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Bishop to Address Lutheran Identity, Mission

By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

Note: Mark S. Hanson was installed as the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA on Saturday, Oct. 6. He will be visiting Lutheran Seminary on Thursday, Oct. 25.

In the life of the presiding bishop-elect of the ELCA, being still isn’t a common option. And the hectic duties of what could have been a more normal transition have been even more rushed this time around.

Exactly one month after Mark S. Hanson was elected to become the third presiding bishop of the ELCA on Aug. 11, the church, and the nation in which it is located, was thrown into a period of mourning, response and reaction.

As all pastors know, however, it is in what might be seen as interruptions that ministry can truly blossom.

“During this last week, it has been wonderful for me to be with the leaders of the Islamic community. We’ve been striving for a long time to develop this relationship and now we’ve been thrown into an inter-faith partnership,” Hanson said on Sept. 20, still serving as Bishop of the Saint Paul Area Synod. “The Islamic community has told me that the support they have received from the Christian communities has been very meaningful.”

The events of Sept. 11 have shaped, along with all other things in this nation, Hanson’s vision for the ELCA.

“As presiding bishop-elect, I see our churches needing to be gathered as the Body of Christ around the Word proclaimed and the meal shared so we can hear God’s Gospel word of grace,” he said. “This is now more important than ever. All of the horror and outrage of the past week has perhaps created a context of a fertile time for the faith and the Gospel to be proclaimed.

“These events have also created a context in which the spectrum of faiths—reflecting the growing diversity of our country have been able to share the public witness of rejecting violence and speaking words of assurance to recent immigrants that they will be safe in this community,” he added.

Just as persons of different faiths have joined together, the collective response to the terrorist attacks has had visible impact on intra-Lutheran relations. “It was heartening to see the new President of the LC-MS, Hanson’ vision to grace Twin Cities

The tension between good and evil and life and death has been readily apparent in the past few weeks. The darkness is real and God is truly our refuge, our fortress.

The life of Martin Luther, a man between God and Satan, is a story for our time. Don’t miss the English-language premiere of Luther Oct. 25-27 at Central Lutheran Church, Minneapolis. The production shows that God ultimately defeats Satan—the war is won—yet, the battle between them in this life continues.

Luther premiered late last year to sold-out performances and excellent reviews in Helsinki, Finland. According to a review in Helsingin Sanomat, Finland’s largest newspaper, “The music captures you with its thundering, physical power. Luther is a powerful experience, connecting people and breaking the barrier between the stage and the audience with the five Luther hymns sung by the audience.” Kari Tikka, renowned contemporary Finnish composer and associate conductor of the Finnish National Opera, wrote the production and will conduct the performances.

Kari Tikka, a conductor with the Finnish National Opera, composed, conducts and co-wrote the libretto for Luther. Gracia Grindal, professor of rhetoric at Luther Seminary, serves as the translator and artistic director for the U.S. premiere.

Tikka had been thinking about a production on Martin Luther for quite some time. “This theme—Luther—has been in my mind for more than 20 years,” Tikka said.

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Concord On the Inside
See how Dr. Mary Hess Answers … “THE 6 QUESTIONS”!
Pick up some money-saving tips from “The Frugal Seminarian”

On the Web @ www.lutherseminary.edu/Concord

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The Way I See It: Six Questions with Mary Hess

By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

Note: This is the first in a series of “Six Questions” interviews. The format of these stories will follow the same set of six questions and the responses offered by faculty and staff, reflecting the diverse perspectives of Lutheran Seminary.

In July of 2000, Dr. Hess was called to Lutheran Seminary as Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership.

1. In what ways does your teaching area impact the future of the church?

In my understanding, Christian education is at the heart of how we help communities continue to hang on to their beliefs and traditions to their children and to those around them who haven’t yet heard them. So, potentially, it has the possibility of radically shaping the future or cutting off from any future at all.

As Maria Harris said, “The Church doesn’t have an educational ministry, it is an educational ministry.”

Of course, it’s interesting being a Catholic in a Lutheran setting, trying to talk about that. It’s a wonderful opportunity for me to be a learner alongside my students. Part of the gift the Lutheran community offers the broader Christian church is an understanding of nurturing faith that’s done at home.

I’ve found, however, that we need to tell our stories more often. Part of my task is to draw those stories from people, helping them weave their stories with God’s story.

2. In what ways does your research outside the classroom impact the future of the church?

My area of research has to do with media culture and how mass mediated popular culture shapes religious experience, religious identity, religious formation. Since it is so clear to me that we live in a “media culture” I don’t see how we can talk about religious communities continuing to grow and thrive unless we also try to understand how we are enmeshed and immersed in that media culture.

The point is that this stuff matters. Christian education matters more now than in any recent time period. It’s at the heart of what we’re doing.

3. What do you most want students to learn under your leadership?

Trust God! The most important thing in shaping a teaching and learning environment is understanding that we collaborate in this process; we don’t control the process.

Ultimately, I hope people come out of my classes with an experience of being able to ask questions to find good questions. I ultimately trust that God is going to be there, shaping the process and ultimately shaping the answers.

4. In your view, what is the most important issue presently facing North American Christians?

I think one of the biggest dilemmas for North Americans-and not just Christians-is our tendency to believe that we can control the world or to want to buy into an ideology that says we can do that. Having some sense of our vulnerability and our brokenness and resting in the grace of God is really hard for North Americans.

We think that we can control the process. That’s why teachers think that if we just teach the right thing, the correct doctrine, it will work. I don’t

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Why Wednesdays? – One Student’s Search for Meaning

By Brad Lindberg
MDiv, Middler

I tend to get a very odd feeling of discomfort every Wednesday as I head to chapel. I must confess I’m very much because of the greeters that are there. So I can’t help but wonder why they are there on Wednesdays.

Are greeters appropriate? It’s not as if the worshiping community is coming from somewhere else, we are already here. It is also very different from a typical Sunday morning worshiping community since we don’t choose to be members. Those few who are on campus visiting get recognized and welcomed in worship anyway.

Even if we move past this and we should be able to agree that, oddly enough, the greeters are a good idea I still can’t help but ask an obvious question. Why Wednesdays? If it is so very important to try and make people feel welcome (though I would argue that the greeters often make me feel more awkward than welcome) then why not greeters every day?

Are we only welcome on Wednesday and we don’t really care about worships the other days? It doesn’t seem that way since we welcome visitors in our announcements every day of the week. So tell me again, why Wednesdays?

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Being a People of God—Prayer Around the World

By David G. Larsen
MDiv Senior

What does it mean to be a “people of God” in the light of the horrific evil that manifested itself on September eleventh? When evil manifests itself in such a sudden and catastrophic way our available technology makes it possible for virtually every population center of the world to see that particular evil almost instantaneously. As we have witnessed over the weeks that followed September eleventh, the entire world makes a response to such a blatant display. As I reflected on the world’s response, and therefore on our own personal response, I was drawn to the words of Scripture from the Book of Hebrews, the fourth chapter:

“So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.” (Hebrews 4:9 NRSV)

We are the people of God. Millions of people, from all over the world rushed to the sanctuary of their faith to find meaning and hope following the events of that day in September. This article is about one response that I received from Micheal Zaughli. I first met Micheal and his family in their home in Bethlehem, Palestine, in 1999. We drank tea together and Micheal and his wife shared their story. When the tensions between Palestine and Israel exploded into violence, the borders between the Palestinian and Israeli territories came under increased security control. These borders are not just security borders, they are visible examples of the efforts of one country to exercise power and control over another.

Prior to 1999, Micheal worked as an electrical engineer for a company in Jerusalem. He drove each day from his home in Bethlehem to work. When the increased security measures were put into place by the Israeli government, Michael was no longer permitted to drive into Jerusalem. He would park his car on the Palestinian side of the checkpoint and walk across to catch a public bus on the other side. Many days, the Israeli guards would make Micheal crawl on his hands and knees in the dirt before they would permit him to cross. Micheal lost his job because his employer could not have an employee coming to work in a dirty suit and working with customers. Many Palestinians suffered a similar fate and loss of jobs. Micheal organized thirteen families into a Christian wood carver cooperative to produce and sell olive woodcarvings to tourists coming to Bethlehem. Lutheran organizations work with cooperatives such as Micheal’s to assist in getting their products distributed to other available markets so that their efforts can create a sustainable livelihood.

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The Frugal Seminarian

It’s that time of the semester-time to pay the tuition bill. For many of us, a big chunk of our payment comes from our own pocket, whether that’s from a job, our savings, or loans to be repaid after graduation. Wouldn’t it be nice to receive more grants and scholarships to pay for your theological education?

Maximizing Financial Aid

I talked with Bill Silva-Breen, Lutheran Seminary Director of Student Aid, about ways students might find more “free money.”

First, apply for financial aid. As easy as that may sound, some students don’t do this. Every student who completes the financial aid forms receives a minimum of $100 per semester, provided the student is taking at least 2.5 credits.

Even if you don’t think you’ll qualify (for instance, due to spouse employment), an application might yield a grant. Sometimes churches and organizations make scholarships available for students who meet certain criteria, regardless of the student’s need. So if you happen to fit their guidelines based on geographic origin, age, gender, prior occupation, etc., you could be in line for some free money—if you have completed the financial aid application.

Next, look for other sources for scholarship money. It isn’t too late to pursue additional grants for the current academic year. Check out the seminary’s list of potential scholarships; an updated list will be available online soon. Look over the list carefully, noting application deadlines. For example, one organization gives awards to 20 to 30 LS students a year, ranging from $500 to $3000; Bill believes that every student who has applied to this source has received something. You might also search the internet for other grants; links to websites are available at www.luthersem.edu/admissions/final.

Are you Lutheran? Are you a member of Aid Association for Lutharians? Every student studying for a first theology degree (MA or MDiv) can become an associate member for $10 and receive $250. What a bargain!

Applications must be received by November 1. Contact Kevin Bonine, AAL District Representative (Kevin_Bonine@aal.org) for more info.

Make your call to serve the Church known to others. Family members and churches

Bishop Discusses Vision

Gerald Kieschnick, and Bishop Anderson meet together in New York City,” Hanson noted. “That gave me a sense of how good it is that while we have a clear awareness of our theological and confessional differences that we can witness through a common response to public need.”

Hanson believes that Lutherans have peculiar responsibilities in this time of crisis. “The questions that people are now asking in light of these tragedies beckon us to dialogue,” he asserted. “We, as Lutheran Christians, need to be involved in thoughtful, lively debate about what is appropriate and just.”

The Role of a Bishop

“This is an incredibly important time for the Presiding Bishop to call the church to that which is central—Word & Sacrament,” said Hanson.

In his view, bishops can serve as a bridge between the parish and the larger church. “I have always looked to bishops to help me see the church in the larger context of the world,” he explained. “While serving in the parish, I was immersed in daily life and I depended on a bishop to call me outside that context and remind me that I belong to church catholic, that our community is included in greater community.”

There are some challenges unique to the current state of the ELCA. “Bishops have a challenge in a church like ours that seems to find unity around issues on which we don’t agree,” he said. “We have ceased talking with each other. We are at tables, disagreeing with each other, but this should be secondary to the table where we do agree.

“Sept. 11 reframes the priorities that are before us. That isn’t to say that we won’t continue to debate—but, at least for this moment, we are together.”

This gridlock is a talismans for the ELCA’s problems in the future. “I’m afraid that we have not claimed the gifts that God has given this church for the sake of the Gospel,” Hanson said of the problems facing his denomination. “We have lost confidence that Christ is the Lord of this church, calling us to minister in the world in his name. We have lost a sense of clarity of what God can do through 11,000 congregations in 64 synods.”

Identity and Leadership

That sense of mission, Hanson believes, can be realized through cultivation of Lutheran identity among ELCA members. “We need to clarify what it means to be a Lutheran Christian,” he said. “We are going to have a greater focus and face what it means to be this body of believers. Our identity is inseparable from our mission.”

The current clergy shortage is related to a limited missional identity. Hanson insists that this problem must be approached on several levels.

“One part is that we have to be much more intentional about congregations lifting up those with gifts for ministry at an early age. These young people need to be identified, named, prayed for and encouraged,” he noted. “We must have a churchwide commitment to and means of identifying people with gifts for leadership and a process for supporting those gifts.”

The character of training for ministry is also open for discussion.

“We need to continue to talk about how we prepare people for ministry in a way that doesn’t forsake the value of seminaries but recognizes that in some rural settings and immigrant communities it is unreasonable to expect people to be able to afford a 4-year time to prepare for ministry,” Hanson said. “We need to be creative about shaping people while they’re living and serving in their community without abdicating the uniqueness of the office to which this church calls its people.”

The cost of theological education is also an important issue. “We need to become a church that doesn’t call people to ministry and then strap them with debts that preclude the joy and question the call,” he said.

“The shortage of clergy is close to the top of the challenges facing this church. Some estimates state that we have 2000 openings for graduates. What would it take to be a church that we had 2000 extra graduates we could place?”

A Word for Current Seminarians

As for those who have already taken the step toward rostered ministry, Hanson has words of encouragement and thanks. “I

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Luther to Host Luther

he said, "Luther’s theology has been vitally important to me. Salvation is 100 percent God’s gift. Faith, too, is a gift. After reading much of Luther I realized I had gone through similar trials and tribulations. I wrote this opera so that many would hear, see and understand that God in his son Jesus has gone through all of our battles and won for us liberty!"

Tikka is convinced that Luther has a lot to say to those of us in the 21st century. “Luther told us the old messages of the Bible in new ways. He changed the world. Today, he would preach mercy and relief to those of us who labor under stress and constant pressure to achieve our salvation.” Grindal agrees. “Luther is considered by many to be the second greatest mind, after Einstein, of the last millennium. He broke the medieval system and unleashed all sorts of energy that remains with us today. In his theology there is a dialectic between good and evil. The gospel works in this dialectic.”

Luther is not a conventional opera. The production features six principals from the Finnish National Opera with elegant costumes and a bare set design, Masterworks Chorale of Augsburg and a 26-piece orchestra. However, unlike most operas, the audience is encouraged to sing along. Between scenes the audiences sing several of Luther’s hymns. Congregational choirs, including Central’s, will be “planted” throughout the sanctuary to lead the singing between scenes.

Staging the U.S. premiere of Luther at Central is no accident. The production was designed with Central specifically in mind. “I have visited Central many times while participating in past Reformation Festivals,” said Tikka. “The congregational singing was tremendous. I had never heard anything like it! From 1996 on I had visions of creating something for Central. Luther is highly inspired by this wonderful church which is at its best when crowded with spirit-filled voices.”

Although Luther’s theology and life story have been in print for nearly 400 hundred years, this is the first time they are in the form of an opera. The medium has a lot to offer the Luther story. “Opera is a wonderful way to tell stories,” said Tikka. “It’s not only music. It’s also theater. It’s visual—lights, costumes, sets—and it’s live. Opera can touch the mind and soul in ways that words alone cannot. At its best, opera can be psychoanalysis or pastoral care.”

Luther is presented by Luther Seminary, Central Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Augsburg College, the Finnish National Opera and Lutheran Brotherhood.

Presiding Bish

would like to express a profound word of gratitude to all who have heard and heeded God’s call to Word & Sacrament and Word & Service ministry,” he said. “You are a sign of hope for the church—you will not only be leaders today, but will be instrumental in shaping the church of tomorrow.”

Hanson’s view of leadership in the church is informed by the uniqueness of Lutheran Christianity. “As seminarians enter their first calls, I encourage them to preach the Gospel and love the people of God. It’s that simple,” he said. “I also encourage them to hold in healthy tension the Word proclaimed and the context in which that word is spoken. This context includes both personal lives and the larger context of our culture and world.”

“We, as Lutherans, have an appreciation for the interplay of text and context. Don’t forget that wonderful word ‘simul’: when the world wants to divide us, he hold to that tension of the ‘and’: Jesus crucified and risen; Law and Gospel; Creation is good and fallen; we are saint and sinner.”

This approach is challenging. “Our culture has a desire for simplicity,” Hanson added. “I encourage you to proclaim the clarity of the Gospel but embrace the dialectics that are much of what we understand as the faith.”
Frugal
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where you have had any connection in your past (baptized, confirmed, membership, employment, etc.) might be proud to help you.

If you happen to receive another grant, your Luther Seminary need-based grant may be reduced by 12 percent of the new grant. So, if an application yields $5000, your seminary grant might be reduced by $600, meaning you still would be $4400 ahead. If you have received the maximum loans offered by the seminary, your loans might be reduced (but you won’t have to pay it back!).

For seniors, check with your new synod after assignment. Several rural ELCA synods have loan repayment programs to help recent graduates repay their seminary debt. At least one synod gives grants to those who serve their first ordained calls there.

From my own experience, I urge you to apply for any scholarship you’re remotely likely to get, regardless of how much grant money you already have received. While writing this column, I was surprised to receive money from a grant application I completed this summer and forgot about.

Make it easier for God to help you pay for seminary—look for help!

How can seminarians live frugally or have fun on the cheap? Please send your ideas or questions to concord@luthersem.edu

The Community of Prayer
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One of the first prayers that I received on September 11th was from Michael. In the midst of his own suffering and oppression he was able to feel our pain and our fear. The Holy Spirit was stirred inside Michael and he in his own way wanted to walk with us. Here are Michael’s words shouted out to us as the people of God:

Come, Oh God, into our worried and consternated lives.
Come this hour as we gather in confusion and with emotions un-described.
Come, Oh God, and bring your blessing upon us as a people and a nation.
Come, and bring your healing to families in shock and dismay.
Come, with your winds spread and gather your children of New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania, and from throughout this nation as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing.
Come and comfort our cries and anguish.
Come like the eagle, which soars down and scoops up its young who have fallen from the nest and raise America up on seraphim wings.

And as you come unto your children, call us unto you.
Call us to place you into our heart of reconciliation.
Call us to reach into the depths of our wounded soul and find your love that strengthens our resolve and gives us your gift of wisdom.
Call us this hour that our ears be opened unto Thee.
Call us from the mountain of catastrophic woe and from the plain of hate filled morning.
Call us to respond to evil trusted upon us with immediacy and tenacity yet with the salve of Jesus walking through Samaria.
Call each of us to know your will for all of us.
Call upon us now we pray, in the name of the host and blessed redeemer.
Amen.

It/Thou: Speaking the Truth

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of women in Islam, we were treated to yet another exposition on the abuses of women in Afghanistan.

Throughout, devotion to one’s religion is derided as fanaticism and resistance to the Western influences of technology and economics is regarded as unacceptable and backwards.

But wait! There’s more!

It can only arouse suspicions of propaganda when the “Culture & Ideas” section in which these perspectives were propounded is hawked, at the beginning, by a column from Michael Barone explaining why war is of such great benefit to government and, at the end, some fiery rhetoric from a Zionist group calling itself “FLAME” (Facts and Logic About the Middle East).

For the issue of U.S. News released just before the one-month anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pen-tagon, FLAME chose to run a full-page ad titled, “The Unrelenting and Virulent Hatred of the Arabs.”

Here are the first two sentences of FLAME’s essay: “After over fifty years of statehood, Israel is a lone outpost of Western civilization and its values. The Arab nations surrounding it are a swamp of terrorism, corruption, dictatorship, and human enslavement.”

Maybe I’m overreacting (then again, maybe not), but I don’t feel so comfortable about the level of objectivity in this reporting. Maybe I’ll just get my news from “The Onion”. (they did, after all, get the scoop of the millennia in “Christ Converts to Islam!”)

In this time of confusion, our greatest temptation is to manufacture certainty by demonizing and objectifying those whom we would adopt as our enemies. In our cer-
ty that they have acted inhumanely, we are tempted to rush to strip them of their humanity.

America now has the nations clamoring to be our neighbor. In response to our worldly power, they are begging for us to recognize their humanity and legitimize their existence.

The upside of this clamoring is a rush to deny the humanity of those whom we have identified as our enemy-whomever they may be.

“Your love among your neighbors and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:43-45 NRSV)

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