



Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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A Word about United Lutheran Seminary

Dear Pastors and Deacons,

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

The seminary community of United Lutheran Seminary is in distress. I ask your prayers and support for its students, for its faculty and staff, for its board, for the alumni/ae of Gettysburg and Philadelphia, and for the ministry partners of ULS, including the synods of Regions 7 and 8 and their bishops.

Toward the end of February, it suddenly became widely known that President Theresa Latini's prior association with, and leadership of, *OneByOne* had not been disclosed to the Search Committee or to the Board. The seminary community also learned that President Latini had, in fact, disclosed this to Board Chair Elise Brown, after having received the Search Committee's recommendation and before the board's action to elect, but neither shared that information with the board at the time.

The significant personal and emotional response to this news, when it became widely known, revealed more clearly in retrospect than was evident to some at the time of the presidential search, that this should have been disclosed during the search process. The result is a profound loss of trust in a setting where trust was already fragile because of the recent merger.

What shall we do now? The narrative of Holy Scripture provides instruction. Both the self-centered hubris of those who would build a tower to reach the heavens and the anguished cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt caused God to respond by coming close to see, to listen, and to respond in person. So also, our first impulse must be to come close, to listen and to learn. This is the work of pastoral care.

Bishops Jim Dunlop and Claire Burkat have been doing this work tirelessly over the last two weeks. By phone and by e-mail and in person, they have tended most personally to those who are on the seminary's two campuses. Other bishops of Regions 7 and 8 have joined them in this work of pastoral care, responding to alumni/ae and to the pastors and deacons of their synods. I have been in supportive conversation with Student Body President, Elizabeth Peters, with whom I served on the Search Committee, and have asked the members of our Candidacy Committee to contact the ULS students from our synod to listen to them, and to provide

support and encouragement for them through this anxious time. Our first and primary response is to tend to the care of people, being quick to listen and to learn, so that our public response may be one that is informed.

The next response belongs to the board. The seminary board is charged with making formal decisions about the seminary's leadership. While I have heard many suggestions for what would serve the seminary best, I do not know what the board will decide to do. This is their work, which they will do on behalf of the seminary and all of its ministry partners.

But there is yet another response, and that is the work of rebuilding trust after it has been lost. This does not happen automatically nor does it happen quickly, but it can be done, and it is a response that we can all participate in. Rebuilding trust is communal work that bears the mirror image of escalating anxiety. Trust requires genuine care of the other in the place of reactive dismissal. Trust requires transparency of thought and action, and direct communication. Trust interprets the other's actions in the kindest light and is most concerned with the discipline and the accountability of the self.

St. Paul's descriptions of love (I Cor. 13) and of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) provide us with the qualities of personal behavior that result in trust.

In this most distressing time in the life of United Lutheran Seminary, I ask for your participation in our communal work of building trust, so that the essential work of theological education and pastoral/diaconal formation may be restored. Thank you for the support you have already given to the seminary community. Please join me in prayer:

We give you thanks, O God, for all of life and for our common calling as your servants, for the work of your church and for the ministries of word, sacrament, and service. We give you thanks for women and men whom you call to be leaders in your church and for teachers who form them for service. Through the witness and mission of our seminaries may the church join courageously in your work of compassion, mercy, justice, and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (ELW p. 74)

With you in Christ,



Kurt F. Kusserow, Bishop