Workshop Feb. 17. Aspiring and published hymn writers and translators and Concordia Seminary students learned about the art of hymn writing from Peter Reske, senior editor of music/worship at Concordia Publishing House, and Dr. Jon Vieker, associate professor of Practical Theology and dean of chapel at Concordia Seminary. The following day, Feb. 18, the Seminary hosted “The Ashes Go on Singing” — A Hymn Festival on the Hymns of Martin Luther as part of the annual Concordia Seminary Concert Series. Held in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus, the St. Louis Lutheran Chorale, *Laudamus* and an orchestra of brass, strings, woodwinds and organ led the festival in song and music.

*Deaconess Studies student Julie Baumann performs as part of the “The Ashes Go on Singing” hymn festival Feb. 18 in the chapel. Photo: Michael Thomas*

## American Kantorei performs Bach’s “St. John Passion”

On Palm Sunday, March 24, the American Kantorei performed J.S. Bach’s “St. John Passion” in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus, which commemorated the 300th anniversary of its premiere in Leipzig, Germany. Bach’s masterpiece includes varied hymn stanzas and sung commentary to proclaim the account of Jesus’ crucifixion from the Gospel according to St. John. Under the direction of Dr. Maurice Boyer, the performance followed a March 21 lecture by Boyer as part of the Seminary’s annual celebration of Bach’s birthday in the Kristine Kay Hasse Memorial Library.

*The American Kantorei perform the “St. John Passion” March 24 in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus. Photo: Jill Gray*





## ‘The Bible We Read in Church’ workshop

How can the use of a lectionary in church encourage biblical literacy? That was the focus of the Feb. 10 Lay Bible Institute, “The Bible We Read in Church,” led by Dr. Vilson Scholz, visiting professor of Exegetical Theology. During the one-day workshop, Scholz demonstrated how The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Three-Year Lectionary’s series of readings for each Sunday intercommunicate with each other and illustrate the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture. The next Lay Bible Institute, “The Book of Psalms and the Christ,” is set for Aug 3. Learn more and register at [csl.edu/lbi](https://csl.edu/lbi).

*Dr. Vilson Scholz leads “The Bible We Read in Church” Lay Bible Institute Feb. 10 in Sieck Hall. Photo: Lucas Moody*

## Seminary celebrates Call Day, Commencement

The Seminary announced and celebrated student assignments and calls during two services April 23 in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus. Second-year seminarians who will serve as vicars and deaconess interns received their assignments in an afternoon worship service with Rev. Michael Mohr, president of the LCMS Central Illinois District, delivering the sermon. Later that evening, concluding students received their first calls to serve as pastors, deaconesses, chaplains and missionaries in an evening service where Dr. Brian Saunders, president of the LCMS Iowa District East, preached. Commencement exercises for the 2024 graduating class will take place May 17 beginning with a Theological Diploma Service at 10 a.m. CDT in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus and ending with Commencement at 7 p.m. in the Main Quadrangle. Both events will be available via livestream at [csl.edu/live](https://csl.edu/live). Congratulations and God’s blessings to all our students on these two significant milestones!

*The chapel is filled for the assignment of calls service on Call Day April 23. Photo: Jill Gray*





## New Lilly Endowment grant to establish Family Discipleship Initiative

The Seminary received a \$1.25 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to partner with the Concordia Center for the Family (CCF) and establish the Family Discipleship Initiative (FDI). The initiative centers around providing Christian individuals and families in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, including pastoral formation and deaconess students at the Seminary, and families, congregations and districts with the educational and motivational tools necessary for sharing their faith and values with their children. Having received the grant at the turn of the new year, the Seminary became one of 125 organizations to receive such a grant through the Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative that Lilly Endowment launched in 2022 to support Christians as they disciple future generations.

*From left, Provost Dr. Ronald Mudge, Associate Professor of Practical Theology Dr. W. Mart Thompson, Executive Director of the Concordia Center for the Family Dr. Todd Biermann and Seminary President Dr. Thomas J. Egger met on campus this winter as planning began for the new Family Discipleship Initiative. Photo: Sarah Maney*

## Eatherton joins faculty

Dr. Samuel Eatherton, an experienced minister of music who has led choirs and taught literature, has accepted a call from Concordia Seminary to serve as assistant professor of Practical Theology and as kantor and director of music arts. Additionally, he will be named the second occupant of the Kreft Chair for Music Arts. Eatherton, who received a Doctor of Musical Arts in church music from Baylor University (2019) and a Master of Church Music from Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill. (2003), will be formally installed Aug. 23 during the Opening Service of the 2024-25 academic year.

*Dr. Samuel Eatherton.  
Photo: Courtesy Eatherton*





## Sem achieves reaffirmation of accreditation

The Seminary recently received reaffirmation of accreditation from its two accrediting organizations. Having placed visitation teams on campus throughout 2023, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) granted the Seminary a full 10-year reaffirmation of accreditation. Seminary leaders received recommendations in formal reports that documented the Seminary's general and distinctive strengths. The HLC report highlighted the clarity of the Seminary's mission, the integrity of its operations and the quality of its academic programs, and the ATS report noted the Seminary's nearly two-century commitment to its mission to provide faithful workers, strong financial support, commitment to hospitality and deep engagement in the life of the church. The Seminary community rejoiced at the accrediting agencies' recognition of its work in providing a holistic theological education rooted in Christian love.

*From left, the Seminary's team that led the accreditation effort: Provost Dr. Ron Mudge; Executive Vice President Mike Louis; Director of Research, Assessment and Academic Programming Dr. Alan Borcharding; and President Dr. Thomas J. Egger. Photo: Sid Hastings*

## President Egger reflects on Walkout

On the 50th anniversary of the 1974 Walkout at the Concordia Seminary campus, Seminary President Dr. Thomas J. Egger offered a brief reflection and statement after the morning service in the Chapel of St. Timothy and St. Titus Feb. 19. "The results of this controversy, the blessings that have come from it and also its lasting wounds, continue to this day. On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, it is appropriate that we pause and reflect. And in this brief reflection, I want to encourage among us four things: repentance, gratitude, love and a steadfast commitment to the Holy Scriptures," he said. "May we never become indifferent or skeptical toward the written Word of God, but rather may we meditate on it day and night." To read the entire reflection, visit [csl.edu/newsroom](https://csl.edu/newsroom).

*President Dr. Thomas J. Egger offers a statement on the 50th anniversary of the Walkout. Photo: Christie Hampton*






CONTINUING EDUCATION

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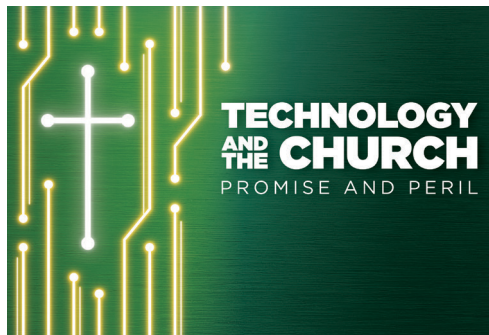
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JULY  
16-18



## Theological Symposium

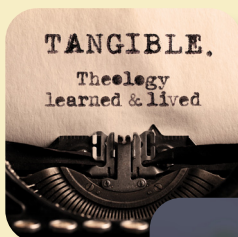
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