

Diversity Commitments Fall 2015

Luther Seminary has been a predominately Lutheran and Caucasian community since its inception. There have been strides made over the years to diversify the community: the enrollment of women, the recruitment of international students, the hiring of ecumenical faculty that can teach denomination-specific courses and support ecumenical students, and the pursuit of students of color through scholarships and staff positions dedicated to recruitment and retention of students of color.

While we can boast that we have gender diversity and a large number of international students, we still have significant room for growth in ecumenical students and students of color. Both ATS and HLC shared concerns regarding the lack of ethnic and racial diversity. As we consider enrollment strategy at Luther Seminary, we must take into account the changing demographics in Minnesota and throughout the United States in regards to who will attend Luther and how we will equip our students to be effective Christian public leaders in a diverse country (and world). Our Lutheran identity calls us to be in community with our neighbors, calling us to engage in our wonderfully diverse world.

Currently, Luther Seminary is not known as a place that welcomes diverse populations. Our attempts to reach out to communities of color have been either short-lived, based on individual relationships and/or from an assimilation expectation (you are welcome here, as long as you act like or become one of us). Luther's reputation in communities of color, interfaith organizations and ecumenical communities needs to be tended through relationship and trust building. We have competition with United Theological Seminary: they are the seminary in the Twin Cities known to welcome diverse populations. Themes of race, race relations and building a beloved community are front and center on their website and in their programming.

The ELCA has struggled as well to become a diverse and interculturally sensitive church, even though this has been one of its stated goal / challenges for the past 25 years. As a seminary of the ELCA, we need to model and encourage the whole church in this direction.

In the recent ATS presentation on the State of Theological Education, Dan Aleshire shared that MDIV degrees account for virtually all the decline in enrollment across the system and MA degrees are growing. White enrollment accounts for nearly all of the decline; racial/ethnic minorities and visa students account for the only growth. MA degrees will outpace MDiv degrees and minority students will outnumber white students within about ten years.

Finally, the new curriculum, with its focus on formation, invites us into a space of diversity. As we ask the important questions about spiritual formation for public Christian leaders, we are asking the question of diversity, of intercultural sensitivity, of a radical welcome.

Historical Narrative of Race and Culture at Luther Seminary:

Freed In Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture is a powerful social statement that was released by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in 1993. This document as communicated by the third Churchwide Assembly provides a blueprint to guide our Church towards eliminating oppression, living for social justice, and building God's community.

Luther Seminary has demonstrated a concern with race, ethnicity, and culture within the campus community. For the purpose of this document, race, ethnicity, and culture will be labeled as "diversity". At multiple points over the last two decades, there is a clear legacy of individual students, staff, and faculty who have emerged as leaders for the cause of "diversity". These persons have spent energy, committed time, and conducted research with the intent of yielding effective outcomes towards building a more diverse educational institution.

"Diversity initiatives" include a wide variety of programs and services intended to foster an array of outcomes, some of which pertain to the institution as a whole (e.g., increased knowledge about diversity, positive campus climate) and others which are specific to multicultural students, faculty, and staff.

The intent of sharing our historical narrative of diversity initiatives at Luther Seminary is not meant to defame, blame, accuse, insult or in any way pass negative judgment on our institution. The intent of this narrative is to communicate the multiple voices and stories from our community, and to acknowledge that diversity has been a part of the fabric of our institution. This type of assessment enables Luther Seminary to own our story in an authentically honest way as we more intensely listen to our call to honor tradition and be different. It also provides opportunity to live diligently within our mission to educate leaders for Christian communities called and sent by the Holy Spirit to witness to salvation through Jesus Christ and to serve in God's world.

Historical Documents:

- School Climate Assessment – David V. Taylor (1994)
- Student Racism Survey – Dennice Gooley (2001)
- Vision Statement Standing Committee Against Racism (2001)
- Questionnaire on Racism In Educational Systems
Jill Michelle, Sue Gravelle, Maureen Howard (2006)
- Dr. Mary Hess – Historical Summary (2008)
- School Climate Assessment – Frances E. Kendall (2009)
- Assessment of Syllabus (2010)
- On Being a Welcoming, Hospitable, and Diverse Community
- Standing Committee on Racism Proposal (2011)
- Dr. Cheryl Chatman Luther Visit (2015)

Themes:

From the documents provided Luther Seminary has approached diversity as a campus community in these ways.

- Assessment of School Climate
- Developing student recruitment, enrollment, and retention strategies
- Developing recruitment, hiring and retention strategies for faculty and staff of color
- Conducting faculty and staff professional development
- Developing cross-cultural and anti-racism curriculum
- Student international and urban immersion programs

Observations:

It should be noted that with the majority of the documentation provided, there is a very small response rate from students, staff, and faculty of color. The majority of the historical narrative that is provided, is derived from a homogeneous white/Caucasian constituency.

This is not meant to marginalize voices of difference within this white/Caucasian homogeneous group. What was shared is considered real and valid, yet, there was not an in-depth explanation that identified why the voices from international and domestic persons of color were absent beyond low numerical numbers within the Luther community at all levels.

School climate

There were two formal climate studies conducted by outside consultants for Luther Seminary one in 1994, and a second in 2009. The first assessment by Taylor in 1994 provides specific data and comments from respondents, whereas the Kendall assessment provides a list of actions steps with no respondent comments.

Former Luther student Dennice Gooley conducted a survey on student racism and information provided by Dr. Mary Hess supplied survey data on racism in the educational system pertaining to Luther Seminary as part of another student research project.

Common threads:

- Luther Seminary is a welcoming community. There was a heavy emphasis on what it means to be welcoming and feeling welcome. The first perception communicated has been that Luther is welcoming community overall. This narrative was generated from the majority culture in most cases. When different persons from denominational, sexual orientation or international perspective, Luther has not been the most welcoming or accommodating.
- The Luther Seminary community is a mixture of cultural awareness. Individuals who responded range on a continuum from being completely detached from diversity and diversity initiatives to full embracement.
- There is a very real sense of honoring the historical origins of Luther Seminaries European roots. The challenges as experienced by persons that considered themselves different, was assimilating to the European cultural and historical norms. Persons from

the same background express sentiments that it was not necessary to learning about diversity as honoring other types of difference would diminish the Lutheran ideal.

- The Luther Seminary Community is filled with implicit and explicit bias with more emphasis based in religious denomination, geographic region domestically/internationally, sexual orientation, and gender.

Developing student recruitment, enrollment, and retention strategies

- There is a perception in the documentation that Luther Seminary has done enough to attract students of color to the seminary. Highlights include a spectrum scholarship and a robust group of international students. When probed about domestic students of color Luther Seminary is mirroring the ELCA which would meet the perceived requirements around enrollment and retention of students of color.

Developing recruitment, hiring and retention strategies for faculty and staff of color

- This was the area most highlighted in the documentation as needing improvement. Students, faculty, and staff respondents across the majority of documentation identified this as a challenge and growth area.

Conducting faculty and staff professional development

- Professional Development and Engagement for faculty and staff have been very piecemeal. The documents provided identified an acknowledgement to know about diversity and showcased a demonstrated resistance to professional development opportunities. There was a cross cultural education component implemented in the curriculum and students responded positively but also identified a need to add more opportunities to explore diversity as a part of their learning. Historically speaking the comments made by faculty reflected more a questioning the need for diversity versus and embracing of cultural, ethnic, and racial difference.

Developing cross-cultural and anti-racism curriculum

- Culturally responsive and innovative pedagogy has been developed and implemented more in silos between faculty members rather than in collaboration. The emphasis also within these opportunities are more international in scope rather than influenced by American racial and cultural history. Culturally responsive and innovative pedagogy also has been perceived as another add on to curriculum and as an obstacle to biblical scholarship.

Student international and urban immersion programs

- The international student population and programming at Luther Seminary is the most accepted form of diversity identified in the documentation. The perception of a diverse community is driven by the numerical trend and history of international students being able to enroll and graduate from Luther Seminary. Students identified opportunities to have friendships, classes and immersion opportunities through study abroad and contextual learning as primary indicators of their readiness for working in diverse settings. Curriculum offerings, administrative policy, community relationships, and

“diversity” at Luther Seminary is defined and implemented from more of a global/international lens.

- Across the documentation there is an absence of American understanding of race, racial identity and racism.

Theology of Christian Community for Luther Seminary:

Draft by Amy Marga, August 2015, with edits by Cameron Howard, Lois Malcolm, and Dirk Lange

I. God’s Promises to the world

We at Luther Seminary believe that God has chosen to reveal God’s unending faithfulness and mercy to all humanity in multiple and diverse ways.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which contain complex and multiple voices and span across centuries, tribes, peoples, and cultures, are the authoritative witness to God’s unending promise of faithfulness.

God’s will for humanity and God’s faithfulness to the variety of human cultures, families, and nations come through in unexpected but clear ways through biblical accounts such as the bond between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, Ruth and Naomi; or the single mother of Ishamel, Hagar, seen and saved by God in the desert; or the Syrophenician woman who speaks with Jesus; or the Samaritan man who gives aid to a stranger. Stories such as these show that God’s will and revelation are active and lively among people from all ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds.

For this reason, we at Luther Seminary believe that our learning community is rooted most honestly and deeply in Scripture when it listens to and learns about God’s action and will *with* people from all traditions, backgrounds, Christian denominations, churches, and ethnicities.

We also believe that the authority of Scripture is grounded in the ways in which the Scriptures lead us to Jesus Christ.

For this reason, at the center of our theology of Christian community is the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, who, as God, became flesh in order to live among sinful, vulnerable humanity as a sign and sacrament and act of God’s unending mercy and creativity. God’s act of Incarnation is the ultimate promise of divine presence and reconciliation. In Christ, God shows humanity that God wills to be in relationship with persons of all kinds of race, culture, social status, power, gender, class and religion.

II. God’s forming of Christian Community

Luther Seminary’s commitment to being a learning community of diverse voices, perspectives, and varied backgrounds reflects the harmony and originality of the Holy Spirit in all its fecundity and creativity. Living in the color and vibrancy that are the peoples of the Spirit, Luther Seminary believes that God will move it -- with the Church and its neighbors -- into God’s future through neighbors, strangers, friends, and colleagues.

Luther Seminary trusts that the learning edges and growth curves of this learning community is a gift from God. Through this growing process, God raises up leaders of God's promise of reconciliation for all peoples in Christ.

We acknowledge that the Old Testament (also known as the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament contain accounts of crimes against humanity, such as genocide, sexual violence and slavery. These stories are accounts of human sin that have continued into our homes, neighborhoods, communities and world today. These sins, past and present, individual and collective, point to the deep need that humanity has for Jesus Christ, who comes as the one who unifies people and heals human divisions.

As a learning community, we seek to reach across dividing lines, as Jesus Christ himself did, and as he taught us, so that our expressions and work in theology, biblical studies, history and other disciplines are more fully and honestly shaped by Christ's life, death and resurrection across the wide breadth of humanity's diverse peoples.

We believe that this 'Christological reach' (God's act in Jesus Christ) is our lens into the present reality of God's work. In the Spirit, through the mercy of the Father and the humanity of the Son, it is also our reach into God's promised future.

Jesus Christ's reach across dividing human lines is continued by the Apostle Paul, who has unequivocally written that "in Christ there is no male or female" (Gal 3: 28) nor "Gentile or Jew... slave or free" (Col. 3:11).

We are all one in Christ.

Faith communities are called to diversity. All faith communities must work to find fruitful ways of agreeing, being together, and working towards common goals. This is an on-going process that strengthens both diversity and unity of genders, ethnicities and cultures. As a seminary community, we strive to live into Paul's vision of the unity of peoples in Christ as an image of the promise of God to all humanity. We are dedicated to the practices of communication, reconciliation, respect and learning from students, faculty, and staff of all backgrounds who want to participate in the ministry of reconciliation and public Christian leadership at Luther. We trust that God will help us navigate through the new future that is opened to us through the diverse individuals in the Luther learning community.

III. God's Work in and through the Neighbor

The words of Christ in Matt 25:35, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," clearly reveal that God's energy and mission come to us in and through our neighbors.

Martin Luther, as well, exhorts his listeners that in the freedom of Christ, the Christian is "the most free lord of all, and subject to none ... the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one."¹

¹ Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian" <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1911/1911-h/1911-h.htm>

The work of the Holy Spirit created a community of early and diverse followers of Jesus Christ. This wide breadth of people formed a new community of neighbors who were different in social status, gender, ethnicity and culture.

Luther Seminary sees itself as having the unique task of learning how to live into a future of diverse voices, faces, backgrounds and perspectives in God's mission in the Holy Spirit for the sake of experimenting with and modeling God's promises of reconciliation for God's wider Church and the wider Christian community.

Luther Seminary understands that communities are complex, sometimes vulnerable, often multi-layered realities inhabited by limited human beings. It seeks to inhabit the space of a learning community through God's grace with trust, courage and curiosity. It seeks to model community among faculty, staff, and students and in the multiple settings of the seminary where small, even provisional communities, are formed.

Luther Seminary believes that God makes promises to communities: first to Israel, then to the Church. We believe that God has made a promise to the Luther Seminary community, too. God promises to use it and those in this community as agents of God's reconciling grace in the world. God will create the spaces here for future Christian leaders to be raised up and nurtured, so that the good news of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection can be heard around the world in a wide variety of places and by a wide variety of people.

Initiatives:

We need a multi-faceted approach to become a more diverse community as a strategic and missional imperative. For us to educate leaders for the future church, our institutional efforts must reflect more consistently the various diversities our students will encounter in ministry:

1. Building leaders: We need to build racial and cultural competencies in our students to effectively lead in the 21st century.
2. Creating and Sustaining Beloved Community: We need to recruit and retain students of color by creating inclusive living and learning environments.
3. Engaging our Neighbors: We need to be known in the community as an institution that welcomes, engages and cultivates racially and culturally diverse populations.
4. Investing in our people: We need to educate and empower faculty and staff to be confident in their work with racially and culturally diverse populations.

Investing in our people: We need to educate and empower faculty and staff to be confident in their work with racially and culturally diverse populations.

With the changing demographics of our country, our state and the Luther Seminary community, the staff and faculty need to be supported in developing or enhancing their intercultural competence and confidence. We must be intentional in our hiring, onboarding and training initiatives for all employees.

Creating and Sustaining Beloved Community: We need to recruit and retain students of color by creating inclusive living and learning environments.

Given the significant decline in ELCA enrollments, we cannot rely on the traditional ELCA pipeline to grow our enrollments. With the ELCA being 96% white, we cannot rely on the traditional ELCA pipeline to grow our diversity numbers.

Recruiting and retaining students of color requires a highly relational model. A Director of Multicultural Enrollment, Richard Webb, was hired and started work on August 3rd, 2015. This position has the authority to represent Luther in conversations regarding educational needs of local congregations and judicatories. The Vice President of Enrollment and Academic Dean have authority over offerings and partnerships.

Engaging our Neighbors: We need to be known in the community as an institution that welcomes, engages and cultivates racially and culturally diverse populations.

We have started to positively impact our reputation in the Twin Cities through our offerings during MLK JR Day (2014 and 2015) and Indigenous People's Day and subsequent programming (2014) and through our co-sponsorship at the YWCA's It's Time to Talk event and the Crossing Bridges: Selma to MN event.

- We need to demonstrate our commitment through our web presence: the language, stories, images need to let people know of our commitment when they go to our website.
- Our campus look and feel: how will people know of our commitment when they come to campus? How are our signs, art, amenities inviting (or not)?

Building leaders: We need to build racial and cultural competencies in our students to effectively lead in the 21st century.

Our graduates will be serving in diverse contexts, whether in rural, suburban or urban calls. Our country's demographics are changing and Christian Public Leaders need to know how to work across difference, how to lead in times of racial and cultural tension and how to build trust in communities. Our curriculum and co-curriculum need to provide space for such learning.