



From the land of sky-blue waters

Minnesota seminaries embrace the future with new insights and new outreach

THIS SUMMER the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada holds its Biennial Meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Five graduate-level seminaries are nestled among Minnesota's celebrated lakes, and recently *In Trust* set out to discover more about them.

Here's what we learned:

At **Bethel**, a large evangelical school, researchers have been studying the psychological and spiritual well-being of students (and spouses) for more than a decade. Their conclusions are intriguing.

At **Luther**, the largest seminary in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, multiple ministry-related websites are expanding the school's

reach far beyond Minnesota.

At **Saint John's**, which is part of a large Benedictine abbey, the spiritual lives of Protestant and Catholic students are being shaped by the monastic community.

At **United**, a progressive Protestant school, the arts have become an integral part of the community's worship.

At **St. Paul Seminary**, a large incoming class of enthusiastic young candidates for the priesthood is offering hope for the future of priestly ministry in the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis — and beyond.

Holly Miller and Jay Blossom wrote the articles in this special section based on interviews by Jay Blossom.

■ Bethel Seminary *St. Paul, Minnesota*

Psychological research on seminarians leads to changes in curriculum

Seminarians who wrestle with questions about their own faith are likely to experience more stress than their fellow students who do not struggle with their faith — but they are also more likely to graduate. That's one of several provocative findings emerging from a research project at Bethel Seminary.

Motivation for the study, now in its 11th year, came from a series of questions originally raised by Leland Eliason, who was provost when the study began. Eliason wanted to know what happens to student's spiritual formation during their years in seminary, says Steven Sandage, professor of marriage and family studies, who has been directing the study in collaboration with former colleague Carla Dahl. "Most of us recognize that students come to seminary at different places

Above: The Saint John's Benedictine monastic community is an integral part of life at Saint John's School of Theology–Seminary. The signature bell tower of the abbey church looms over Lake Sagatagan.

in their faith journeys,” Sandage adds, “but where are those places?”

Answers to the questions may predict seminarians’ success in school and in ministry. And as the study’s findings are disseminated through the seminary and in area churches, they are also used to make changes in curriculum and programming. “When it comes to spiritual formation, we need to think not just about how students grow, but what might be the impediments to growth,” says Sandage.

Bethel’s campus has all the characteristics of a laboratory setting for such a groundbreaking project. A large evangelical seminary affiliated with the Baptist General Conference, it draws students from 60 denominations. Participation in the study has been voluntary from the beginning, and more than 2,000 students and spouses have agreed to fill out well-validated research questionnaires, join in focus groups, and submit to follow-up interviews. The result: The research team has amassed more than half a million data points. And they’ve published a dozen empirical studies in scholarly journals with the help of funding from Lilly Endowment Inc., the John Templeton Foundation, and the Fetzer Institute. The varied back-grounds of the campus population have ensured an interesting sampling. “Students often come here wanting a good evangelical theological education, but as soon as they step into a classroom they encounter diversity, a range of perspectives, and the stress that goes with both,” explains Sandage. “These conditions contribute to their spiritual formation.”

The most spiritually and psychologically healthy students exhibit characteristics of both *dwelling* and *questing*, Sandage says. Dwelling—the deepening of internalized religious faith and practices—corresponds to high levels of personal motivation and may even contribute to increased spiritual activism and community service. On the other hand, questing or seeking involves spiritual searching through open, authentic questioning which can result in a deeper and more complex faith perspective.

While dwelling and questing are usually thought to be opposed, most seminarians encounter both during their theological education. As a result, measures of psycholo-

gical well-being often take on a U-shaped pattern. Students often begin their studies with a strong sense of well-being. By the time they reach the middle of their degree program, they experience a dip in well-being as their questing unsettles long-held assumptions and biases and they wrestle with forming their own theological commitments. In some cases, students also experience a “leaving home” process and grapple with personal issues. But as graduation approaches, many students report a renewed sense of well-being, surpassing even their original levels of well-being, as they learn to integrate questing with deeper levels of dwelling.

Sandage reports that students who integrate both dwelling and questing into their lives also tend to demonstrate relational qualities consistent with success in completing their education and in later ministry. “We’ve found that students who value theological exploration and stay connected to other people and to God as they engage in their exploration — these students tend to grow and have a better chance of graduating,” he says. On the other hand, students who either cannot tolerate ambiguity or feel overwhelming anxiety about rethinking their theology risk becoming isolated and dropping out. “We are working at providing the kinds of relational supports that can help students remain connected even during ‘dark nights of the soul,’” he says.

The research reveals troubling outcomes for seminarians who feel they are spiritually superior to their classmates. “These are persons who believe they are closer to God than other people are, and that God listens to their prayers more than to others’ prayers,” Sandage explains. “Such an attitude catches up with them when they find themselves in the rough-and-tumble world of congregational leadership and need to collaborate with other people.” They also struggle with forgiveness and with sensitivity to cultural differences. “Our research shows these tendencies toward spiritual narcissism tend to go down over the course of seminary, but we are also trying to work with those few students who are slower to show signs of healthy humility.”

Predictors of student success include attitudes of hopefulness and a style of praying that is warm, conversational, and meditative. On the other hand petitionary prayer,

Other research findings

Among other significant findings of the Bethel study:

- Most students participating in the project demonstrate an increase in spiritual maturity during their time in seminary.
- Student scores on virtues such as forgiveness, hope, and gratitude are strongly correlated with measures of a healthy self-identity and secure attachment with God, whereas feeling punished or abandoned by God is negatively related to those same virtues.
- A majority of students claim they experience a significant spiritual transformation during seminary.
- Intercultural competence among students is associated with spiritual well-being, gratitude, and questing.

Spouses of seminarians in the marriage and family therapy program acknowledge the financial and time pressures attached to student life but noticed positive influences on their “couple communication.” They also report a positive impact on their own faith and that of their partner. Training in family systems perspectives may be crucial to help students and spouses navigate the stress of seminary.

which asks God for help, is not correlated to graduation, spiritual well-being, or practicing the classic Christian virtues. "Petitionary prayer is certainly a valid spiritual practice," says Sandage, "but it seems the formative styles of prayer are more about connecting with God than making requests." The positive outcomes from meditative prayer have led the faculty to teach that practice within the curriculum.

■ Luther Seminary

St. Paul, Minnesota

An expanding vision for online community

The numbers say it all. Luther Seminary's online learning community is experiencing a population surge. Last year, *Workingpreacher.org* welcomed more than 1.2 million visits by 375,000 users in 210 countries. That represented a 4 percent increase over the previous year, and "from what we're seeing, a similar increase is likely in 2012," says Roland Martinson, academic dean.

The growing popularity of Luther's various websites has spurred the board and administration to expand their vision. They see the seminary, the largest in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as "more a theological learning community for Christian public leadership than simply a school," says Martinson.

The concept began to take shape about a decade ago when faculty members developed web resources for students enrolled in courses on campus and online. "That led to our imagining websites that would stand on their own and support persons in Christian leadership anytime and anyplace," says Martinson. An unanticipated benefit of these websites has been what he describes as "meet-ups" that enhance the school's reputation and boost its bottom line.

For example, the seminary supports a website called Stewardship for the 21st Century, which provides information for both lay and clergy leaders involved in congregational stewardship. Visitors to the site can interact, swap ideas, and even arrange to continue their discussions face to face. When Luther's Center for Stewardship Leaders sponsored a conference last summer, attendance was strong in part because website users wanted to meet colleagues they had chatted with online. "Plus, we had more than a hundred persons who didn't sign up for the conference but came to campus anyway," says Martinson, "or they streamed or downloaded what was happening in the sessions."

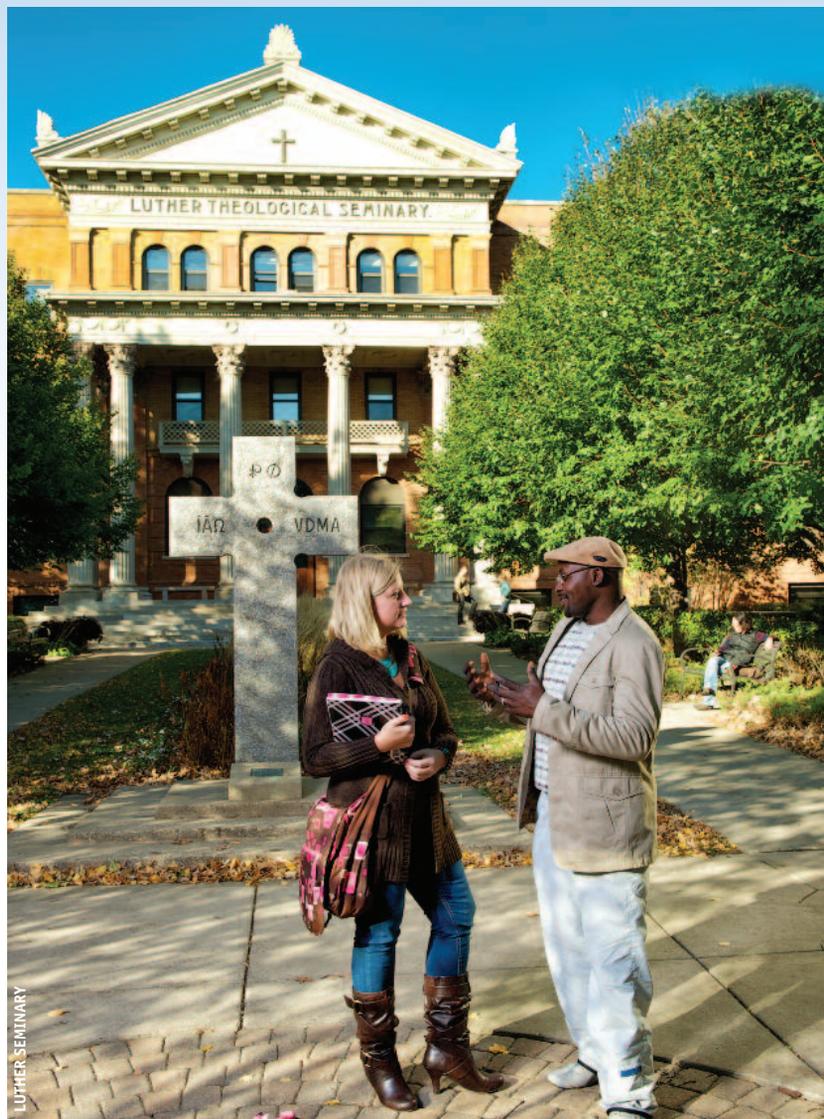
The result, he says, is that "people are discovering that Luther Seminary is a vital, lively place with quality faculty and quality research going on." Content for the sites is provided by professors who draw from projects they have initiated with partnering congregations and institutions.

*Luther Seminary has been investing human and financial resources into websites like **Workingpreacher.org**. Dean Roland Martinson says people who discover the seminary's online resources eventually learn that Luther is a "vital, lively place" that they may want to visit or attend. At right, seminarians chat on campus.*

Other experts weigh in, depending on the topic and the conversation threads. For instance, since its launch in 2007, *Workingpreacher.org* has offered contributions from 270 authors who represent more than a dozen faith traditions. "Our faculty has a network of people who are within the guild and who are practitioners. We invite them to participate," says Martinson.

The online presence attracts financial support from endowments, research centers, a foundation, and individuals. Luther's board of trustees is among several groups that encourage the online activity, but the major drivers are young faculty members who have grown up in the digital world. "These professors can't imagine carrying on scholarly discourse without participating in this virtual environment," says Martinson. "They blog, and their blogs take them all around the globe where they connect with new colleagues, promote us as an institution, and invite these colleagues to join them in their imagination."

The school's leadership believes that its growing online presence is helping achieve Luther's mission to educate a broad range of persons for positions of responsibility in Christian communities. Those persons include first-year



Free online resources from Luther

Although Luther's online resources are free, some of the sites invite users to contribute to their support. The first year that Workingpreacher.org accepted donations, users responded with gifts totaling about \$20,000; the next year that number doubled. Seven freestanding sites are now operating and "we envision ourselves adding some others," says Roland Martinson, academic dean.

Workingpreacher.org, the largest site, offers content for working preachers and includes audio and video resources.

Enterthebible.org is an interactive Bible study tool for lay people and clergy. Easy-to-read narratives are supported by maps, images, timelines, glossaries.

Firstthird.org cultivates faith in persons who are in the first third of life.

Luthersem.edu/godpause provides daily devotions written by Luther Seminary alumni.

Discerningmission.org is a cooperative effort that solicits stories and observations about the missional church movement.

Luthersem.edu/stewardship contains articles, reviews, links, and sermons about stewardship.

Luthersem.edu/vcp is the site of the grant-sponsored Vibrant Congregations Project, a long-term study of congregations that have grown more vital.

theology students, advanced degree candidates, ordained pastors, and congregational laity. The communities they serve may be located as close as the Twin Cities or as far away as developing countries. The challenge is to harness the digital phenomenon, determine its direction, and maintain its high quality.

"It's unfolded quickly, but we have some ideas as to what might happen next year and the year after," says Martinson. "We see the websites growing and becoming even more participatory. We hope to coordinate opportunities for users to interact online and also face to face. We're looking at the possibility of expanding our online presence by following the lead of schools such as MIT and Stanford."

■ [Saint John's School of Theology–Seminary](#) [Collegetown, Minnesota](#)

Protestants and Catholics, men and women, learning together in a monastic setting

When faculty at two Minnesota seminaries — one Lutheran, the other Catholic — bridged the denominational divide in the 1950s to explore views on theology, campus leaders cautioned them to keep the meetings under wraps. "It was like the old Mission Impossible show," jokes William J. Cahoy, dean of Saint John's School of Theology–Seminary. "Both sides were told, 'Go ahead, but if anybody finds out, we'll disavow any knowledge of the conversations.'" But the subsequent dialogue with Luther Seminary faculty members was stimulating, and the veil of secrecy soon lifted. Within a decade, Saint John's monks had launched the Collegetown Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research. "The monks founded the Institute to bring new people together," says Cahoy.

And they're still doing it.

The school of theology is part of Saint John's University and shares a rural campus of more than 2,500 acres with Saint John's Abbey, a large Benedictine monastery. It takes

seriously its Benedictine commitment to hospitality, trying to break down barriers among groups, and its efforts to "bring new people together" have served as models for others. For example, when nuns from the nearby College of St. Benedict asked to enroll in all-male graduate classes and work toward master's degrees, the monks agreed as "an exercise of monastic hospitality," says Cahoy. The first cadre of women completed their studies in 1962, and, "as far as we know," he says, "they were the first women anywhere in the world to earn graduate theological degrees from a Catholic theologate. We're proud of that."

The surprising result is that while at the undergraduate level, Saint John's remains all male, enrollment in the school of theology is equally divided between men and women. (Undergraduates at Saint John's do take classes alongside women from St. Benedict's, and the two schools collaborate in many administrative and academic areas.)

Out of both experiences — the ecumenical discussions in the '50s and the matriculation of women in the '60s — evolved the school's commitment to educate lay people of both sexes and all traditions for service to the church. The decision was timely, coinciding with a declining number of persons answering calls to priestly ministry. A notable flip-flop in numbers at Saint John's Seminary reflects the trend. In the decade between 1988 and 1998, enrollment went from a ratio of 80 percent seminarian and 20 percent laity to a ratio of 20 percent seminarian and 80 percent laity. "That's a lot of change for a theological school," says Cahoy.

Responding to this change, the challenge for the seminary has been to deliver the same quality education and formation for lay people as for priests-in-training. "Our commitment is to provide not just information but also formation," says Cahoy. "The first we do well; the second has been more of an experiment. We're trying to draw on the monastic character of the school and figure out what this means for non-monks. It's not that we see our lay students as monk wannabes or monks without the vows. That would never work. We know they can't go out and turn parishes into some kind of monasteries."

The goal, instead, is twofold: first, to identify the key parts of a monk's spiritual formation that lead to a well-formed life seeking God; and, second, to translate those essential elements into something that serves the church more broadly. This ambitious experiment plays out in an ecumenical setting that is conducive to growth. Although the majority of the seminary's enrollment is Catholic, some of Saint John's students are Protestants preparing for ordination. Others are lay Catholics or Protestants working toward academic theology degrees or simply studying for their personal enrichment in a monastic context of prayer and community. The mix of backgrounds and aspirations creates lively discussions for all participants.

"Most of our Catholic students find it affirming to have classmates who are not Catholic," says Cahoy. "The non-Catholics come and say, 'I want to learn from your tradition; I find this to be a source of spiritual enrichment. There's something here that I want to understand. It doesn't mean that I want to become Catholic.' A lot of learning takes place during conversations among the groups in the classroom, but some of the best learning occurs during walks through the woods and over dining room tables."

■ United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

New Brighton, Minnesota

Art and the spiritual life

As part of their alma mater's 50th anniversary celebration this spring, alumni of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities contributed to an art exhibit that depicts moments of transformation in their lives. A highlight of the year will come later, in July, when the campus welcomes its eighth president, Barbara Holmes, who introduced herself to the community in a recent video. "The most interesting

thing about me is I'm an artist at heart," she said. "There is an artist who lives in me, even when I'm performing institutional duties. It's all about the spirit."

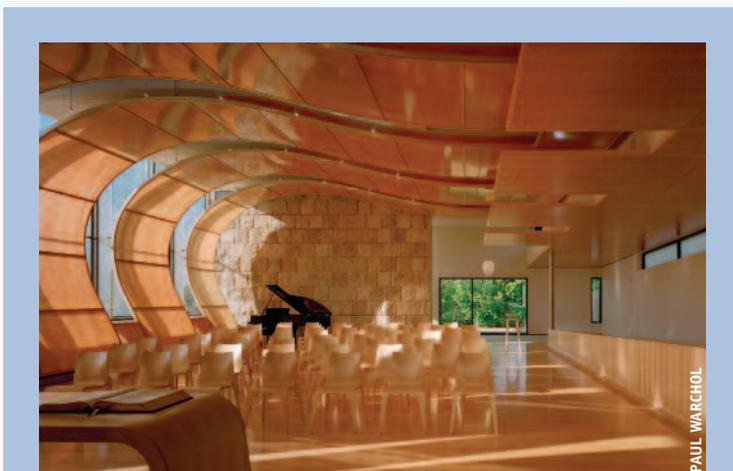
At United Theological Seminary, the emphasis on art is campus-wide and intentional. If 2012 is a pivotal year in the school's history, so was 2004 when the seminary's new chapel opened its doors and a newly adopted curriculum explicitly included spiritual formation and the arts. "In their first class, students write and share their spiritual autobiographies," explains Martha Postlethwaite, chaplain and associate professor of spiritual formation, adding that students can add to their "Spiritual Chronicle" throughout their years at the seminary. "We encourage them to collect items that are pertinent to their faith journeys. Some students include art projects, poetry, or papers they've written that helped them find their unique voices. In a sense, they're tending to their spiritual stories all the way through seminary."

Semiweekly chapel services are "very ecumenical, which I think puts our students in a good place for preparing for the world they're entering," says Postlethwaite. This wasn't always the case. When she arrived on campus 20 years ago, the school was struggling to offer chapel programs that met the needs of its diverse enrollment. The seminary has long attracted students from a range of faith traditions, and at first, part of Postlethwaite's job was "to make sure we had an Episcopal service, a Lutheran service, a Methodist service, and so on." But she left chapel every week hearing a lot of complaints.

If students objected to the denominational approach, they also dismissed the attempt to turn chapel services into forums. "They said, 'We hear lectures in our classrooms; we need chapel for worship,'" recalls Postlethwaite. The move into the new Bigelow Chapel addressed both complaints and ushered in a period of change that transformed the community, she says. "We had conversations about which parts of our worship practices we were ready to leave behind and which parts we wanted to take with us."

The new space is open, flexible, dramatic, and lends itself to innovation. There is room for art exhibitions, and professors encourage their students to wander the galleries and integrate works of art into their theological reflections. Art also has a place in worship services. As an example, during Holy Week, the worship committee set up the Stations of the Cross with tables displaying art, poetry, and questions for reflection. When an art exhibit is the focus of a chapel service, the room can be configured for easy viewing of the pieces. "We turn our chairs toward the gallery space," says Postlethwaite.

Changes in chapel have led to changes in Postlethwaite's responsibilities as chaplain. She describes herself as a "resource" who supports rather than directs the groups of students who plan many of the worship services. The results benefit the entire community, as students gain



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The innovative design of Bigelow Chapel has earned numerous awards from professional architectural organizations. Wilson Yates, president emeritus and professor emeritus of religion, society, and the arts, wrote that it has a "poetic presence on the landscape."

www.unitedseminary.edu/Bigelow/photos.asp

valuable experience and faculty members are exposed to new expressions of creativity. "We're enriched by the students who come here," says Postlethwaite. "A number of them are artists, and they help us worship in bolder colors."

■ St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas

St. Paul, Minnesota

A "new springtime" for Catholic vocations

When Msgr. Aloysius R. Callaghan was named rector of Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity in 2005, the seminary's total enrollment was about 60. This year, 100 were enrolled, including 32 new students. That's probably the best enrollment in three decades, Callaghan says.

So why the uptick?

"Eucharistic adoration," says Callaghan. "That's the first thing."

Parishes all over the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis have regular Eucharistic adoration — a devotional practice in which Catholics pray together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament (that is, consecrated Communion bread) that has been reserved from a previous celebration of the Mass. In the St. Paul–Minneapolis archdiocese, as in other dioceses, prayers for an increase in religious vocations are part of Eucharistic adoration.

"Jesus said, 'Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to his harvest field,' says Callaghan. "Well, people are praying, and some young men — and some not-so-young men — are responding."

Entering seminarians "want to proclaim that there is something stable and strong, and that's our faith," he says. Most credit Pope John Paul II, whose charismatic presence

seemed to resonate with young people, as their chief inspiration for pursuing the priesthood. "These men are eager to proclaim the Gospel and to show their brothers and sisters that there is joy in following the Lord," Callaghan says. Indeed, he believes that infectious joy is another reason for the growth in vocations over the last few years. "If there are happy, joyful, enthusiastic, and dedicated people on a mission, other people will be attracted to it. These students are attracting others."

To help seminarians learn how to attract others in a more deliberate way, St. Paul Seminary is piloting a new program this summer called Evangelization in Action. Seminarians who've completed their first year of theology can spend eight weeks learning how to share their faith with Catholics who have dropped out of parish life. "We'll provide the participants with a grounding in the theological basis and the practical application of the Catholic church's vision for evangelization," Callaghan says.

Living in the residence halls, seminarians will study together and will attend daily Mass. But they'll also go out to serve parishes in the Twin Cities, interning with parish pastors who have identified lapsed members who might be open to a home visit. "The seminarians will participate in evangelization in parishes, and they'll reach out and build relationships with inactive Catholics," Callaghan says. "They'll visit people."

Callaghan explains that classroom learning and work in parishes will be integrated with weekly spiritual direction and regular study groups, all with the purpose of deepening students' awareness of the "tools for evangelization" that are at their disposal.

"As far as I'm concerned, we're experiencing a new springtime," Callaghan says. "Young men see a hurting and suffering world, and they want to do something about it." **IT**

Msgr. Aloysius Callaghan carries the Blessed Sacrament (displayed at the center of the sunburst-shaped monstrance) into the courtyard of St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity during a procession of seminarians, priests, and lay people. The annual procession through the campus of the University of St. Thomas precedes 40 hours of Eucharistic devotion held each fall in honor of St. Charles Borromeo, patron saint of seminarians.



MIKE EKERN/UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS