



SOUTHERN BULLETIN

FALL 2020

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GET IN TOUCH

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Seminarian Luke Delasin (center) was serving his internship year at Trinity Lutheran Church in Greenville, South Carolina, when COVID-19 turned church activities and community outreach initiatives on their head. (Photo credit: Trinity Lutheran Church)

Clergy in COVID-19: LTSS Students Learn Parish Ministry During Pandemic

The novel coronavirus pandemic has cast a long shadow on the United States and on the world. Many people have lost their jobs, and some people lost their lives.

Quite often during this ordeal, people have turned to clergy for help finding their way.

For LTSS seminary students who were completing their vicar year when the virus struck, that meant learning the ins-and-outs of parish ministry, while leading a congregation through a worldwide pandemic.

“They learned problem-solving in the midst of a crisis,” said the Rev. Dr. Mark Fitzsimmons, campus pastor and associate professor at LTSS. “They had to learn how to think creatively and be part of a community that had to venture into new territory in so many ways. They may never deal with something of this magnitude again, but then

again — they might.”

Advanced theological training typically takes one of two routes for Lutheran seminarians. Both involve three years of classes and an internship working full time for a parish — a vicar year.

Traditionally, students take two years of classes, serve their one-year internship and return for a final year of schooling. The other route has the student attend three years of schooling, then serve their internship as a vicar and move right on to the ministry.

Luke Delasin went the traditional route.

A Tampa Bay, Florida, native, Delasin spent his vicar year at Trinity Lutheran Church in Greenville, South Carolina, which was within driving distance of Lenoir-Rhyne where his wife, Lindsay, was completing her undergraduate degree.

He had completed eight months at Trinity when COVID-19 struck.

“They had to learn how to think creatively and be part of a community that had to venture into new territory in so many ways. They may never deal with something of this magnitude again, but then again — they might.”

THE REV. DR. MARK FITZSIMMONS

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A Colorado native, the Rev. Dr. Justin Nickel earned his Doctor of Philosophy from Princeton Theological Seminary. (Photo credit: Justin Nickel)

LTSS Calls Inaugural Baxter And Frances Weant Professor Of Lutheran Studies

The Rev. Dr. Justin Nickel is passionate about the church and also about teaching. Now he can join the two.

Nickel was selected to be the inaugural Baxter and Frances Weant Professor of Lutheran Studies at LTSS.

“Teaching has always been my first passion, especially the idea of teaching for the sake of the church,” he said. “I also love the church, and I care deeply about the church. I feel like teaching candidates for ministry is a wonderful combination of the things I love.”

A Colorado native, Nickel, his wife, Mary, and son Max joined LTSS from Living God Lutheran Church.

“We are pleased to welcome Dr. Nickel to the seminary faculty,” said the Rev. Dr. Mary Hinkle Shore, rector and dean of LTSS. “Watching him teach, one sees that he is devoted both to the Gospel and to his students, and he delights in introducing them to one another.”

Nickel stepped into a newly endowed position whose focus

is Lutheran theology. While his signature course will be Lutheran Confessional Writings, he also teaches in the areas of theology and church history.

“A couple of the hallmarks of (LTSS) and LR that are interesting to me is the fact that we’re committed to being a Lutheran institution, but also being ecumenically open,” he said. “We focus on forming the whole person for ministry.”

Nickel earned his Doctor of Philosophy from Princeton Theological Seminary in the spring of 2018 before being called to serve as pastor to Living God Lutheran Church in Honey Brook, Pennsylvania. He earned a Master of Divinity from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a Bachelor of Arts in English literature and secondary education from the University of Colorado.

He has taught at Princeton Theological Seminary and United Lutheran Seminary, in addition to producing half a dozen published works and presenting on numerous topics relating to church doctrine. ●



The Rev. Dr. Robert Allen (right) graduated from Lenoir-Rhyne in 1962 and from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in 1966 before spending more than half a century in ministry throughout the Southeast, including the last 20 years in a variety of roles for his alma maters. (Photo credit: Mikeala Skelton)

ALUMNUS SPOTLIGHT

Rev. Dr. Robert Allen Retires: Lenoir-Rhyne and LTSS Alumna Retires After 54 Years in Ministry

Lutheran Theology Southern Seminary of Lenoir-Rhyne University strives to nurture the faith of its students, to prepare them to serve in a variety of ministry capacities as Christ-centered servants to the world.

That's how the Rev. Dr. Robert Allen lived his life, and after 54 years of ministry in the parish and in higher education, he has retired. Allen's last day was July 23.

"I have a sense of peace about it," he said. "Lenoir-Rhyne gave me a direction for my life. I came here almost as a blank page. I knew I wanted to go to the seminary, but I also had a desire to go to medical school. I thought maybe I wanted to be a medical missionary. In time, I came to see the seminary is where I wanted to go. Lenoir-Rhyne gave me that destiny, and I'll be grateful for that."

Allen graduated from Lenoir-Rhyne College in 1962 and from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in 1966. He later received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from LR.

"When I think of Dr. Allen, several wonderful qualities come to mind: mentor, confidant, wise," said Dr. Fred Whitt, university president. "Arriving at Lenoir-Rhyne University, I was not only new to a presidential role, but I was somewhat new to the Lutheran faith. I was immediately put at ease by Dr. Allen. He has been a wonderful source of knowledge and history, not only of LR and LTSS, but also sharing his faith and experience."

As a newly minted pastor fresh out of seminary, Allen — a

Columbia, South Carolina native — fondly remembers asking the bishop of South Carolina to escape the Southern heat and receive a call in New England. He ended up in Savannah, Georgia. Allen spent his entire career as a parish minister in the Southeast serving congregations in Georgia and the Carolinas before returning to LR as a professor and executive director of development for LTSS.

"Lenoir-Rhyne gave me a direction for my life. I came here almost as a blank page. In time, I came to see the seminary is where I wanted to go. Lenoir-Rhyne gave me that destiny, and I'll be grateful for that."

THE REV. DR. ROBERT ALLEN

"My life has been dedicated to the church, and I have been grateful for the multi-pronged influence I've received from my educational background and that encouragement to stay close to the church," he said. ●

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

UPCOMING EVENTS

NOVEMBER 16 Association of Theological Schools/ Commission on Accrediting evaluation visit (online)

NOVEMBER 19 Last day of fall semester classes

JANUARY 13 Spiritual Direction Program intensive

JANUARY 29 LTSS/Region 9 Stewardship Symposium

FEBRUARY 25 LTSS/Region 9 Candidacy Summit

MARCH 3 LTSS Advisory Council meeting

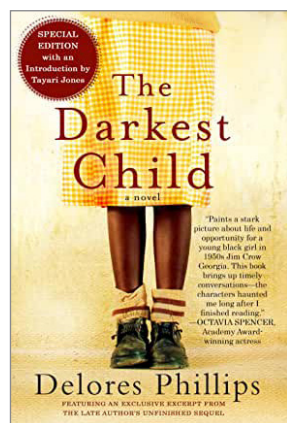
APRIL 21 Scholarship luncheon for donors and scholarship recipients

APRIL 22 Alumni Day

MAY 6 LTSS Commencement

* Events are subject to change as university schedules, policies and safety measures evolve.

THE RECTOR READS



Delores Phillips, *The Darkest Child*. Soho press, 2018. \$12.75. 432 pages.

Like many of you, I spent the summer consuming news about racial injustice and attempts to change it. I joined friends to work through the non-fiction account of American racism and its alternative, "How to Be an Anti-Racist" by Ibram Kendi, which I also recommend. I listened as Black colleagues on our campus spoke of the headwinds they encounter in their jobs that White colleagues do not experience. And I read fiction.

By ushering us into times and places not our own, fiction introduces us to experiences we could not otherwise have. "The Darkest Child" by Delores Phillips is set in late 1950s rural Georgia and narrated by a teenaged girl, Tangy Mae Quinn, who is one of the middle children in her family, all of whom had different fathers. The children's mother, Rozelle, is at once a mother who is trying to manage for her children in the midst of crushing poverty and a monster who is complicit in the brutality within which her

whole life unfolds.

Other reviewers have described "The Darkest Child" as a coming-of-age story. For me, however, Tangy Mae's mother was the most vivid character. As we witness her deep self-centeredness and shocking violence, Phillips encourages us to explore, "How did this woman get this way?" Underneath that question for me was this one: What do Rozelle and I have in common? In what ways do I also work hard to appear to myself and others as loving even as I participate in atrocities against the very people I claim to love? Rozelle is deeply troubled, but she is not the only one.

The novel offers a portrait of an overtly racist culture in which most attempts at something better are crushed, yet it is not just a horror story. The children take care of each other the best they can, and the stories of their love and resourcefulness bear witness to good in

the midst of evil.

Those who read fiction for its theology will find other characters, too, who have characteristics we associate with God and Christ. Miss Pearl loves the very hard-to-love Rozelle and is able to forgive her even when Rozelle's sins are directed against Miss Pearl herself. Velman Coope loves one of Tangy Mae's sisters and saves her life. He buys Tangy's sister away from their mother and makes a new life with Martha Jean.

Current events have presented us with another opportunity to examine the role of racist behavior in our culture and ourselves. When such examination begins to move into the realm of abstraction, people's stories pull us back to real life. The stories in "The Darkest Child" pull readers back to the recent past; we emerge to see our own time and place more clearly. ●

LETTER FROM THE REV. DR. MARY HINKLE SHORE



The Rev. Dr. Mary Hinkle Shore
Rector and Dean

Zoom discussion groups, Facebook Live chapel services, masked and distanced conversations outside Hillcrest apartments: Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary has a whole new look this fall. Even as the pandemic presses both faculty and students to do things differently, we are grateful for the opportunity still to pursue our callings of teaching and learning for the sake of the gospel.

Enrollment is slightly up. Nineteen new students joined the seminary this fall, sixteen of whom are in the M.Div. program and three in the MACM program. Our nine M.Div. interns have begun serving parishes located in five different states. Our newest faculty member, Lutheran Studies professor Rev. Dr. Justin Nickel, has begun his LTSS career during a semester when teaching is happening in a hybrid format. Classes include limited time on campus for students and faculty and much more time creating and interacting with online content.

It is a little early to look for a silver lining to a global pandemic, but I have noticed three positive things about the upheaval through which we are living.

People seem more attentive to each other. We inquire about the changes in people's lives and listen when they speak of homeschooling, or how a layoff has affected their family, or who they miss most right now. We recognize the deep and wide economic and racial disparities in our country that many of us could ignore before last spring. I wonder if we will take this awareness of our shared vulnerability and attention to the needs of others with us beyond the crises of the present time.

We are clearer on what is important. Having been denied our usual ways of building community, worshipping, and learning, we have adapted. Every adaptation has begun with a conversation about what we value in the face-to-face event we cannot do. What is it that we do not want to lose? How can we get to that deeply valued experience another way? Loss can clarify the nub of things. None of us would have chosen this way of learning what matters most to us, but learning we are.

Our institutions are more flexible than we knew. Seminary staff and faculty figured out in the spring how to host a service of blessing and prayer for our graduates. This fall, we offered online orientation for new students that improved on what we had done before. Meanwhile, our graduates and interns are doing faithful ministry in completely new ways. God is calling forth from God's people a more creative, flexible witness to the gospel than we could have imagined possible.

In challenging times, the Spirit continues to use Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary to teach, form, and nurture leaders for public Christian ministry. As students, faculty, and staff of LTSS, we are grateful. ●

Grace and peace,

Mary Hinkle Shore, Rector and Dean

Clergy in COVID-19, continued

"In some ways, it was amazing," Delasin said. "We ended up doing a Wednesday service we recorded and put on Facebook and YouTube, as well as a Sunday service.

"Instead of shying away from it, we said it's happening and assured people that God is walking through this with us. That was one of the great things, seeing how much it meant to people."

Each seminarian is required to complete an internship project. Delasin was planning to host community dinners to foster friendship in the community. With government restrictions limiting gatherings, he was forced to adjust. Rather than offering three large dinners, Delasin organized weekly meals at a low-income housing development.

"We were able to help those who likely needed it more," he said. "Instead of three big meals, we were helping people every week."

Natalie Cook took the non-traditional route interning at Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Ritchfield, North Carolina, and St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Gold Hill, North Carolina. As the months went by, she was becoming more comfortable behind the pulpit when the pandemic hit.

"I was feeling confident in my relationships with others and my emerging leadership style," she said. "I felt comfortable enough in my preaching that I loosened up a little and let my personality show.

"Following the synod's recommendations, we decided not to gather for worship Sunday, March 15.

The big question then was, 'What do you do when what you do the most is gather, but now you can't?' It truly was a disorienting time."

Cook said they began by adding PDFs of worship services to their website and sending copies to parishioners through email and the post office. They included hymn numbers and a reflection component for everyone to consider. For Holy Week, Cook said they started recording services.

"Instead of shying away from it, we said it's happening and assured people that God is walking through this with us. That was one of the great things, seeing how much it meant to people."

LUKE DELASIN

Cook and her supervising pastor also took turns calling every member of the church on a regular basis to make sure they were all OK.

"Learning how to preach to an empty sanctuary felt odd, but we made it work," she said.

"As time goes on, I can feel God shaping me into the person I need to be for the church. I feel like during my time at Southern Seminary, through different class discussions and focused readings, I have been formed into a person, and now a preacher, who can speak to crisis. Many factors contributed to my growth over time, but oddly enough, I think I preached better during the pandemic." ●



Natalie Cook was just getting used to preaching in front of a congregation when coronavirus forced the churches where she served her internship year to go online giving her valuable parish experience in front of a camera. (Photo credit: Natalie Cook)



Prior to COVID-19, seminarians such as Luke Delasin were preaching in front of full congregations. (Photo credit: Trinity Lutheran Church)



The Rev. Dr. Rhodes Woolly is a graduate of both Lenoir-Rhyne University and Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. (Photo credit: Rhodes Woolly)

IMPORTANT FACTS

Website Redesign Coming Soon

A modern, user-friendly website is critical to the digital strategy of Lenoir-Rhyne University and all of its campuses, including Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. After submitting a request for proposal to nine vendors, BarkleyREI of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was chosen to redesign lr.edu.

BarkleyREI organized virtual discovery sessions in August with groups across the university, while getting to know LR through publications, research, website analytics, brand messaging documents and more to guide the redesign. The redesigned website will launch in summer 2021. More information about the project is available at redesign.lr.edu. ●

Rev. Dr. Rhodes Woolly, Chair of Seminary Advisory Council

The Rev. Dr. Rhodes Woolly, a 1988 graduate of Lenoir-Rhyne University and 1996 graduate of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, was selected to be the new chair of the seminary's advisory council.

"I'm just a supporter and ambassador of what they do at the seminary," Woolly said. "What I bring to the table is a long history with the seminary, a passion for the church and a lot of work in parish ministry. Hopefully that will be useful along the way."

Woolly is the senior pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Salisbury, North Carolina. His three-year appointment as chair began June 1. He also serves as the LTSS representative on the Lenoir-Rhyne board of trustees. ●



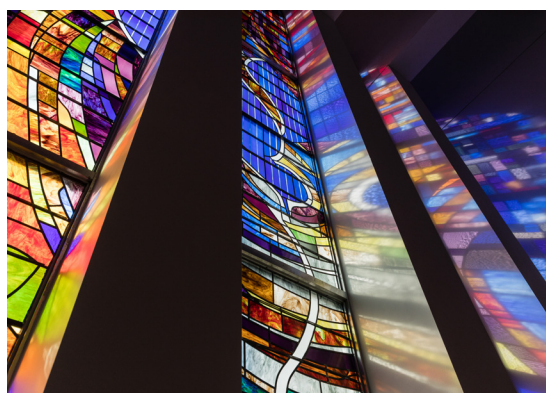
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Columbia, SC 29203

lr.edu/ltss



SCENES FROM SOUTHERN

Beautiful scenes from Southern can be captured daily at LTSS. Visit campus and take a tour or catch a glimpse of these imaged and more by following LTSS on Facebook at [facebook.com/LutheranTheologicalSouthernSeminary](https://www.facebook.com/LutheranTheologicalSouthernSeminary).



THANKFUL FOR YOU

Gifts to Lenoir-Rhyne's New Life Fund impact the lives of seminarians at LTSS each day. Through the New Life Fund, those committed to the mission of LTSS can make a major difference in the training of future servants of the church.

Join the many supporters of LTSS in making sure the needs of the seminary and our seminarians are met. Please make a tax-deductible gift prior to May 31, 2021.

LTSS is truly thankful for the loyalty and support of the ELCA's seminary in the South. A gift of any size expresses faith in the seminary's continued prosperity and demonstrates the value and commitment LTSS and its supporters have for its students.

Visit lr.edu/givetoLTSS.

IN MEMORIAM

*Dr. Robert Douglas Fritz '50,
7/28/2020*

*The Rev. George M Rushe '56,
5/12/2020*

*The Rev. Clarence Eugene
Sifford '60, 6/9/2020*

*Mr. Gather Gibson Blackwelder '62,
2/12/2020*

*The Rev. Wilmer Eugene
Copenhaver '64, 8/16/2020*

*Dr. Richard T. Smyth '69,
4/20/2020*

*The Rev. Gene Wayne Bruce '69,
4/6/2020*

*The Rev. Dennis Lee Setzer '70,
2/4/2020*

*The Rev. Dwayne J.
Westermann '74, 6/4/2020*

*The Rev. Carol A. Hertler '87,
1/30/2020*

*The Rev. Lori Ann Hefner '96,
5/20/2020*

*The Rev. Sherrill D. Curtis '03,
6/24/2020*

*The Rev. Karen Lois Schwindler '11,
6/7/2020*

INSIDE THE NUMBERS: GIVING

\$1,096,212

SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS AWARDED FOR THE
2020-21 ACADEMIC YEAR

\$122,297

LTSS NEW LIFE FUND RECEIVED AS OF SEPT. 30

\$350,000

LTSS NEW LIFE FUND GOAL

72

LTSS FALL ENROLLMENT 2020-21

20

NEW STUDENTS THIS FALL