Leaps for Faith
Taking risks for the gospel

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Plus: Surviving a stolen sedan, musing on the Midwest, commenting on culture and more
First Things First

Letter from the Editor

By Nicholas Weber
Concord managing editor

These past few weeks have been filled with risk for me. Dropping and adding classes, changing congregations and getting used to new classes felt like walking on a tightrope. During these past two weeks, we all have experienced new classes, new people and new ideas. Our risks might be facing the registrar to drop a class, meeting new people or encountering strange theological thoughts. In the grand scheme of things, these problems might seem petty or insignificant. After all, our world is fraught with much more terrifying risks. The results of our fallen state are all around us, and the dangers of the world are painfully obvious.

In response, we try to minimize our risk. We never say things that might spark a debate, and we preach sweet sermons while withholding the suggestion that Jesus Christ might have something to challenge us with. We then congratulate ourselves with the smug assurance that we held onto our own views for one more day and “didn’t make waves.” This flight from risk stands in stark contrast to Jesus’ words, the actions of the early church and the legacy of the reformers.

As we start this new academic year, let us take risks! Ask questions, appear stupid, and seek Christ. We already know that we are not saved by intelligence, beauty or our wisdom (God help us if we were). Therefore, if we are not saved by academic numer, “sin boldly...” We need new worship boldly, serve neighbor and proclaim Jesus. As we make mistakes this semester, remember the second part of Luther’s exhortation as well: “...but believe and rejoice in Christ more boldly still.”

The Concord would like to encourage one more risk from its readers as well: We invite you to write to the Concord. Our job is to serve you as the Lutheran Seminary community by covering what is important to you. Is there an issue that is bugging you? Write a letter to the editor. Does the theme of the next issue appeal to you? Write an article for us (and get paid). The dialogue that we strive to encourage with the Concord can only continue if we take risks as a seminary community.

From the Mann Himself

Really Taking Risks for the Gospel

By John Mann
Seminary pastor

In my second call, I followed a pastor who for 38 years had been in the senior position of a large parish. He was retiring at 84, and one moment in his ministry was so full of courage and faith that it demonstrates how faithfully he led for the gospel. He was well acquainted with a family whose kids he had catechized and who were in the youth and young adults classes, and he had been in a rental home. The pastor was contacted with the news that one of the sons was holding the family at gunpoint in their home.

The pastor was there in a flash. He spoke with the police, and, being a well-known chaplain for the city’s safety force, they agreed to let him enter the home to negotiate with the youth in question. He went in to talk. When persuasion failed, the pastor maneuvered close enough to stomp on the rifle barrel, causing it to discharge into the floor and allowing him to hold the youth until the police entered and took him away. When I asked him how he dared to do it, he simply said that he was the boy’s pastor and had to do what he could before folks got hurt!

Fortunately, most of us as leaders of the church will not be called upon to exercise such courage. But that doesn’t mean we are home free. Truth told, whenever we have to stand up for the remarkable scandal of the cross or the power of the grace of God, we will often find ourselves at cross purposes with parishioners, friends, family and even strangers. Most people’s prejudices about Scripture or religion are more simplistic and populist than true. Finding the courage to challenge, teach, preach and comfort with the truth you have come to treasure here at seminary is not easy. It can make you unpopular, unhappy and even dubious about your grasp of the gospel.

In the institutional church, faithful leaders can be put at risk. Their children’s education, their retirement fund, their happy home and their very vocation are at risk. But leaders who choose to go along with what is popular rather than saying what they know to be true. Many are the church leaders who choose simply to hold on until retirement while not rocking the boat. Many are the church leaders who ultimately succumb to discouragement and doubt rather than risking all for the truth. Many are the church leaders who decide to give up on God rather than their secure position in the community.

What God’s called and sent leaders are required to manifest is great courage and great faith. The good news is if you can do that, it will seldom be dull.
Health Initiative Raises Theological Concerns

I have to confess up front that I've rarely paid much attention to the various Healthy Leaders Initiative mailings that appear in my box. Unfortunately, participation in this year's First Week has given ample reason to rethink that inattention; the materials distributed at the Enhancing Healthy Leaders workshop ought to raise some serious concern. I'm thinking here of the handout entitled "The Road to Emmaus: Walking the Path to Wellness," which comes across as a bizarre mixture of solid practical advice and "spiritual disciplines" reflecting a distinctly non-Lutheran view of progressive sanctification. Worse, it seems that implicit in the initiative is a baptized version of the popular concept of health, which is rapidly approaching the status of an eternal youth cult.

No doubt students can use some advice on diet, exercise, stress relief and rest, but there's irony in handing out instructions on performing some of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises to a class who will shortly be assigned the same work as a negative example in their Reformation History course. By itself, that would be only strange, something to politely ignore—but what are we to make of the inclusion of this quotation from Charles Henry Parkhurst: "Faith is the very heroism and enterprise of intellect. Faith is not a passivity but a faculty. Faith is power, the material of effect." News to Luther, I would think—I can hardly imagine a more succinct contradiction of the concept of passive righteousness.

We can't realistically demand theological perfection of every document put out by seminary or church, but this is too much. We can't lecture incoming students repeatedly about their call to become public theologians only to implicitly ask that they put aside that theology in the name of "health." Yes, I'm sure we have our share of overweight, overworked seminarians and pastors—but why make a theological issue out of that? Let's not pretend that this matter of pure law has anything at all to do with making us more godly. The implication that our "spiritual well-being" (see the ELCA's Wholeness Wheel for details) is composed of a balance between intellectual, social, emotional, physical and vocational well-being is pagan nonsense. It is far removed from the Gospel offered to the stupid, unlikeable, emotionally train-wrecked, sick, ordinarily useless slots whom Jesus has taken into his kingdom.

Adam Morton
M.A., junior plus

With Little Time for Dropping Courses, I'm Dropping More Cash

I bumped into something here at Luther that I believe needs changing. The time allotted for adding or dropping classes without penalty is only one week, and that is too short. It leaves no margin of error for students who have busy schedules and tight budgets. In addition, there should not be a hold placed on our accounts that prevents us from dropping classes.

In my case I decided to drop a class on the Thursday night of the first week of class but couldn't do so on the computer because of the hold. I wasn't able to stop by the Registrar's Office the next day because of class and work and thus had to put it off until the second week of classes. Too late! I will be paying for half of the class. It's my fault for not knowing the policy in advance, but the policy should be changed to avoid unnecessary penalization of students.

Ben Worley
M.Div., junior plus

In the next CONCORD

Identity Crises

In our lives, we have different identities. We consider ourselves fathers, mothers, preachers, righteous, ridiculous, old, young and many other things. Ultimately, we often say that our most important identity is found in Christ. But this presents us with a unique set of problems. How does our identity as Christians work with our other identities? Also, as individuals and as an institution, what do we claim to be? Do we live up to those claims? How much of who we are is part of what we do? How much of our "selves" do we give up for the sake of ministry?

Articles are due Wednesday, Oct. 17.

If interested in being solicited for articles in the future, please send an e-mail to concord@uthersem.edu. Pay rate is $15 per article with up to 250 words and $25 per article with more than 250 words.
Rides

By Amanda Liggett
M.Div. senior

In the early hours of Aug. 20, my husband, Derek, discovered that thieves had broken out the back window of our pickup. We weren’t terribly shocked. After all, his bike had been stolen two years before from the same lot. We were more than a little surprised, though, when we realized that my car was missing as well.

It’s also not the first vehicle we’ve lost in the Burntvedt parking lot, as Derek’s old car was destroyed in the flood a couple of years ago. That, at least, was a natural disaster rather than a senseless and stupid crime.

From the police, we learned that we weren’t the only victims as Karen and Jeremiah Cherwien had two cars badly damaged and another stolen that same night. The police speculated that it was probably a gang initiation. (Perhaps the jerk who took my car was punished for stealing something so lame.)

The pickup window was fixed before noon, but the car was never recovered. I was not particularly emotionally attached to my 2001 Dodge Intrepid. It wasn’t exactly a marvel of motorization, but I was saddened by the loss of the things in the trunk: a picture of my grandparents, my Bible and a fly rod that my father-in-law had purchased when he was in high school.

The greater loss is the loss of the sense of safety and trust. If we can’t protect our property 15 feet from our window, how are we going to protect ourselves if the criminals decide to come in? I want to trust other people, but I find myself eying strangers with suspicion. It hurts to feel unprotected, but I remind myself that people have suffered far worse to be at Luther and even more for the Gospel.

Karen was able to see through her own loss with the encouragement, “As leaders in the church, we are also often called to be leaders in our community, which means that we need to be working toward justice and peace in the midst of the dangers we face.”

It’s important to be aware of the dangers that lurk out there. Take care of yourselves and your property. Be aware of your surroundings, and watch out for one another. Make sure you don’t leave anything in your vehicles, even if it is out of sight. But maybe leave the Bible in the car. Just in case.

Yeeehaaaaawwwww!
The roller-coaster ride of faith

By Bob Sinclair
M.Div. middler

Several years ago, I saw on the back of a semi-truck the acronym FAITH — Fantastic Adventures In Trusting Him. Now, when I think of an adventure, I usually think of amusement park rides, specifically roller coasters. And a roller coaster is what I think of when I reflect back on the events surrounding the process of going back to school to start another career. Once both my wife, Deh, and I made the decision, it was like sitting down in the roller-coaster car and putting the bar over our laps. There is a sense of anticipation about what the ride will be like. It is both exhilarating and frightening. And then the attendant comes along, pushes the bar down one or two more notches and then shoves the pin holding the bar into the car. You can’t get out! In our case, the ride to the top of the first hill was taken up with emptying out the seminary (clack, clack, clack), lining up housing (clack, clack, clack), giving notice to our respective employers (clack, clack, clack), putting the house up for sale (clack, clack, clack), separating the household goods into three piles labeled “MN,” “storage” and “for sale” (clack, clack, clack). As we were getting closer and closer to the top we were wondering what was in store for us (clack, clack, clack).

And then we were at the top. The big yellow truck was packed, the cats were in their cages, and the cooler and our suitcases were full. And, I thought, “What have I gotten into? What have I done to my family? Is this what I’m really supposed to do?” Of course, it was too late at that point. The car was beginning its downward movement. And we couldn’t even see the bottom. Yeeehaaaaawwwww!

The ride has not disappointed. As with any roller-coaster ride, there are the inevitable ups and downs. There are moments of sheer panic (“I have a 10-page paper due when?”). There are moments of amazing excitement as the car rises up to the next apex (“I passed my Greek vocabulary test? Really?”). There are moments of relative calm when we are able to enjoy the scenery (sightseeing in the Twin Cities). The ride is not over. But now that we have gotten over the biggest hump, it can only be fun from here on. And we remember that in all of this we have FAITH.
Finding Reassurance

Even amid feelings of being an outsider, call can be affirmed

By Sarah Brouwer
M.Div. middler

Is coming to seminary a leap for faith?
I didn’t consider coming to seminary a leap for faith until I was actually here and realized what I had gotten myself into. I’m guessing most of us have felt this way before. That doubting-yourself feeling followed by a little voice inside your head that says, “What were you thinking?” That thought usually includes a few days of panicking, followed by a consistent, growing feeling that is exacerbated whenever there is a little bump in the road. Even one bad grade can throw some of us into a tizzy!

Some of you know that I am a middler ecumenical student and that I hope to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The first week of orientation here was overwhelming enough, but to consistently feel slightly like an outsider does not make the situation better. I certainly don’t want this article to be a pity party; I knew what I was getting myself into (the Lutheran part, anyway) when my dad referred to Luther Seminary as the “middle” of ELCA seminaries. My point is that it doesn’t take much to feel like an outsider, even if you are a Lutheran.

Truthfully, however, there are moments when I knew this leap for faith was the right decision—I like to see it as God’s way of reassuring me. These moments come when I least expect them, but I assume that most of us rely on them to get through the day or week, or even year. Sometimes, listening to a sermon, singing a hymn, going on a hospital visit, hearing a lecture or having a conversation with one of the many amazing people I have met at Luther Seminary is all it takes to reassure me—I made the right decision and this is my call. So I would say, “Go ahead with those leaps for faith,” because you are almost always going to doubt yourself or feel like an outsider, but somewhere along the line, God will reassure you.

The real leap for faith, I believe, is not that we come to seminary, but that, with God’s reassuring nudges, the bumpy road don’t overcome us.

Lutefisk, Leaps & Risks
Good and bad at Luther Seminary

By Mohammad Nabeel Ashraf
M.Div. junior plus

At the risk of being imprudent, allow me to begin by asking a simple question: Is it a risky proposition to come to a place where everyone eats gooey stuff called lutefisk?

If your answer to the question was “yes,” then you can confidently identify yourself as an ecumenical student at Luther Seminary! Now that we have that figured out, let’s talk about how to best cope with being an ecumenical student.

Jokes aside, why are you here? Some of you are here so that your fellow congregants may benefit from your learning and your leadership when you go back. Some are here for advanced theological education so that you may help educate those at home. Others among you are here to discern your callings. Those of you who are here from across the seas have left behind your families, your people, your churches and your way of life to answer the call of the Gospel. Your journeys are remarkable and your faithfulness commendable.

Some of you have had to deal with insensitivities, some of you have cried in classes over the beliefs you hold, some of you have had your beliefs attacked, and some of you have rethought your Christianity. On the other hand there are many in this community that have welcomed you with open arms, comforted you in grief and, above all, affirmed who you are. All of you are admirable for remaining steadfast in your earnest will to serve the Gospel at all times.

I, too, am an ecumenical student. I, too, have experienced what most of you ecumenical students have experienced. I can never thank this community enough for the support it has provided me in my faith journey, and yet I can never forget the oft-spoken words of condemnation against the beliefs of my people. This community upheld me and shared my grief with me when my father died, and yet it is impossible to forget the chapel sermon that emphasized exclusive salvation for Christians. In short, I have seen both open arms and closed doors at the seminary.

As we think of the leaps of faith we have made in our journeys and the risks that we have taken for the Gospel, let us not forget that the risk that God has taken for us is far greater: God has entrusted us with the Gospel. And perhaps loving one’s neighbor is the apt response to God’s trust in us.

DRAW YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS.
The Concord is seeking a cartoonist to contribute regularly in 2007-08. If interested, e-mail us at concord@lutherseminary.edu.
Variations on the Theme

Jesus' Leap
No jumping lessons required

By Steven Paulson
Professor of Systematic Theology

Since faith is apparently some form of leap, and one stands in life as if always on a precipice, drumming up the courage finally to take it (the leap that is — not the precipice or life), then you can imagine my surprise when a preacher arrives and tells me that my leaping days are over. Although it removes the prickly joy of anticipation that one day one day, I will do no — just jump, leap into the arms of my Lord and trust him above all things — you can understand that it is finally deflating to lose the purpose of life itself in the form of the dream of accomplishing the one last, big thing of life that I have not yet mustered the courage to complete. There are one thousand places to visit before you die, and then at the end, when there are no more places to see, you leap. Christ robs me of this expectation and hope. He makes faith easy and random, the soundrel. Christ apparently applies faith to the faceless masses that have refused to distinguish themselves by any act in life, especially in the form of a leap of faith. You could almost say he gives it away to the unsavory, non-leaping kind of human produced like so much sausage from the world's vile institutions like a Danish state church or external documents that come in big blue books or pasty preachers without an ounce of leader or charisma about them.

You could imagine the zealous David or Paul, ready to leap at a moment's notice for the Lord, asking not where or when but only how high — only to find that He leaped before them and robbed them of their zeal. As the Scripture says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead), But what does it say? The word is near you." Jesus got the jump on us, like a cheat at the starting line going before the gun sounds. When it is true that Jesus, I will do not — just jump, leap and perhaps doesn't qualify for a true leap of faith since it was in a manner of speaking a leap away from God, not toward divinity — not counting equality a thing to be grasped." It was a leap down, not up, and perhaps therefore it doesn't count. He counted, having gravity work in his favor. But you must agree that, however cheeky it was, and deflating for my goals in life, Jesus' leap was risky, nevertheless. He risked not only the embarrassment of choosing the wrong thing to believe in, like a non-leaper who doesn't even teeter a little bit on the brink of faith, but he risked it all — life and divinity and whatever else there is in this world or the next, since what he leaped into was His Father's wrath at sin. And the strangest thing about Jesus' leap is that his risk did not pay off. It was a bad choice. He was disposed of by those waiting to take their own leap and risk their own futures. His example teaches us to risk nothing and leap nowhere — stay as you are. But the Father raised him anyway and established a new kingdom where forgiveness of real sinners is the order of the day. Christ having leaped leaps no more since he is going nowhere. The word is near you. Having come near, He stays. No telling what this Christ will do now, having risked it all and lost — perhaps he will justify the non-leaper intent upon risking it all but never quite getting there. Perhaps the preacher will arrive with Jesus' leap before you take your own.

Being Faithful in Little ... and in Much

By Alan G. Padgett
Professor of Systematic Theology

There is a good reason the New Testament uses the metaphor of "walk" to speak of following after Jesus Christ. When I first heard the theme of "leaps for faith," I thought of my three trips to China to speak on philanthropy, science and Christianity in an officially atheistic state. But things like this did not feel right as I began to write about taking risks for Christ. They happen only now and again. The big events, the ones that make for good stories later, are indeed reasons to give thanks to God. But faith is not so much about the big things as the regular, daily, so-called "little" things of life. I take up the theme of daily discipleship as my "risk" for Christ and the gospel.

To publicly confess Christ is already to take a risk for Jesus. For the call of Christ upon our faith and life is complete. It takes all of what we are; mind, soul, heart and strength. "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has (and is; pasin tois heaoutos cannot be my disciple)" (Luke 14:33). Compared to our total devotion to God, faith looks like hate toward worldly things, even other people that we rightly love and cherish (14:26). I have experienced this myself.

I converted to Christianity as a young adult despite everything I had been taught by my parents. My family and friends thought I had simply lost it, not least because of the rationalistic, science-minded disdain I expressed for the "Jesus freaks" or Krishna devotees we sometimes ran into. While over the decades I have been a pretty poor disciple by biblical standards, I have found the biggest risks and the greatest temptations toward evil come at me every day. This is the ongoing struggle to live out our faith in the power of the Holy Spirit, that is, to take seriously our calling as disciples. Because this is a struggle against forces of sin and darkness — however we want to understand that in concrete terms — there is a need daily. When I open myself up to my neighbor in love, when I seek to serve the least, the lost and the left-out in the name of Jesus Christ, then I become vulnerable. But without these risks, without this vulnerability to the other and to God, then the life of faith has few rewards.

For many Christians on earth today, just being known as a follower of Christ is a huge personal risk. Believers are still being persecuted in Communist, secular and Islamic nations just for their belief (even as Christians still persecute others who are different, we must confess). I cannot compare my daily risk of faith to theirs, for we are blessed to live in a society of relative safety and a nation that affirms religious freedom. But even for us, if we really open ourselves up to the neighbor in love, if we step out daily in faith relying on God to be at work, if even with our many faults and foibles and our several graces and gifts we hear and obey the word of God, then we are indeed taking a leap of faith.
“Things Are Going to Be Different Today”
A congregation breaks routine to respond to a community’s tragedy

By Sean Whelan
M.Div. senior plus

“It just didn’t seem right to stay in the church this morning ... like it was any other Sunday.”

“We just really need a pastor,” Ken had said, as he told me about Maria’s and Brittany’s prior involvement as members of North Emanuel (Brittany had been baptized there). And as I was the only person there serving as pastor on a “detached-site” internship, I was it. The family had only recently departed the congregation following events surrounding the untimely resignation of its long-term pastor from the roster: Since then, while some of them had taken up with another congregation, they all considered North Emanuel as their “church home.” So I set up what support I could for the family by phone for the weekend and let Ken have my contact information and an encouragement to call “day or night” should any situations arise where I could help.

Sunday morning fortunately came too soon for any of those fears to take hold. You know how it is with those things that are easier just to do before you think too much about them? I let the congregation know at the beginning of worship that “things are going to be different today” Peter Rogness, the Saint Paul Area Synod bishop, whom I’d called only the night before, was able to attend. I was glad to have his presence and leadership among those gathered to worship that morning ... and so that I could refer any requests for comment to him should there be any reporters on hand.

We all turned the corner from Farrington to Burgess Street, still walking two by two, still proceeding in silence. I saw the small shrine of candles, cards, stuffed animals and flowers now collected on the curb in front of the house. And I saw the faces of the family members, still gathered on the street in their grievous vigil. I thought about how life had been, how much of their mourning had been viewed on the news and how they might feel today.

“It just didn’t seem right to stay in the church this morning,” I said as I approached Otahl’s mother; “like it was any other Sunday.” She greeted me with sobs and hugs, immediately introducing me to the other people who were with her. “We’d just like to continue with our worship service here, if it’s OK with you,” I said, “and you’re all welcome to join us, pray with us, sing with us, and know that you are not alone today” I took my place on the curb, intentionally placing the processional cross right in front of me, not only to make a “liturgical statement” but also to help me keep my emotions just a bit in check to be able to lead the rest of the worship.

We read aloud the gospel lesson, John 12:1-8. We sang hymns, we prayed together, and we shared the peace with each other and everyone who had gathered with us there on the street. During the course of events, several neighbors and nearby family members had appeared among us, and they joined our worship with gusto, crying and singing, smiling at our bewilderment and awkward displays of affection and support and thanking us for coming to be with them.

As we processed back to the church building, not one mouth was silent, and I had become so completely caught up in the conversations that I didn’t even notice that the traffic had completely stopped on Front Street to let us all cross together. But I do remember wondering why the drivers were staring so intently at me ... until I had to hitch up my alb to step up on the curb.
"Jump like faith during Luther's despair". Kathy Hansen, a parish nurse at Mayo Clinic, made a "leap of faith" right out of an airplane — with a parachute and an instructor — to symbolize and celebrate a completed capital campaign that had been a communal leap of faith by our community. Just as Luther had wanted to kick off the fundraising effort, Sept. 11, 2001, "happened." The shock and despair of all Americans placed a pall over both the nation and the possible campaign. Going forward with such an aggressive campaign was risky. Most institutions reacted conservatively. Luther's leadership decided to go forward. It was a huge leap of faith. And it was motivated by an understanding of the gospel that pointed to the need for missional leaders, especially during times of national crisis. (And notice how often leaps of faith involve money.) Institutions can make leaps of faith just like individuals. Accepting risks as a community can prove to be a huge faith-builder.

For faith to grow, we need periodic leaps of faith. These stories make the best sermon illustrations. For many people the path to, and sometimes away from, the seminary becomes just such a story.

Some of the greatest leaps of faith, in my mind, never get much public notice. These leaps are the ones that really make our knees quiver. Practicing forgiveness with a neighbor. Committing yourself to reconciliation with a family member. Observing the Sabbath every week — as a pastor! Vulnerability abounds. But if we make the leap, grace abounds even more.

After one session of personal absolution and confession with a real person, one can better understand the most dramatic leap of faith imaginable. Acts of reconciliation and Sabbath observance are similarly risky. Just try them! They represent as great a leap of faith as those taken by African missionaries in years past. Sometimes even greater.

Start 'Living Well at Luther'

By Rick Bliese
Luther Seminary president

"Taking risky leaps of faith" is a topic that makes my mind jump from the books of Kierkegaard to the concrete stories of incredibly brave missionaries I knew in the jungles of the Congo in the '70s, '80s and '90s.

Last summer, our vice president for Seminary Relations, Kathy Hansen, made a "leap of faith" right out of an airplane — with a parachute and an instructor — to symbolize and celebrate a completed capital campaign that had been a communal leap of faith by our seminary. Just as Luther had wanted to kick off the fundraising effort, Sept. 11, 2001, "happened." The shock and despair of all Americans placed a pall over both the nation and the possible campaign. Going forward with such an aggressive campaign was risky. Most institutions reacted conservatively. Luther's leadership decided to go forward. It was a huge leap of faith. And it was motivated by an understanding of the gospel that pointed to the need for missional leaders, especially during times of national crisis. (And notice how often leaps of faith involve money.) Institutions can make leaps of faith just like individuals. Accepting risks as a community can prove to be a huge faith-builder.

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By Karen Treat
Luther Seminary parish nurse

Jesus said, "I came to bring life, life abundant." John 10:10

This is a scripture used by parish nurses. It gives the foundation that Christ did not just want for us to believe in the wondrous world to come but that He wanted for us to have abundance here on earth as well.

The new academic year has begun, and we begin to move at an incredible pace. Eventually balance becomes tenuous and we begin to think in terms of survival. It is a sad reality.

The ELCA Board of Pensions, the provider of benefits for ELCA church leaders, has come up with striking statistics regarding our leaders: 71 percent report poor nutritional intake; 69 percent report they are overweight; 64 percent report a risk of high blood pressure; 63 percent have mental health concerns, and 35 percent are at risk for the consequences of insufficient physical exercise. These statistics are the result of a Health Risk Assessment done by the ELCA Board of Pensions with the help of the Mayo Clinic.

This sad reality illuminates the need for this seminary community to take a leap of faith. Within our faith community, we need to care for our whole being. We need to learn how to live well now so we are deeply rooted in wellness before we move into the churches.

The Healthy Leaders program and the Parish Nurse Ministry program have received funding and support through the Make It Happen foundation at Luther. These funds are available to promote wellness within our student body.

The first week of October will be an opportunity for students to sign up and take a leap of faith. The program is "Heathy Leaders — Living Well at Luther." The Seminary has adapted the ELCA Wholeness Wheel to our community needs. The Wheel includes the interconnection of our physical, emotional, social, intellectual, financial, vocational and spiritual well-being.

"Living Well at Luther" provides opportunity for students to take part in activities offered at Luther that encourage well-being.

After taking part in activities in all areas of wellness over the coming months, students will receive a $100 gift certificate from the bookstore. This program gives encouragement and provides incentive.

Christ wanted for us to live a life of abundance. Take the leap of faith. Be a healthy leader and live well at Luther. See you in October.

Start 'Living Well at Luther'

The Wholeness Wheel

courtesy of www.elcabp.org
An East Coaster’s Leap to Luther
Myths affirmed and myths busted

By Rob Myallis
M.Div., senior

Before I came to Luther Seminary, I knew little of Minnesota. I basically imagined it consisted of four things: winters full of snow, lakes full of mosquitoes, communities full of nice people and churches full of Lutherans who did not like CCM. Growing up in Pennsylvania, I always wanted more snow. I thought I had experienced mosquitoes, I liked nice people (especially Lutherans), and I was suspicious of the Episcopal Church. Luther Seminary and Minnesota seemed not the perfect fit. Most assuredly, Luther Seminary and Minnesota have been wonderful. In many ways, the myths about Minnesota contained much truth. Yet I was in for many surprises.

TRUE myth about Minnesota (and Luther Seminary) No. 1: Minnesota is cold. When people say that “Winter just ain’t what it used to be,” they are probably telling the truth, but it is irrelevant. And when people say that Fargo’s wind is worse, this is again true but also irrelevant. When your battery dies in the Bockman parking lot after four consecutive days of sub-zero temperatures, it’s cold enough...

FALSE myth about Minnesota (and Luther Seminary) No. 1: The cold is bad. On internship in California, the locals did not understand how my wife, Emily, and I could live in a place where frost was possible. The truth is that I love winter. I love cross-country skiing, hot chocolate and the feeling of cold air on the back of my throat. I love the fact that every couple of months the view out my window totally changes.

TRUE myth about Minnesota (and Luther Seminary) No. 2: Minnesota has lots of nice people. I spent the last seven years before Luther Seminary in big East Coast cities. People are not exactly “Minnesota Nice” there. Interruption shows that you are paying attention; honking shows affection (well, sort of). I am always amazed, especially outside of the Twin Cities, at how courteous and thoughtful people are. One time when visiting my wife’s parents, we were for a walk after a storm. We saw a member of their church who was out and about checking on older members of the congregation to make sure they were safe. OK!

FALSE myth about Minnesota (and Luther Seminary) No. 2: Nice is always a good thing. When I first came to Minnesota, I thought everyone here was nice. I began to think that Upper Midwesterners were actually ontologically better people; I naively believed and hoped this came about from the excellent law and gospel preaching of many Lutheran pastors. This could be, but in my experience, the voice of law that encourages Midwesterners to be modest is just a LOT stronger. Nearly every Midwesterner I have met laughs talking, much less braging about him or herself. However, I still don’t fully understand how groups make decisions, how “whatevers” are translated into action (or passive inaction). After three years of Upper Midwestern life, even I can no longer articulate directly what I want to group. After years of frustration with others’ feigned flexibility, I find myself saying “whatever” and then grumbling to others and worse — not confronting and then doing what I wanted to do anyway!

TRUE myth about Minnesota (and Luther Seminary) No. 3: Minnesota has lots of Lutherans. This is most certainly true.

FALSE myth about Minnesota (and Luther Seminary) No. 3: Lutherans in Minnesota are alike. Before coming to Minnesota I thought that Swedes and Norwegians were the same folk. I now realize this was wrong. However, the big thing about Lutheranism that I learned at Luther Seminary is that it is so much bigger than Minnesota or Norway or even Germany. My contextual education site was one-half Liberian, and they had just as much claim to Lutheranism as the Swedes in the church.

I have learned about the confessions and about mission at Luther. But I have also learned various Lutheran perspectives on these two topics. That variety not only fascinates me but will also shape my ministry as I enter into a world of diverse people hungry for the same Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.
Living in the Eternal Present
Christ in Culture: Seeing God in New Ways

By Katie Fick
M.Div. middle

Few people will tell you not to take a leap for faith, in the same way that you will rarely hear that you need to think inside the box. Yet when I came to seminary, I was tentative. I didn't want to screw up. I didn't want to say anything that would make people think I was crazy and I wanted to present myself as a person who was “right” for ministry. These are terrible, yet understandable, ideas. After all, while we are wandering around as both saints and sinners, I think candidacy committees prefer people with less flashy sins. I might get away with mouthing off to my mother, for example, but they're bound to get upset if I knock over a convenience store. (Of course, this is in line with the rest of the world.) So my tendency was to be overly cautious. This manifested itself in my trying to keep my head down in a sense — downplaying the way I encounter the world and theology.

One way I see and understand the world is through storytelling, which can get pretty risky — I realized this when I saw people act out a scene from Mark’s gospel as velociraptors. But one of the primary ways I come to understand biblical texts is by making connections between them and my life — my experiences, the stories I take in, the books I read, the movies and TV shows I watch, the podcasts and music I listen to and the Web sites I read.

I did not fully understand the story of Abraham, God, and Isaac until I realized that it was the story of my father, his alcoholism and me. If you imagine I was hesitant to publicly draw a line connecting faithfulness in God to addiction, you'd be right.

I saw the story of Zaccheus differently last fall after I watched episodes of Battlestar Galactica, in which the human race was tossed into a concentration camp, some of them

...One of the primary ways I come to understand biblical texts is by making connections between them and my life...

collaborating with their captors (who happened to be robots). Many collaborators were killed — one man even murdered his own wife for betraying their people. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, collaborator with the Roman Empire? I understood him, and Jesus, in a new way. Did I write about this for my Luke class? No — I followed the syllabus. I didn’t see if it was possible. My seminary career was becoming littered with papers I didn’t write.

I read fiction mostly for the sheer pleasure, but sometimes insight arises in unexpected places. Sarah Dunn’s Big Love is supposed to be a “chicklit” novel, but when her heroine, Alison, is pondering what she’s been told in therapy versus what she was told growing up as an Evangelical Christian, she finds herself unsure how to navigate in the world. Therapists were always telling her to “trust herself”, but the church had always told her she wasn’t to be trusted. So the culture was telling her one thing, and the church wasn’t telling her enough. I hope I don’t contribute to this very real problem when I enter the ministry.

Clarity on a completely different topic hit me one night when I was watching a Simpsons Halloween episode. Our storytelling group was working with the story in Luke of the angel announcing to Mary that she would bear the child Jesus, and I suddenly had some insight for a new way to play Mary — as bewildered as Marge Simpson was when she was kidnapped by aliens and informed she would be the proud bearer of a new alien-human race. Playing Mary in this state of mind, it's no wonder she reminds God of God's mercy at the end of the Magnificat.

This happens to me over and over. I watched the movie The Pianist, about a Jewish piano player during World War II, and felt some comprehension for the exilic Psalm 137, “For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of those songs of Zion!” This week in class, when learning about the Christology put forth by Apollinaris, I thought, if the Logos had full control over the flesh, then it’s like the human Jesus is in Being John Malkovich!

I have been hesitant to talk about these things. Most seminarians I talk to have little time for entertainment, and I was concerned about being taken seriously. I am enjoying my time at seminary, and I am learning a lot. I’m sure you are, too. But I can't escape the fact that sometimes I have shoved a major way I understand God and the world under the carpet.

I hope for better for my fellow students. I wouldn’t suggest to anyone to “be yourself.” (Ick.) What I am saying is this: Bring everything to the table — even the stuff you think is crazy or stupid. Bring all of you to class, and let yourself spill all over your work. The less you let out, the less you learn. Plus, it’s very messy to try to leap with only half of yourself.

Excuses, Excuses
Your one-stop source for self-justification

This month's problem: Late for class

- Classic: Alarm didn't go off due to power outage
- Extenuating: Just came from a Paulson class
- Mundane: Elevator in Bockman broke
- Dramatic: Mobbed by paparazzi
- Farfetched: Got lost walking the labyrinth in Northwestern Hall
- Sympathetic: Injured on Ultimate Frisbee field
- Sob story: Temporary amnesia
- Theological: Basking in passive righteousness
Concord Events Calendar

By Katie Fick
M.Div., middle

Want to hit some fun places in the Twin Cities for free? Check out a Museum Adventure Pass from one of over 100 Twin Cities public libraries. Simply use your library card to check out a pass for a week and groups of two to four can visit places like the Minnesota Zoo, the Bell Museum of Natural History, the Walker Art Center and more! Visit www.melsa.org/museumadventurepass for more details. Here are some other upcoming events that won't cost you a dime!

- Sept. 27-30: Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières hopes to bring an understanding of the refugee experience to the people of Minneapolis. A Refugee Camp in the Heart of the City will take place at Loring Park from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. Doctors Without Borders aid workers will guide visitors through the camp exhibit and explain the challenges faced by refugees and internally displaced people. The camp is made up with actual materials used by DWB in its medical humanitarian work around the world.

- Sept. 29-30: St. Mary's Catholic Church, 602 University Ave. NE, Minneapolis, is hosting a Touch of Lebanon Festival, with food, live music and dancing: 1-6 p.m. Saturday; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday.

- Sept. 30: Nordic Friends will present a program of Scandinavian music at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2499 N. Helen St., North St. Paul. The program will include classical, folk and sacred music and will be followed by a Scandinavian tea. A free-will offering will be taken; 3 p.m.

- Oct. 4: Mystery auth. S. Jorgenson will be signing and reading from his latest book, Dark of the Moon, the second book in his Minnesota-based Prey series, at the Barnes & Noble at HarMar Mall in Roseville; 7 p.m.

- Oct. 6: Robert Royal, president of Washington D.C.'s Faith & Reason Institute, will be giving a lecture titled "Faith and Western Civilization: How Religion Built and Sustains the West" at the Providence Academy in Plymouth. He is speaking as part of the Faith & Life lecture series; 7 p.m.

- Oct. 7: The East African Children's Choir is giving a concert at Augustana Lutheran Church, 701 11th Ave. S, Minneapolis. All proceeds from the concert will go toward the cost of educating the children to be tomorrow's leaders; 7 p.m.

- Every Monday, Acme Comedy Co., 708 N. 1st St., Minneapolis has a free Open Mic Night. Go test your comedy skills or laugh at the attempts of others. Ages 10 and up, 8 p.m.

Other events:

- Weekends through Sept. 30: There's still time to catch the Minnesota Renaissance Festival in Shakopee — get your giant turkey leg, shop for crafts and unusual items, and see jousting, juggling and other stage acts; 9 a.m.-7 p.m.; $18.95 for adults, $9.95 for kids.

- Through October: Interested in seeing more fall foliage? Check out the latest updates at Minnesota's Department of Natural Resource's web site, regularly updated to let you know the peak times for seeing the fall leaves, grasses and wildflowers in all of Minnesota's State Parks. Park admission is $25 for a yearly pass or $5 for the day. Visit www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks, and click on "Fall Color Reports."

- Beginning Oct. 7: The Minneapolis Institute of Art will feature the exhibit Georgia O'Keeffe: Circles Around Abstraction. More than 50 of O'Keeffe's works will be on display; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Museum admission is free, but admission to the exhibit is $8.

- Oct. 13: Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan will be performing its new show, Wild Carusoe, featuring a mix of Asian and Western dance styles, at Northrop Auditorium on the University of Minnesota campus; 8 p.m., $31-42.

- Weekends through Oct. 28: Take a stroll into Sever's Corn Maze in Shakopee, and see if you can find your way out. Stay for the magic show, live music and other activities; 11 a.m.-6 p.m., $10.

- Through Nov. 10: The Guthrie Theater has a new production of the classic Charlotte Bronté novel Jane Eyre in a new adaptation that is thrilling audiences; 7:30 p.m.; $24-69.

- Through Nov. 25: The Ordway Center's McKnight Theatre in St. Paul is staging a production of The Rocky Horror Show, the stage musical that inspired 1975's The Rocky Horror Picture Show. A wild ride! Best for ages 15 and up; $35-47.

- Ongoing: The Lowry Theater in St. Paul has an extended run of We Gotta Bingo!, an interactive comedy show in which the audience spends a crazy night at a church Bingo supper being held in a German beer hall. There's a delicious dinner, Bingo prizes, and live music; $42-$84.50.

Like to eat? Want to write about it?

The Concord's restaurant-review column, Eat Your Way Through the Twin Cities, is coming back for seconds in 2007-08. We're seeking hungry volunteers to host one of our monthly dinner outings at a favorite dining venue and then write up a review about the experience. Interested in being a host/reviewer (oh, and did we mention that you'll receive the Concord's standard pay for writers)? E-mail us at concord@luthersem.edu. Interested in joining in on the outing but not on the reviewing? Keep your eyes on Inside Luther (www.luthersem.edu/intranet) for the time and place of the first event.
What should you do before you leap?

"Call your mom."
- Chase Foreman
  M.Div. junior

"Look."
- Dan Anderson
  Third-year Ph.D. student

"Pray with your eyes open."
- Ruth Monson
  M.S.M. junior plus

"Plan a cute pose and make sure there's a photographer."
- Hannah Johnson,
  Amber Marten
  and unknown
  M.Div. middlers

"An analysis and risk assessment: Will it benefit me to leap or stay stagnant, and how will the candidacy committee react in either case? Is leaping one of my growing edges?"
- Amy Santoriello
  M.A. senior

"If my choices are leaping or attending the Boundaries Workshop, I hope I have good shoes for jumping."
- Stew Carlson*
  2007 M.Div. graduate, master of the mailroom

*The views of Stew Carlson still do not necessarily reflect views of the Concord or Luther Seminary

Down the Hill
Luther Seminary through younger eyes

Kids Take Risks for the Gospel, Too

By Signey Oslund
Daughter of Doug and Amy Oslund

> When you think of Jesus, what do you think of?
  A person who laid down his life so we could have eternal life. We don't have to worry about being separated from God. Jesus gave us forgiveness so we can make other people believe and feel good. When we forgive someone for doing something bad, it is like loving them and saying you are accepting what they have done and everyone makes mistakes.

> How have you cared about someone even though you knew others might not think it was cool?
  There was one kid at my school who didn't make M.S.M. junior. But, when he fell over, I asked a teacher to come and help him.

> How do you and your family care about people because Jesus cares for you?
  We made supper and had our neighbors Neil (age 93) and John (his son who helps him) come over to eat with us.

> What would you do if Jesus told you to leave your family and follow him?
  I'd feel kind of weird, and it would be hard, but I would leave my parents to follow him because he does great miracles and things, and it would be cool to see it.

Ask the Magic 8-Ball!
Real theological answers from the ball that knows all

Would Jesus play Risk?
"It is certain"

NOTE: The image on this month's cover comes courtesy of Eric Prenshaw. Juli Neff is the photographer.