12-11-2000

The Concord

Luther Seminary

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/student_newspapers

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/student_newspapers/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives & Special Collections at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Newspapers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact akeck001@luthersem.edu.
LUTHER SEMINARY PROFESSOR AWARDED HONORARY DOCTORATE IN ICELAND

Luther Seminary Press Release

Daniel Simundson planned to spend at least part of his sabbatical last year in Iceland, but he had no idea an honorary doctorate would cap off the experience.

Simundson, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Theology from the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. The award was presented in September at the university’s opening convocation to begin the academic year.

“I’m the son of recent immigrants,” Simundson said. “I’ve had the identification to be an Icelandic American, so to be honored has special significance for me. My family in both countries is pleased and proud.

“It was of course a great honor and affirmation of the work I was doing there and the friendships made,” Simundson said. “It was a complete surprise because it was from this country my people left because of economic poverty.”

Simundson spent the fall 1999 semester on sabbatical leave in Iceland where he taught a 13-week course on the biblical book of Job at the university — the only one in Iceland. The university has an enrollment of about 6,000 students. It includes schools of theology, law and medicine.

The Church of Iceland is Lutheran, with about 90 to 95 percent of the population identifying themselves as Lutheran.

Simundson’s sabbatical project was to write a commentary on the Minor Prophets, but he also taught a lay school on the themes of suffering and hope. In addition, he spoke at four pastor’s conferences: one in Reykjavik and three in outlying areas.

Because of his Icelandic heritage, Simundson had previously visited the country about half a dozen times to see family and friends. He also spoke at a meeting of clergy. Since 1980, he and his wife hosted and established relationships with a number of pastors who have spent a significant time at Luther Seminary.

Simundson’s father Kolbeinn was born in Iceland, immigrated to Winnipeg, Manitoba at age 12 and moved to Washington at age 20. His maternal grandparents left Iceland in their 20s and moved to Victoria, British Columbia. Simundson’s mother Groa eventually moved to Point Roberts, Wash., where his parents met. Simundson’s father was a second-career pastor who attended seminary in Seattle in his mid-30s. He served as a pastor.

continued on page 6

ELCA News:
Church Leaders Head To Middle East To Bolster Peace Efforts

ELCA News Service

A high-level delegation of American church leaders is headed for the Middle East Dec. 7-12 to express solidarity with Christian churches there and to lend their voices to a growing chorus calling for renewed efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in the area. Representing the ELCA in the delegation are the Rev. Herbert W. Chilstrom, Green Valley, Ariz., former ELCA presiding bishop, and the Rev. Margaret G. Payne, bishop of the ELCA New England Synod, Worcester, Mass.

The delegation hopes to meet with Israeli and Palestinian political and religious leaders to discuss the escalation of violence and collapse of the peace process, as well as difficult issues such as the future status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, refugees and the protection of human rights. “It is crucial that we sit down with those who are victims of the violence, as well as those who are working to restore the peace process,” said the Rev. Mark B. Brown, assistant director, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA), Washington, D.C., who was instrumental in arranging the visit.

LOGA is the ELCA’s federal public policy office in the nation’s capital.

Despite the heightened tensions in the area, Brown said the delegation also hopes to visit institutions in Jerusalem, Gaza, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour and

continued on page 3
Thus far you have heard me speak about my faith tradition and my struggle to place my belief system, as it stands, within any one denominational scheme. As I have been engaged in this process, some of the shortcomings of the denomination of my youth, the Assemblies of God, have become apparent. I am keenly aware of the lack of religious education in the Assemblies of God. As I look around at my peers, engaged at their Con. Ed. Sites in teaching confirmation, I find myself wishing that my Sunday School classes and youth group activities had been supplemented by some sort of teaching regarding my denominational heritage and beliefs. Having journeyed from my “denominational home” and after being a part of a Mennonite and now a Baptist congregation, and even now as I am immersed in a Lutheran theological education, I feel compelled to shore up this knowledge that I lack, and am glad for the opportunity to seek an understanding of each tradition on its own terms.

What perhaps has been most surprising in all of this is my realization that just as I had uncritically absorbed the Assembly of God system as a child, so too did I dismiss it uncritically as I have ventured to explore the others. I am obliged now to retrace my steps and examine what has fallen by the wayside. Nonetheless, my enthusiasm for exploring the denominational landscape in an effort to develop a holistic faith in the face of waning denominationalism has been somewhat dampened since my arrival here at Luther. I find that the “political” climate for an open discussion of denominational differences can, at times, leave something to be desired.

Please do not misunderstand me here. While I am heartened and relieved that the Seminary employs Jean Justice and has charged her with making people like me feel welcome, I still find that it is hard for me to “kick against the goads”. The transition from my Assembly of God church to a Mennonite and then a Baptist one was not terribly difficult. However, it is increasingly clear to me that this latest adjustment is, and will continue to be, more problematic.

It is not a simple matter of doctrine, theology, and liturgy, although, of course, they do play a role. No, what I find most disconcerting is the manner in which people of good faith sometimes go about their disagreements. I can respect and understand that Lutherans and others in the mainline denominations have, quite naturally, serious points of contention with those in the evangelical churches, those in the charismatic movement, and those of the “fundamentalist” persuasion. However, it seems to me that honest disagreement need not lead to condescension, name-calling, and sarcastic castigation. Again, please do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to imply that this is endemic throughout the seminary. I, of course, speaking about a particular situation that I have experienced and about which I must be intentionally vague. I must also say that I am not, by any means, an advocate for “political correctness” and the like. I only mean to say that, in my opinion, what differences we may have need not divide us so long as we agree on Christ. With that in mind, if our objective were to love one another with the love of Christ, then it would seem that people of good faith could engage in vigorous debate without demeaning one another. Allow me to be slightly more specific; the particular type of theological arrogance that I am speaking against is that which regards itself as superior because it is “more intellectual”, or “better-reasoned”, all the while taking for granted that the base assumptions on which this premise rests are shared by all alike. This is not to say that those assumptions are wrong, however, only that they are not shared, which would naturally make any discussion (or disagreement) based on those assumptions problematic.

Nevertheless, I must admit that I find many of these arguments compelling, but they are made nearly unpalatable by the manner in which they are delivered. I often hear some of these castigated groups (fundamentalist, charismatics, etc.) condemned for a seeming moral superiority, an emphasis on personal piety. (In other circles, this emphasis on personal piety has been faulted for the manner in which it marginalizes the unbeliever who could never hope to achieve such a lofty standard and can, in any case, see through the hypocrisy of such a stance.) How striking, then, that this condemnation occurs by virtue of an equally damming intellectual superiority which has the effect of framing any sort of disagreement as stupidity. In this particular circumstance of which I speak, there truly has been no real debate because I, quite simply, have been afraid to speak up. I don’t want to sound stupid. So, it is my hope that we can learn to value each other more than our theological and intellectual agendas, as important as they may be, and that, by doing so, the God who died for us all might cause us, together, to grow into all truth.
Forcing The Issue

Scott A. Johnson, M.Div. Middler
Managing Editor, The Concord

It is so hard to write a column during the last week of the... oh wait, Leslie already covered that.

Seriously, it’s 9:45 p.m., I’ve got a paper due on Friday that is seriously behind schedule, and it’s really warm here in ye olde Concord office. Just about time to take a few weeks off, but a few words before that.

You may not have heard the news, but I happened to catch this on All Things Considered last week (December 5th). It seems that St. Paul - Reformation Lutheran Church has voted to ordain Anita Hill, a lesbian in a committed relationship who has been working in the congregation for some time. In October, the Conference of Bishops voted not to grant an exception to the requirements for ordination to St. Paul - Reformation in Hill’s case, and in November the ELCA Church Council upheld that decision.

Consequently, St. Paul - Reformation has voted to take matters into their own hands and ordain Hill at a date to be determined next spring.

Personally, my first reaction was “Oh, shit.” Here it comes, I thought, the donnybrook begins. And I could still be right about that. But I’ve changed my mind on this whole thing, and I want to take a few minutes of your time to tell you about it. I hope you’ll stay with me.

First, let me say that I do not support the ordination of practicing homosexuals. I know that to some people my opinion seems hateful, and I suppose there’s no better way to say it than just to be blunt about it. Others feel differently: that’s a fact and one that I will be happy to prove by publishing any letters against my opinion in our next issue. But for me, I remain unconvinced that homosexual relationships are part of the natural order God intends. As such, when I first heard that St. Paul - Reformation was going ahead with Anita Hill’s ordination, I was fearful and more than a little anxious. But after a few days to think about it, I’ve decided that this is, actually, a good thing.

Some of you have followed the endless discussions within the powers-that-be of the ELCA regarding homosexuality, especially concerning ordination. Have you noticed how these things have been obliquely addressed, e.g. proposals for the study of whether a committee dealing with homosexuality should be undertaken? Anything of substance gets 20th-century-Lutheranized right down the toilet: asking questions about whether a committee is needed allows people to wash their hands of the matter without ever having to worry about getting their hands dirty in the first place.

St. Paul - Reformation, however, seems to have stopped playing the game. Instead of following the lead and just standing there, they have done something, and it appears that they will continue to do something until they do what they think needs to be done. As I stated before, I do not endorse this ordinance. I do, however, endorse the spirit that is driving it.

If there’s going to be warfare, let there be warfare, but let’s get it out in the open, face to face. Yes, I know, church fights are our way of showing the world how hypocritical we are, but really, are endless focus groups and social statements a truly better way to attempt to resolve the issue? I remember being in a discussion group in college when the second sexuality statement was released, the one that was released as a draft for public consideration and never got any farther. Just imagine for a minute what the ELCA will look like 30 years from now if we are still in the same position.

Leslie Says...

By Leslie A. Goodwin M.Div. Middler

Let me tell you, it’s not easy coming up with a column while in the midst of finals. I already feel like my brain is working overtime, plus much of my plans (academic and otherwise) were delayed recently by an unfortunately-timed case of bronchitis - it’s enough to make your head spin. But today I think I got my fight back and I’m ready to tackle another column. Sort of. Well, maybe. Okay, just hold on with me, and let’s see where this thing takes us.

So what’s the good word? Well, that depends. Like I’ve told you before, these are just my ruminations (cf. previous issue of Concord) and I’m lucky enough to have convinced the editor of this fine publication to give me a column so I got a space to write them in. A very public space at that. Thanks to all of you dear readers who let me know that you enjoyed my last column, by the way. Today I’d like to talk about an issue dear to my heart, albeit one that creates some controversy in these parts: Catholicism.

Those of you who know me know that I spent the first twenty years of my life as a Roman Catholic. My joining the Lutheran church wasn’t an entirely easy transition, but it was in part motivated by my wanting to attend seminary and pursue ordination. In the time since my “conversion” I’ve wavered as to how I feel about my Catholic background, at times regarding it as a bane, other times as a blessing, and sometimes as both. But now through my well-rounded seminary education and all that CPF, I’m comfortable with being a formerly-Catholic Lutheran. What I am not comfortable with is some of the comments I hear about Catholicism however.

Recently a fellow student, during a casual conversation with several others at dinner in the cafeteria, called me a “recovering Catholic.” I voiced my objection. A professor referred to me as “an escapee from Catholicism.” Again, I objected. Another professor called me a “refugee.” Again, I demurred. Let me tell you right now that if I thought that my Catholicism was something I needed to either recover from, escape from,
Notes from the Parish Nurse

By Lydia Volz
Luther Seminary Parish Nurse

As we look towards our celebration of Christmas, many of our hearts are filled with warm memories and eager anticipation. For persons who have experienced a loss of a loved one, however, this can be a very difficult time. This month I would like to share with you Ways we can be a Comfort to Those who are Grieving.

When a friend is grieving there are several things we can do for/with them. First, we need to remember that there isn't a right thing to do or say that will make the pain go away. We need to be willing to simply be a continuing presence in our friend's life. It can be a comfort to just sit quietly. We can always be willing to listen. The pain of loss creates a deep and abiding loneliness; this is magnified when those grieving feel separated from others. Second, we need to take our cues from our friend. If they need to cry and experience sadness, we need to be able to be with them at this time without trying to 'cheer them up.' If they need reassurance of their worth, we need to be affirming. When they need to hear words of comfort from our Lord, we need to be to speak these to them. Third, we need to remember them in our prayers and let them know we are praying for them. May we "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Cor. 1:4).

Perhaps these excerpts from a widow's letter can better describe the impact of grief.

"...I want to thank you for your note of love and concern for me. The Lord has continued to work through people like you so I am adjusting to this new life of living as a widow. It is indeed a very difficult time. When he died, I wasn't sure anything or anyone could help. I felt a part of me go with him, and I felt an indescribable emptiness within me. But I was surrounded by family, my Pastor, work, church and community friends, all of whom wanted to help in any way they could to make my burden lighter, by doing physical work, praying with or for me, giving a hug, a meal, or a chance to talk or cry. I know these people were sent by the Lord to help me.

I remember the days before the funeral as somewhat of a blur. The funeral itself was a time of celebration of victory at his being with the Lord. After the funeral, the enormity of things began to hit me. I was so afraid and lonely, and still have those feelings. But one thing I know now is that when those feelings come, I can turn to the Lord and feel a peace come over me and know that I am not really alone. I've learned to pray in ways I never thought possible and then face the day with courage and acceptance. Again, He provides me with countless people to help me. It is hard for me to accept help, but I do know these people are all hurting too. I have struggled with financial matters, hospital/insurance concerns, and lots of smaller concerns, but again these things have worked out. Little by little I am getting more confident that perhaps I can handle life again, not with the same joy or in the same way, but I do believe it can be done.

My church and the people within it have been an exceptional source of strength. My children continue to be very supportive. They are grieving in their own way and struggle with their own feelings. Our friends continue to be my friends, couples continue to include me in their activities and plans. It is difficult to be there without him, but still I feel good knowing they want me in their lives. My family continues to stay very close to me and assure me of their love and support. My job and co-workers have been a salvation of sorts, as they are all such caring people, and work is a place I can go and have some semblance of routine. Neighbors and friends have helped in any way they can, from mowing to snow removal, and I have had the assurance that if I need anything at any time, I can call them for help. I am truly blessed. I cling to the promises that the Lord will not give me anything that I can't handle with His help, that somehow all of this is working together for good, and mostly the promise that He is with the Lord and that I will again be with him some day. If it were not for these promises, and the Lord working through His people to help me on a daily basis, I could not endure all of this. As difficult as it all is, I know I have so much to be thankful for and will try to live my life now in a way that would make him proud and happy, always Fighting the Good Fight of Faith, trying to help others in the way that I have been helped. Thank you for your concern, prayers and support...."

Grief is a very real and painful experience. Our faith offers us tangible help when all else gives way. May we speak and live these words.

Job spoke from the depth of his misery "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25-26).

Forcing The Issue
continued from page 3

Some of the more vicious anti-gay groups are condemning the ELCA as a "fag" church, while others are lambasting the ELCA for not getting with the program and moving forward with full participation for practicing homosexuals. We truly are 'damned if we do, damned if we don't;' at this point in time. Continued non-action is not going to suffice; eventually the ELCA will have to decide one way or another. By forcing the issue, St. Paul - Reformation is actually helping the ELCA try to regain its saltiness. Again, I may not endorse their decision, but I do applaud their saltiness.

When it all comes down, I guess I'd have to say that if the decision St. Paul - Reformation has made is a sin, it is at least a sin of courage. It is rare to see a congregation with the guts to do what they feel called to do no matter what the powers-that-be may say about it. This is the kind of trust in God and each other that makes Christian congregations special, and though I may disagree with them, I cannot help but admire their resolve, and sometimes wish that I might have a bit of the same resolve myself.
Middle East

continued from page 1

Ramallah. "We need to understand the breakdown in peace negotiations better and discuss ways in which churches in the U.S., Palestine and Israel can work together to strengthen the Christian communities and to promote a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians," he said.

The delegation includes participants from the National Council of Churches, the United Church of Christ and the Armenian Apostolic, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Quaker and United Methodist churches. The visit comes at the same time many of the churches are involved in a Prayer Vigil for Middle East Peace. The vigil begins on the first Sunday in Advent, Dec. 3, and will continue until the violence ends and a peace agreement emerges. Based on an ELCA initiative and organized by the ecumenical working group Churches for Middle East Peace, the vigil holds in prayer all those who are suffering in the Holy Land, including Palestinians and Israelis.

Participants in the delegation include Bishop Viken Aykazian of the Armenian Apostolic Church; The Very Rev. Brother Stephen Glodek of the Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men’s Institutes; The Rev. John McCullough of Church World Service and Witness of the National Council of Churches; Bishop Vincent Warner of the Episcopal Church’s Diocese of Olympia; Patti Brown- ing, wife of the former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church; Bishop Dimitrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America; Donella Clemens of the Mennonite Central Committee; Inez Allan of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); Mary Ellen McNish of the American Friends Service Committee; The Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson of the United Church of Christ; Bishop William Oden of the United Methodist Church.

For details of the Prayer Vigil for Middle East Peace, go to www.loga.org/PrayerVigilHome.htm on LOGA’s Web site.

To receive daily press reports and photos of the visit, send your e-mail address to CorinneWha@aol.com at Churches for Middle East Peace. During the trip the delegation’s press officer, James Solheim, director for news, The Episcopal Church, can be reached at jsolheim@dfms.org.
"On A Day Like Today"

By Trudy K. Tannen
M.Div. Junior

It was one of those days. So far that morning, I was running on time for once. But in these days of the ramp meter experiment, on time isn't early enough. Noises drifting up from the lower level of the house informed me my two children were awake. That was good — but unfortunately, they woke up ready to fight, which is never good. The fought with each other all through breakfast and then with me while we struggled to leave.

As I started to drive away from the house, I realized the speedometer on the van wasn’t working. Was it just one more sign that the battery was reaching its limits or a sign of a larger electrical problem? If it were the latter, I wondered, when would I be able to carve out the time to get such a problem diagnosed and fixed?

By the time I reached the major thoroughfare that is my only serviceable freeway bypass, it became quite clear that the speedometer would be unnecessary for this trip. Traffic was backed up and crawling nowhere near the posted speed limit. So as my children continued to fight, despite being properly restrained in age-appropriate car seats, I fought traffic all the way down to school.

After dropping off my son at kindergarten (barely on time) and settling my daughter into Wee Care, I trudged up the hill about an hour after I had left home. On the way to the Campus Center, a friend asked how my morning was going. Reaching the end of my tale as we reached the mailboxes, I said, “But it’s going to get better — it has to...” As I peeked in my mailbox, I saw the notice about the Reformation weekend activities that I had ignored on the previous day. This time, however a glint of foil that hinted of candy caught my eye. As I pulled the card out, I added, “...especially when there’s candy in my mailbox.” I looked at the little piece of candy for a moment. Yes, the wrapper really did say Hershey’s Special Dark. I smiled and said, “And dark chocolate too, my favorite. It’s better already.”

Now, it could be just a coincidence. But I know from personal experience that, at best, the dark chocolates make up 25% of a bag of Hershey miniatures and probably less. So the odds weren’t exactly in favor of a dark chocolate piece landing in my mailbox. And maybe I hadn’t noticed it the day before because I would appreciate it more on that day. You may disagree, but that little piece of chocolate was a sign to me that God does see, God knows so very well, and God really does care. I felt...remembered, not forgotten.

Then I started to think about the people

— Leslie Says... continued from page 3

or seek refuge from, I would certainly not be attending a Lutheran seminary! Let alone a Lutheran seminary named after someone who considered himself a Catholic until the day he died.

Maybe I shouldn’t let things bother me. Maybe you think that this is just something I should live with and why should it even bother me, seeing as how I’m not even Catholic anymore, and if I don’t like it I’m free to leave. (And believe me, I know I always have that option, as does any of us!) Who knows, anything’s possible, right? Well, let me give you something else to consider: another prejudice I’ve noticed being thrown about is against fundamentalism, or at least whomever or whatever the speaker has determined is fundamentalist or “fundie.” Now, I’ll be the first to tell you that someone who is a fundamentalist and I will probably not come down on the same dime theologically, but I would hope that our common identity as Christians and our common relationship as children of God would at least be a starting point in our having a conversation.

This is my point, and I do have one. It’s my belief that perhaps we should be more mindful of our own identities, and the attitudes, values, and assumptions that go along with them. Certainly there is more to being Lutheran than being prejudiced against Catholics and fundamentalists, right? If we limit ourselves to being only defined in terms of what we are not, (i.e. “not Catholic and not fundamentalist”) we miss out on stating who we are in a positive way. As Christmas approaches and we once again celebrate the nativity of Jesus, it’s my prayer that our community will be brought closer together by Christ and by his life, death, and resurrection.

Simundson continued from page 1

in the Seattle area for many years. “My father was a citizen of two countries,” Simundson said. “Of course he loved being an American and the opportunities here, but he was always proud of being Icelandic.”

Simundson received a Bachelor of Arts from Stanford University, a Bachelor of Divinity from Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago; and a Doctor of Philosophy from Harvard University. He was ordained in 1959.

Simundson’s late wife Sally was with her husband to receive the honorary doctorate and spend the fall semester in Iceland, but the couple returned to St. Paul in December due to her need for medical treatment. She recently lost a 10-year battle with cancer.