

SECTION F – REPORTS OF COLLEGES AND SEMINARIES

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MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

April 2021

Rev. Claire S Burkat, Interim Chaplain

2020 Spring Semester

2020 started as a very promising year on the campus of Muhlenberg College packed with all the usual excitement of regular activities, classes, lectures, events, theater productions, sports, exams, outdoor and indoor pop-up festivities.

All in-person student, faculty, and staff gatherings stopped when the news that a life-threatening pandemic was rapidly spreading throughout our nation and the world. Like all schools, colleges and universities, Muhlenberg was mandated to shut down on less than a week's notice.

On March 10, 2020, students living on campus were alerted to pack up their belongings and return home to await news for a safe return in some unknown future. Everyone hoped it would only be a few weeks. For most it would be almost a year before they returned to the Muhlenberg campus in Allentown. Every single aspect of college life and education needed to be re-adjusted to this new and uncertain reality.

Faculty accustomed to active in-person learning, with occasional online segments, were immediately challenged to change all their familiar pedagogies to online learning. Many students were able to adjust to hybrid or remote classes, however online learning was particularly challenging for students with learning differences, those from less privileged backgrounds, or students with difficult family situations. The College provided additional services to support students' academic success and personal well-being.

College staff also found their workload increased due to the need to offer dual services and programming. Essential employees worked tirelessly to implement new cleaning protocols, increase campus safety patrols and maintain campus grounds and facilities, at times with a reduced work staff.

2020 Commencement was postponed, a decision that was particularly difficult for seniors and their families desiring to celebrate their well-deserved accomplishments. A virtual ceremony that included all of the traditional graduation elements was held in October 2020.

At a June 2020 Board of Trustees meeting Kathleen E. Harring, Ph.D. was unanimously appointed as the 13th President of Muhlenberg College. Our Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop Patricia Davenport was one of the three Bishop trustees who affirmed Dr. Harring's selection.

Board Chair Richard Crist praised Dr. Haring's wisdom, experience and energy. "When Dr. Haring was named interim president a year ago, none of us could have imagined what the next 12 months would hold. Kathy's performance in real time during unprecedented conditions made it clear to the Board that Kathy was the best possible candidate to lead Muhlenberg College."

President Haring has held many important roles in her 36 years as a gifted professor at Muhlenberg. She co-chaired Muhlenberg's 2017 strategic planning process, served as the College's provost, held the roles of vice president and dean of institutional effectiveness & planning, served as dean of institutional assessment & academic planning, among many other positions of scholarship and leadership. Dr. Haring is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale PA, a member congregation of the SEPA Synod.

Summer/Fall 2020

By summer it was clear this virus was spreading not diminishing. A wave of racial and civil unrest, along with protests denouncing systemic racism in cities and towns around the nation, added another layer of discontent and dis-ease on campuses and communities across our nation.

Comprehensive planning and agile decision-making led to a successful fall semester in the midst of a global pandemic.

COVID testing, surveillance and tracing was ramped up in August in order to allow the First-year students, select upperclass students and international students to live on campus for the Fall Semester. Everyone else was still learning and living remotely. As quiet as the campus seemed with only 600 students in residence and most faculty and staff working online, virtual work, learning and bonding was robust and non-stop through Thanksgiving.

It was late October when President Haring called to ask if I would consider serving as the interim chaplain at Muhlenberg while they began a nationwide search for a new chaplain.

A surprise request for sure, but having served on the Muhlenberg Board for 12 years as (former) bishop of the SEPA Synod, I was honored and pleased to be considered. Immediately, I had to get onboard with remote working, worshipping, meeting, planning, and learning unfamiliar technologies.

The Muhlenberg Candlelight and Carols Advent Service has been a beloved highlight of the Christmas Season for 62 years. Many SEPA Synod alumni have attended over the years and tickets for three services max out at about 1,500 people at this annual worship service. The chapel, music, vocal and theater depts did not want 2020 to be the year the music and worship stopped, so early in the Fall semester a virtual Candlelight and Carols Service was created for the 63rd year. The delightful result of this three-month labor of love, was a service open to all with no physical restrictions, and an attendance of almost 4,000 viewers!

Learning how to lead Zoom worship services, give pastoral care, welcome new people, invite participation, and plan for the future during a pandemic, was a challenge all Lutheran colleges, congregations, synods and church leaders had to navigate for more than entire year.

Winter/Spring 2021

All students were invited back on campus with classes beginning February 8, 2021. Approximately 1,300 students returned to campus, with another 270 living off campus or community. About 360 chose to attend remotely.

COVID 19 Testing was required for every single student for three full weeks, at the beginning of the semester with surveillance, tracing, and additional testing safeguarding their return and living on campus.

The search committee for new chaplain was actively seeking candidates by January. The position description can be found at the following address:

https://muhlenberg.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/en-US/MuhlenbergCareers/job/Egner-Memorial-Chapel/Chaplain_R0000455-1

Now that I have been on staff at Muhlenberg I have come to enjoy the energy, intelligence and imagination of 18-21 year-olds, the wisdom of the faculty, the welcome of the staff and President's council, and the increasing diversity on the campus of Muhlenberg. Progress on diversity, inclusion and anti-racism initiatives has not stopped or slowed in the slightest in spite of a pandemic. I have been working on the President's Diversity Advisory Council (PDAC) that is leading a process involving faculty, staff, students, alumni and trustees to identify the College's core strengths and foundational values for diversity, equity and inclusion.

I was particularly delighted to see recent updates on the religious, racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ communities working and learning together at Muhlenberg.

18-20% of Muhlenberg Students identify as Black or African American, Asian, or Pacific Islander, and Latinx or Native American or Indigenous. Muhlenberg is a welcoming community for LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff.

The percentage of students receiving Federal PELL grants is 18%. A recent survey of the students for this Spring Semester highlights the increasing religious and non-religious diversity at Muhlenberg. Students self-identified in the following ways.

The Ecumenical Christian Community (Protestant) is 20%, Roman Catholic 23.3%, Jewish 21.5%, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, 1.2%, Agnostic 4.1%, Atheist 2.4%, and No Affiliation as the largest single group at 26.7%.

My work as chaplain engages all the students, faculty and staff regardless of religious or no religious identification. The religious groups also intersect with all the other racial, ethnic, multicultural and LGBTQ+ communities on campus.

All the people on and off the Muhlenberg Campus offer exciting and enriching educational and relational opportunities, and a chance to participate in the hopes, dreams and leadership of a new young adult generation.

It has been an honor to serve our ELCA Higher Education ministry, to relate to the synods of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, and the Slovak Zion Synod that relate to the mission and ministry of Muhlenberg College. I look forward to passing this calling to our next chaplain. Thank you and bless you for your continuing support of Muhlenberg College.

Peace, Shalom, Salaam, Shanti, Nimrata

Claire S. Burkat

Interim Chaplain

UNITED LUTHERAN SEMINARY



Psalm 46 reminds us that “God is our strength, a very present help in trouble. We will not fear, though the earth be moved.” Since the beginning of the pandemic, it seems as if the ground moves under our feet every day. The seminary has adapted quickly to this new reality, using our pre-existing technology that used to join real classrooms in Philadelphia and Gettysburg to a now-totally virtual learning environment. Also, we encounter the risen Christ together as a community through our zoom worship services, a blessing that has truly unified our students, staff, and faculty across the miles.

President Guy Erwin arrived in last August to begin a new chapter in the seminary’s story, introducing a fresh perspective on the needs of the church during such a time as this. Along with Dean Sebastian and the faculty, he welcomed 85 new members to the ULS student body. In January, we welcomed an additional 39 new students. Our overall enrollment is strong: 360 students, including 177 in the Master of Divinity Program (Word and Sacrament), 19 Master of Arts in Ministerial Leadership (Word and Service), and 82 Doctor of Ministry Candidates. Other students are enrolled in the MA, MAPL, STM, and PhD programs. Currently, 56 of our students are concluding their internships. Seventy-five students received diplomas this Spring, enabling them to continue servant leadership in the church. We also celebrate the gifts and service of non-degree students including 24 Affiliates and 33 Certificate course enrollees (CTS, TEEM, CCFE, UTI, and Anglican Studies). We welcomed the regional Bishops to a virtual visit this past February where they met with members of the seminary community and spend time in worship and prayer. We will hopefully return to in-person learning in this coming fall, with events featuring convocation, colloquy, and Dr. Erwin’s inauguration (go to www.uls.edu for more information).

We strive to be a community that celebrates God's diverse Creation, with intentional focus on [inclusivity and equity](#) for all. Last Fall, we created the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in keeping with a Board of Trustees mandate. Our own Brother Ed Henry was promoted to become VP in this new office.

We are grateful to the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, our [partner congregations](#), [alumni](#), individual donors, and synodical support. Thanks to *all* of our donors, we continue to offer up to full tuition for our degree-seeking students with plans to prayerfully provide in decades to come. As a higher educational institution, we were able to receive federal PPP loans/grants which have helped to sustain us despite the economic hardships in our midst. We strive to be faithful stewards of our resources, looking to guidance from the Board of Trustees and the Endowment Board to help with sound fiscal and resource advice. We welcomed Buff Carlson, the Chief Financial Officer, who began working at the seminary in February of 2020, a few days before the pandemic upended our patterns and routines. He continues to work with Advancement team to forge a sustainable financial strategy for faithful ministry to our students now and in the future. In March, we thanked the Rev. Dr. Zimmann for her years of faithful leadership as she departed for a new position as VP of Advancement at Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

We are thankful for the ELCA synods of Regions 7 & 8 for their faithful accompaniment during these times. Though the earth is always moving, we will not fear, because our partners continue to remind us that God is present amid the challenges we face as we equip the saints for the work of ministry. May God bless you in this moment and strengthen you in the days to come as we continue to encounter Christ when and where we least expect him, but always where he is most-needed.

Rev. Dr. Martin Otto-Zimmann, *Director of Church Relations*