

For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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Vocation: A Defining Point for Lutheran Campus Ministry

Prof. John Pless

Real Time Campus Ministry

Rev. Derek Roberts

The Beginning of Wisdom

Rev. Stuart Crown

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I expect basic questions about when we meet, why there’s more than one Lutheran group on campus, plus a surprise question or two like, “Why do Lutherans think that water baptism saves?” It’s times like these that it’s good to have the *Small Catechism* memorized.

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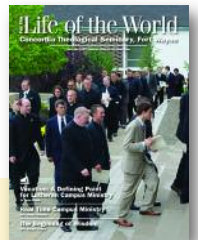
by Rev. Stuart Crown

Stanford’s physical scenery differs, its religious life holds up pluralism and post-modern thought, and its academic prestige and rigor can be intense, but the needs of the faithful at this private university differ little from any other school.

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In Mequon, Wisconsin, and at our sister schools around the country, Concordias start to live up to their names. That Latin word concordia implies a connection of faith, meaning something like “with one heart” or “with the same heart.” We who are privileged to serve on campus once again get a chance to live and forgive and grow and show Christ’s love to each other - to be Concordia.



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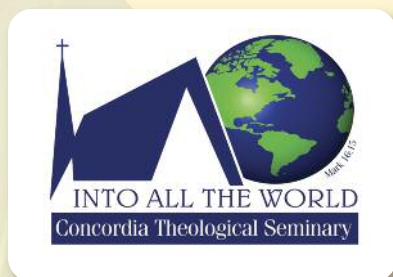


Into All the World was the theme for Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne's celebration of God's blessings on the renowned Eero Saarinen designed campus.

The entire campus, consisting of a total of 25 college buildings plus faculty housing, was designed by the internationally famous architect Eero Saarinen and his associates. The design has been the subject of articles in leading architectural publications and received the top award for design of college buildings in the United States in that year's annual design award program of Progressive Architecture.

Concordia Senior College officially opened its first academic year on September 10, 1957, with an enrollment of 193 students in the first class, and with a faculty of 21. The Senior College operated on the Fort Wayne campus for the next 20 years. At its 1975 convention, the Synod combined Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, with its Junior College in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Seminary operations were transferred from the aging campus in Springfield to the architecturally stunning Saarinen campus in Fort Wayne. With an enrollment of 419 seminarians, Concordia Theological Seminary shared the Fort Wayne facilities with the Senior College in 1976.

For over 30 years, Concordia Theological Seminary has continued to flourish in Fort Wayne. The seminary helps pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, and other church workers grow in knowledge and in the skills necessary to minister in a changing world. Concordia Theological Seminary continues to bring the gospel into all the world by forming servants in Jesus Christ who will teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all.



Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, President of CTS, looks on after giving workers permission to release balloons to mark the occasion.



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Vocation:

Missouri Synod Lutherans have a long track record for campus ministry going back to initial efforts at the University of Wisconsin, Purdue University, and the University of Minnesota in the early part of the last century. In spite of reduced subsidies from the districts and the lack of the previous synodical support structure, campus ministries continue in many places with evangelical vitality and confessional vigor. Whether in the form of campus chapels and student centers or neighboring congregations (“town-gown” ministries), LCMS campus ministries have great potential both for keeping our own students connected to Christ Jesus and reaching out to those who do not confess Him.

Campus ministries exist to maintain young Christians “in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Given the pressures of campus culture, this is no small task.

In the best sense of the term, campus ministries are maintenance ministries and should make no apology for being known as such. Campus ministries exist to maintain young Christians “in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Given the pressures of campus culture, this is no small task. Certainly there are secular ideologies and religious systems that may lure Lutheran students into false belief, despair, and other shame and vice. But perhaps more are lost to apathy or busyness than these more evident dangers. Centered in the proclamation of the saving Word and the giving out of the Lord’s body and blood, LCMS campus ministries serve to keep faith alive through God’s own means.

LCMS campus ministries will need to

be firm at the center and porous on the edges. At the center is clear preaching of God’s Word, rightly dividing God’s Law and Gospel so that the forgiveness of sins is spoken; and along with such preaching, a reverent and regular giving out of the gifts of the New Testament - Jesus’ body and blood to sustain and enliven students in the life of faith. For the sake of this firm center, there will be a lively and faithful use of the liturgy, careful and ongoing instruction in the Holy Scriptures and the Small Catechism, a loving practice of closed communion, and attentive pastoral care that utilizes confession and absolution.

Such firmness at the center then allows and even requires porous edges, that is, campus ministry offers a safe

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A Defining Point for Lutheran Campus Ministry

By The Rev. John T. Pless

space for those on the outside to listen and learn, to explore and investigate the claims of the Christian faith. Hospitality and English tutorials for international students, public lectures on campus, a well-stocked and up-to-date chapel library, a regularly maintained and easy to navigate website, and social and recreational events are some of the ways that a Lutheran ministry opens itself to the campus without losing its own identity. It is a given that a Lutheran campus pastor will not be intimidated or hostile to the life of the mind. In the fashion of the sainted campus pastor turned seminary professor, Don Deffner, he will have a “compassionate mind” open to learning, hungry to know more, while bringing every thought captive to Christ Jesus.

The LCMS does its best work on campus not by attempting to imitate the para-church groups but by actually being church. In fact, many LCMS campus ministries pick up students whom I

would describe as “Evangelical burnouts,” students whose initial contact with Christianity may have come by way of Campus Crusade, the Navigators, or InterVarsity Fellowship, but who eventually grow weary of being told what they must do to be effective disciples but never measuring up. Instead, Lutherans proclaim the Gospel of a God who justifies the ungodly apart from works of the Law.

The university, like the rest of the world, is best described using the imagery of Oswald Bayer (see his excellent little book, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*) as an arena that is always demanding justification; and attempting justification is something now that comes naturally to sinners. So sinners on campus might attempt to justify themselves by their academic achievements, physical attractiveness, social standing, or even religious experience. We seek to justify ourselves by action or attitude. Our



Our campus ministries are primed to teach the doctrine of vocation, enabling students to understand that their lives are right with God through faith in Christ. There is no additional holiness that they need before God. Belonging to Christ they live out their baptismal identity as they render their bodies as “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1) in the places where God has called them.


claims to autonomy only serve to demonstrate how bound we are to self. The university with its claims to openness and tolerance ends up closed and oppressive. Into this world, Lutherans come with a Word to proclaim that gives both truth and freedom. It is the Word of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of vocation is the earthly consequence of God’s justification of the ungodly. Set free from dead-end attempts to prove oneself to God, the Christian can spend his or her life in being some earthly good to the neighbor. A robust use of the doctrine of vocation should characterize our campus ministry. Students don’t come to the university to be missionaries or go to church. They come to get an education, to learn useful knowledge and needed skills that will put them in a position to earn a living. In doing so, they are doing things that need to be done in the world. Here I think Lutherans have an edge. The life of discipleship is not narrowly defined as doing church-related activities or even as that of witnessing to Christ on campus. Vocation embraces everything that the Christian is and does.

From Martin Luther we have learned to speak of vocation as lived out in three estates or three domains of life - congregation, civic government, and family (in Luther’s thinking as it was prior to the industrial revolution, occupation or job was assumed under family). Campus ministry strengthens students in vocation, that is, in living by faith in Christ and in love toward the neighbor. Faith is nourished by God’s Word and Sacraments and lives are shaped to live in love for the neighbor.

Our campus ministries are primed to teach the doctrine of vocation, enabling students to understand that their lives are right with God through faith in Christ. There is no additional holiness that they need before God. Belonging to Christ they live out their baptismal identity as they render their bodies as “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1) in the places

where God has called them. Bible studies, retreats, and other forums provide a venue for campus pastors to teach vocation. Campus ministries serve the church by producing theologically literate laypeople who will go back into the congregations and serve in a variety of capacities. Even as students grow in their various academic disciplines, they should be offered the opportunity to stretch the intellectual horizons of their faith. For over twenty years, University Lutheran Chapel at the University of Minnesota has hosted a Fall Study Weekend, bringing to campus such notable theologians as Robert Preus, Kurt Marquart, William Weinrich, Ronald Feuerhahn, Gene Veith, Harold Senkbeil, and John Stephenson to engage students in lively and solid study. Events like these have prompted some young men to consider the pastoral office; the significance of campus ministries as a recruitment pool for the seminaries should not be overlooked. But it is just as significant to recognize the way in which thousands of young men and women will live out their Christian callings as laypeople with profound Lutheran convictions due to their involvement in campus ministry.

Campus ministries, firm in their Lutheran identity and engaging of their university setting, do indeed serve as maintenance ministries, maintaining students in the faith and forming them to live in their vocation as Christians for the sake of the world. 

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