

SECTION F – REPORTS OF COLLEGES AND SEMINARIES

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MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

Synod Report March 2022-March 2023

Greetings to the Members of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod,

We share below a list of activities and events of Muhlenberg College, one of the 26 ELCA affiliated colleges and a partner in ministry with the SEPA Synod. We give thanks for the work of the synod and look forward to deepening our partnership in the years ahead. Pastor Janelle is on leave through May 2023. In the interim, please do not hesitate to reach out to Ira Blum, Director of the Leffell Center for Jewish Student Life, irablum@muhlenberg.edu or Allison Williams, Vice President for College Life, allisonwilliams@muhlenberg.edu.

Thank you.

Muhlenberg College – SEPA Synod Assembly

Report of Activities from March 2022-March 2023

- As part of continued efforts to support students' mental and emotional well-being, Muhlenberg has continued its partnership with the Jed Foundation (JED) and its JED Campus Initiative. This strategic four-year collaboration will focus on increasing accessibility and opportunity for students to access resources to support their mental and emotional health needs. As part of our work this year, all of our community members now have access to innovative online training to help them recognize colleagues or students who may be struggling with mental health concerns or contemplating self-harm or suicide. The modules train people on how to have conversations in those difficult moments, how to link them to appropriate support resources, etc.

- We had a successful return to an in-person Baccalaureate service led by Chaplain Janelle Neubauer, followed by an in-person commencement ceremony held at the PPL Center in Allentown.

- Campus activity returned to pre-Covid normality. This included, but was not limited to, religious services, sports games, theater and music performances, and in-person family, alumni, and Class weekends being held without capacity restrictions. We also returned to hosting our Candlelight Carols Advent Services at Egner Memorial Chapel at full capacity and continued offering livestream viewing as well as a produced version for later viewing.

- The new Fahy Commons for Public Engagement and Innovations opened on campus and is now home to Religious and Spiritual Life, Community Engagement, Graduate and Continuing Education, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship program, and the Muhlenberg Institute for Public Opinion. There are also a variety of new studios and other creative spaces for students to take advantage of. The Fahy Commons has been named one of the most sustainable buildings in the world and offers a wonderful community-oriented space for students and visitors at the College.

- Muhlenberg's statement on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) (linked [here](#)) has been updated following a community effort that engaged students, faculty, staff, trustees and alumni. The Board of Trustees approved the new DEIB statement in January 2023.

- The college launched the Campus Living Room Project to foster conversation around critical societal issues. These scheduled discussions were led by faculty, staff and student groups in an effort to bring together community members across identity, experience, area of expertise and ideology to seek to better understand the perspectives of others and to collectively grow in our quest for deeper learning and more complex ways of thinking across differences.

- Five members of the faculty were recently awarded tenure and promoted to associate professor by the Board of Trustees on the recommendation of President Kathleen Haring and Provost Laura Lowe Furge. You can find more information about each promoted faculty [here](#).

- In April 2023, Muhlenberg College celebrates 175 years of preparing generations of students for lives of meaning and impact through a rigorous education grounded in the liberal arts. The College will mark this historic occasion with three days of events, many of which are open to the larger Muhlenberg community. The weekend's events include a keynote address, faculty panel, dedication of the new academic building Fahy Commons, a gala and campus-wide celebration plus much more.

- The Boundless Campaign, launched during the inauguration weekend of President Kathleen Haring, continues to secure funding for a comprehensive, carefully interconnected group of strategic priorities that will shape students' academic and residential experience for decades to come. \$88 million of the \$111 million campaign goal has been raised. The campaign is scheduled to run through 2025.

- At this point in time, we are working towards Honors Convocation as well as commencement weekend programming including a student focused Baccalaureate service, a family day on campus, and commencement ceremony at the PPL Center in Allentown.

Submitted by Ira Blum, Director Muhlenberg College Hillel

UNITED LUTHERAN SEMINARY

Unifying, Learning, Serving

United Lutheran Seminary continues to build and sustain an affirming and diverse learning community of faithful, well-educated leaders skilled at guiding grace-filled encounters. Deeply rooted in the history of Lutheranism within Christianity, we witness to and participate in the work of God in the world through spiritual leadership and accompaniment, public advocacy, impactful worship, and care of neighbor.

In three years, we will be observing the bicentennial of our origins when Samuel Simon Schmucker founded the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg in part because it's bucolic setting would ensure a place of study and contemplation free from the distractions of the world. Of course, our national narrative put an abrupt end to that concept in 1863, and shortly thereafter C.P. Krauth felt that the center of Lutheran theological learning would be better off in the growing city of Philadelphia. After 154 years and several failed attempts, the two campuses were re-united under the banner of United. This word is a lofty aspirational sentiment, given the fractious world in which we find ourselves.

The church of Christ is struggling to be seen against a backdrop of political drama and escalating tensions over our history, our climate, and our future. Nevertheless, it is a good time to be the church. It is a good time to be United under the banner of God's intended formation for all of us. The seminary has adapted quickly to the world emerging from Covid, providing new technologies and learning platforms that make theological education accessible to people as far away as Palestine, Ghana, and Myanmar. No longer bound by archaic notions of geographical limitations, our two campuses have broken down old barriers and assumptions, creating a new campus that is both geographical and without boundaries, offering our students to gather in person and virtually. Our faculty is working to provide learning opportunities in Guatemala, Germany, Palestine, and India.

In the past year we have dedicated a great deal of time and resources to developing a Strategic Plan for the seminary which gives us a wide-angle view of future aspirations to fulfill the needs of a changing church and world. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the ELCA Mission Investment Fund and support from your synod, we will continue to offer degree programs at little or no cost to the student, allowing a higher ed. degree without crippling educational loan debt. In addition, our endowment allows us to apply funding to a new and exciting horizon of learning opportunities for rostered and lay folks.

The Strategic Plan recognizes that learning and formation never end. Our faith narrative is never fully formed. Sanctification is a life-long process full of fits and starts, mountaintops and valleys. This is the reason United Lutheran Seminary will continue to focus on building a lifelong community of learning through Kindling Faith, the Center for Sabbath Rest and Formation. Already in its first year of existence, Kindling Faith has created over sixty opportunities for learning across a wide range of topics, demographics, and learning platforms. While much of the programming takes place in a virtual setting, multi-day events take place on both United campuses, offering alums and lay folk the opportunity to spend time in a place apart where they can engage

in learning and fellowship with like-minded colleagues and friends. Kindling Faith has a learning opportunity for you—simply go to uls.edu and click on “Learn” to see what we are offering.

Thank you for walking with us on this portion of our common journey. In the year ahead, I hope to see and meet more of you on the territory of your synod, on zoom, or on one of our beautiful historic campuses. Peace be with you.

Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, *Seminary President*