REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST FIFTY YEARS

Three faculty members—Dr. David Scaer, Dr. Dean Wenthe, and Dr. William Weinrich—have lived through it all.

By Kristine Bruss

In the summer of 1975, delegates to the Fifty-First Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, held in Anaheim, California, passed Resolution 6-08A, "To Initiate Action for the Continued Development of the Synodical Higher Education System." The first two proposed actions in that resolution explain how Concordia Theological Seminary, which operated in Springfield, Illinois, for one hundred years, ended up back in Fort Wayne, the city in which it was founded:

1. *Resolved*, That the Board for Higher Education be directed to phase out Concordia Senior College at Fort Wayne as a separate educational institution . . . and be it further
2. *Resolved*, That the Board for Higher Education be directed to transfer Concordia Theological Seminary of Springfield, Ill., to the campus at Fort Wayne, Ind., by June 1, 1977.

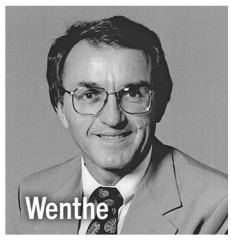
The following summer, CTSFW faculty and students made the move to Fort Wayne, which, according to



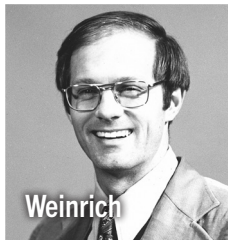
CTS Springfield Faculty, 1976



Scaer



Wenthe



Weinrich

Dr. David Scaer, "was carried out without a hitch." The fifty years since then have been marked by strides forward (see "Fifty-Year Timeline" on pages 16–17), blessings and challenges, periods of serious turbulence, and scrappy persistence, all of which have made CTSFW a stronger seminary today than when it first returned to Fort Wayne.

Transition to a New Campus

A striking, intentionally designed campus isn't required for a seminary, but it's certainly a great blessing.

Dr. Dean Wenthe, professor emeritus of Exegetical Theology and president emeritus, got to know the Fort Wayne campus as a Concordia Senior College student from 1965–67, after which he enrolled at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. His first call was to teach Hebrew and Old Testament at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, where he served as a faculty member from 1971–76.

"The contrast of the campuses was noteworthy," said Wenthe. "The Fort Wayne campus was an expansive architectural jewel designed by Eero Saarinen, an internationally known architect. The buildings were integrated with the diamond-brick motif and unified architectural grammar. The chapel, located in the center of campus, had a wonderful altar and an outstanding organ. Classrooms featured state-of-the-art configurations with strategic positioning of the lecturer surrounded by students. The dining hall was another Saarinen jewel, with two levels and a mosaic on the south wall. And the setting was the expansive Kramer Farm, with a lake."

The Springfield campus, in contrast, was made up of various buildings from different eras, with minimal architectural integration. Wenthe notes that the chapel was a large room with simple stained glass windows and an organ, classrooms were traditional spaces with rows of seats from front to back, and students and faculty ate in a large, dated room.

The location in Springfield also left much to be desired. "CTS was in a declining neighborhood with safety issues," said Wenthe. "We lived in a faculty home on campus, which was broken into three times in five years."

Wenthe is quick to point out that despite these differences, "there was a fine and faithful spirit on the Springfield campus, with the majority of the faculty supporting the Synod's confession of the authority of the sacred Scriptures."

Dr. William Weinrich, professor of Historical Theology, also taught at Springfield, but only for two quarters. He started in December 1975, and by August 1976, he was moving to Fort Wayne with his wife, Barbara, a baby on the way, and the first of their many Westie puppies. Echoing Dr. Scaer, Weinrich says the move was handled very well, despite the complexity of it all.

During the 1976–77 academic year, CTSFW and Concordia Senior College operated together on campus. Not surprisingly, there was some tension, not just on campus but also in area congregations. "The congregations had families from the senior college who had been in their parishes for years, and now they were being moved out, and we were the new guys," Weinrich recalls. "Their reaction was understandable, but that didn't make it easier."

For Scaer, who was called to CTS in Springfield in 1966 to teach dogmatics, the tension was about more than the move; it was about different philosophies. "The two faculties on campus were not of the same kind," said Scaer, who, prior to the move to Fort Wayne, had traveled between Springfield and St. Louis with other Springfield professors, including Wenthe, to teach at both LCMS seminaries after the "Walkout" of 1974 (Seminex).

"Springfield was theologically directed, while the senior college faculty focused on an assortment of secular topics, similar to but not exactly like the German model of education," he said. "Bringing the Springfield faculty onto the Fort Wayne campus might be compared to placing the non-commissioned officers in charge of the base."

In and Out of "the Troubles"

Weinrich says he doesn't have many strong memories of life on campus in the early years, but that changed in 1984, when he returned to campus after a year of study in Cambridge, England. "I left in early September of 1983, and everything was fine. I came back, and what I call 'the troubles' had already begun. After that, there was one kind of turmoil after another for the next ten years or so."

Weinrich learned that the Synod president had launched an investigation into "unrest" on campus, which led to a visitation and a report. In the summer of 1989, the Seminary's president, Dr. Robert Preus, no stranger to theological and political battles, was "honorably retired" by the Board of Regents, and Dr. Norbert Mueller was named interim president. Preus sought recourse in the Synod's adjudication system and was ultimately reinstated as president in 1992, but his presidency was effectively over. By 1993, there was a new president in place, Dr. David Schmiel, who served for two years.

In 1995, toward the end of Schmiel's term, things began to change. At that summer's Synod convention, "conservative types" were unexpectedly elected to the CTSFW Board of Regents; had that not happened, Weinrich says, CTSFW might not be here today. "They took office in September and chose me to be interim president."

In November of that year, Weinrich got a call from Robert Preus, and they talked for two hours. "He was giving me advice, which was fine, because I really didn't know what the heck I was going to do." Later that day, Preus had a fatal heart attack. "When he died, wow. The energy exploded here and throughout the Synod."

In his short time as acting president, Weinrich worked quickly to make changes in several positions, including academic dean; Wenthe was appointed to fill that role. One item on their agenda: dealing with an audit ordered by the previous president, which turned into a full-scale investigation by the Board of Higher Education. "That almost scuttled us with accreditation," Weinrich said.



Dr. William Weinrich speaks at a dedication event June 20, 2026, celebrating the donation of his and Dr. Dean Wenthe's personal libraries to the Seminary. Dr. Wenthe (front row, left) also delivered remarks to the gathered group, which included Dr. David Scaer (lower left corner). The Wenthe and Weinrich collections are now housed in the Wolf Lantern of the Wayne and Barbara Kroemer Library.

Beyond the accreditation woes, the financial stability of the Seminary "was going in the tank," said Weinrich. "The student census was way down. And the PR that was coming out of many district newsletters and some synodical materials was very negative toward Fort Wayne. We were in a bad place as an institution, without any question."

But brighter days were ahead.

A Stronger CTSFW

In 1996, Dean Wenthe was elected to serve as the fifteenth president of the Seminary. That same year, the school launched the Russian Project, which brought students to campus and sent professors to teach overseas. Weinrich says it was a lifeline for the Seminary and led to expanded work in the international arena.

Accreditation was still a problem early on, requiring some hard meetings and special pleading with accrediting agencies. "NCA had put us on probation. We were very fortunate they didn't just yank our accreditation," said Weinrich. "Dean flew to Pittsburgh to meet with the ATS representatives and pleaded with them to give us a chance and not put us on probation. They did give us a couple of notations, but they didn't put us on probation."

In 1998, the Seminary produced a self-study, written by Dr. Cameron MacKenzie, for another accreditation visit. "Lo and behold, we got three years, or maybe five, and things began to stabilize," said Weinrich.

Fast forward to 2010. In that year, near the end of Wenthe's presidency, CTSFW received its first-ever ten-year accreditation from both of its accrediting bodies, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The assessment confirmed not only that the educational quality at the Seminary met established standards, but that evaluators were confident that the Seminary could stay the course for the maximum renewal period of ten years.

As Wenthe looks back on the many ways in which the Seminary has gotten stronger in the past five decades, accreditation is high on his list. Also on his list: "continued growth and deepening theological and academic standing in the faculty," the addition of the deaconess program in 2003, the library expansion project, and the addition of the baptismal font in the chapel and crucifixes in the chapel and classrooms.

That left the Seminary in good shape for Wenthe's successor, Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. "When Dr. Rast took over as president in 2011," Weinrich says, "he got a strong school, and he kept it that way."

Since that time, CTSFW has dedicated the renovated and expanded library, implemented a full-tuition guarantee, added programs, retired its debt, grown the endowment, leaned into strategic planning, and added new endowed faculty chairs. In 2020, the Seminary earned another ten-year accreditation from ATS and HLC.

CTSFW continues to add strength to strength, a sure sign that it is, indeed, in a better place.



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FOR FURTHER READING

Scaer, David P. "The Move to Fort Wayne: The 'How,' the 'What,' and the 'Why.'" *CTQ* 85 (2021): 263–278.
Weinrich, William C. "Concordia Theological Seminary 1985–2010: A Story of Decline and Revival." *CTQ* 85 (2021): 279–296.