



LTS TODAY

Lutheran Theological Seminary, a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, nurtures and challenges all people for Christ-centred leadership and witness for God's mission in the world.

WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER

Rev. Dr. William Harrison, President



Many of us have sung a chorus that goes, "I am the church / You are the church / We are the church together!" This issue of *LTS Today* is a reminder of an important, and easily lost, theological point: the church is composed of people engaging with God's transformative

work in the world.

We meet two faculty members who have other jobs while sharing their expertise with our students. **Jared Siebert**, one of Canada's leading church planters and a skilled communicator, teaches our course in outreach ministry. I was blessed to hear Jared speak at a conference in Toronto. When I realized that he lives in Saskatoon, I knew we had to find ways to engage his skills with our work. **Christine Fiddler** is an Indigenous scholar and PhD candidate in History, who is deeply engaged with the stories of *nehiyaw* (Cree) peoples on the Canadian prairies. Christine teaches a course called "Indigenous Intercultural Relations." Students visit people and places around Saskatchewan, to encounter Indigenous life and history. We invite you to take both these courses; they're great for laypeople. (Remember that auditing a course is really, really cheap!)

The Rev. Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein celebrates two milestones, with promotion to Associate Professor rank and grant of tenure (making her appointment permanent). **Mavis Hamilton** has a title change. She is now both Administrator and Executive Assistant to the President, reflecting an increased role in the LTS organization.

We meet four new members of the LTS Board of Governors. **Frank Stanisch** is a dedicated Lutheran

layperson who brings extensive experience in postsecondary education. **The Rev. Lori James** is Director of Mission and Spiritual Care with LutherCare Communities. **Bp. Trish Schmermund** leads the Synod of Alberta and the Territories. **Bp. Ali Tote** leads the Synod of Saskatchewan.

The Rev. David Hunter, Chair of the LTS Board talks about developments with the building on Seminary Crescent that we previously occupied. Challenges with that space remind us that LTS is an educational community, a group of people working with people, even as the buildings that have housed us have changed.

Two people who serve with us have seen shifts in their responsibilities. **The Rev. Dr. Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero** is now Chair of the STU Common Faculty, as part of our contribution to leading the partnership. **Hugh Williams** is now Director of Advancement for the STU; he will continue to serve LTS as before and will also share his skills with our partner schools. Greater resources for our friends mean increasing strength for all of us.

I report on the outcome of my recent sabbatical, with a brief introduction to my new book: *Leadership in a Shrinking Church: Finding New Vision in Unlikely Places* (Seabury Books, July 1, 2025). This is intended to serve as both guidebook and workbook for people and parishes (and other church organizations) seeking to navigate the complex waters of today's church environment. The book places God's transformative work in the lives of people front and centre.

We conclude with an article by **Dr. Schiefelbein-Guerrero**, in which he reflects upon the relationship between grace as central to Christian faith, and leadership as important to church life.

LTS AFFILIATE FACULTY



My name is Rev. Jared Siebert and I teach the “Outreach Ministries” course along with Professor Schiefelbein-Guerrero. This course is offered every other year and aims to help students think contextually about the ministry of the local church. It gives them the tools they need to lead their congregations through change and into meaningful engagement with their neighbours.

When I am not teaching this course, I serve in many different areas of the church: I am a director of the New Leaf Network (a Canadian organization dedicated to helping the Canadian church) and a pastor of a small but growing church plant in Saskatoon. I also run a sound, video, and lighting company called Siebert Audio Video and am a part owner of a social media management company called Mini Management. I live in Saskatoon with my wife, Katherine, and my two sons, Soren and Nathan.

My name is Christine Fidler. I am a Plains Cree (nehiyaw) woman who grew up in the northwest area of Saskatchewan in the Treaty 6 Territory of Waterhen Lake First Nation. I currently live in Saskatoon and I have a daughter and son. I have taught the Indigenous Intercultural Relations course for LTS since 2018. The course aims to better inform students about our history, culture, and worldviews through Indigenous pedagogies and curriculum, and land-based site visits. For as long as I have taught the course for the seminary, I have met some great people at LTS—students and staff who have always been open to learning and who make teaching the classes so rewarding. Our trips to historical sites have brought me some cherished memories. It’s been a fun, enjoyable experience to teach every time and I’m looking forward to what this year’s class will bring.

Apart from this course at LTS, I teach History and Indigenous Studies at the First Nations University of Canada and at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S). At the same time, I am a PhD student within the History department at the U of S, where I am using oral histories and archival sources to explore Indigenous understandings of health and healing as practiced by Nehiyaw (Cree) peoples living in northwest central Saskatchewan in the early 1900s. I aim to utilize research as an avenue for sharing the stories of Indigenous peoples in northwest SK, and to improve the status of treaty rights, health, and the well-being of these communities. Through my small business, Free the Spirit Consulting Services Inc (www.freethespiritconsulting.ca), I deliver presentations and workshops to individuals or groups. My collective work and education have led me to teach others about personal development and Indigenous insights and to offer my own knowledge to help develop programs, policy development, and projects.



**Four College
Conference:
“Homes Of The
Sacred”**

June 15-17, 2025

What is sacred space? How do we participate in co-creating sacred space? What theological responses and practices equip us for engaging hope in the world today?

The conference overlaps with the biennial meeting of the International Academy of Practical Theology and includes shared programming.

Watch our website and social media channels for more information.

FACULTY & STAFF NEWS



REV. DR. KAYKO DRIEDGER HESSLEIN GRANTED TENURE AND PROMOTION

President Harrison is delighted to make two announcements: the first is that Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein, the William Hordern Professor of Theology, has been granted tenure effective January 1, 2025 in recognition of her significant contributions to the teaching and institutional life of LTS.

The second announcement is that Dr. Driedger Hesslein has been promoted from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor, granted by President Bill Harrison and affirmed by the LTS Board of Governors.

Dr. Driedger Hesslein joined the faculty in 2020 as a full-time professor, having previously served as a sessional instructor since 2015. She is the first person of Japanese

descent to be granted tenure in the field of theology in Canada, and the second woman to hold a professorship in systematic theology at an ELCIC seminary.

“I am grateful to God, the tenure committee, President Harrison, and the LTS Board for this continued affirmation of my call to teach and form leaders for the church. I look forward with joy and excitement to continuing to serve the LTS community in our shared ministry,” says Dr. Driedger Hesslein.

Dr. Driedger Hesslein’s dedication to teaching, scholarship, and service to our seminary community is deeply appreciated. Congratulations on this well-deserved achievement!



“I am thankful for the opportunity to work with President Harrison, faculty, and staff in the capacity of Administrator and Executive Assistant to the President. My role at LTS is to manage and streamline processes as effectively and efficiently as possible as well as providing support. I am grateful for the work we do with the STU and the opportunity to enhance the lives of our students.”

~ Mavis Hamilton

LTS BOARD OF GOVERNORS



Dr. Frank Stahnisch is a Canadian postsecondary educator of German descent – having worked in five different countries before arriving in Alberta: Germany, India, Scotland, France, and the US. He is a member of Advent Lutheran Church in Northwest Calgary, where he lives with his wife and three children. Frank has been a Lutheran since around the age of six, while being raised in the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (growing up in the united Lutheran-Reformed church of Hesse-Nassau). He experienced his strongest faith impact in his youth, as a member of the Christlicher Verein Junger Menschen – Westbund, exploring Lutheran life forms amidst 1980s’ multicultural realities in Frankfurt am Main. Persisting from that time is a theological and life question that intrigues him: “What really is the Lutheran project – 500 years after Martin Luther’s time?” Frank still looks for answers to this question, for example when he turned into a pilgrim on the Luther-Trail (from Erfurt to Worms) two years ago, or when he mowed the lawns and cleaned the canteen kitchen at the Holden Village grounds last May. Similar to his contributions to the LTS Advisory Board, he sees active volunteering as part and parcel of a “Lutheran Way of Life” today.



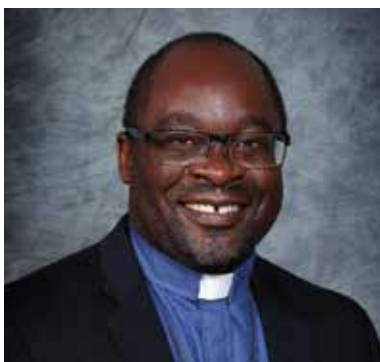
Rev. Lori James, Director of Mission and Spiritual Care, LutherCare Communities

Rev. Lori James was elected to the LTS board in June 2024 and is a graduate of LTS. She is privileged to have served three congregations in Saskatchewan: New Stockholm Lutheran Church, Stockholm; Redeemer Lutheran Church, Esterhazy and Trinity Lutheran Church, Estevan. In her current capacity at LutherCare Communities, Lori oversees the spiritual care and social work programs, engages with the larger church and occupies the role of ethics practitioner. She is grateful for the education that she received at LTS and says that it has served her well in answering God’s call to serve in various ways—both in these local communities and in the synod. As well as an opportunity to give back to the larger church, serving on the LTS board enables her to continue to follow God’s call as our whole church discerns where Christ is calling us today.



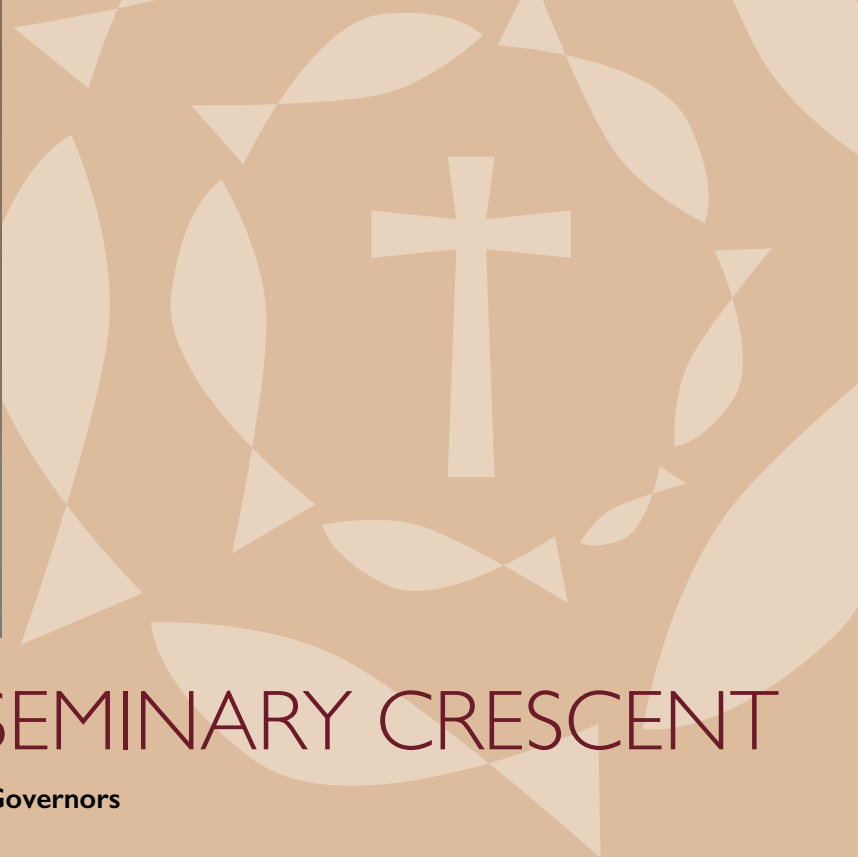
Bishop Trish Schmermund, Synod of Alberta & the Territories

Bishop Trish Schmermund was elected to the office of Bishop in August 2024 and is a graduate of LTS. She has served three congregations in Alberta: Good Shepherd Lutheran, Edson; Peace Lutheran, Leduc; and Holy Spirit Lutheran, Edmonton. She says, “I was able to serve all of these communities well because of the training and support received through LTS. In thinking of those formative years, I’m not sure I can fully articulate just how important they were in my life journey—in every way. I am incredibly grateful for the people, education and support received that continues to be with me in the everchanging work of ministry.”



Bishop Ali Tote, Saskatchewan Synod

Bishop Ali Tote (Brother Ali, as he is known by his friends), is a graduate of LTS, and holds a Ph.D. in Epidemiology as well as an MBA in Innovation Leadership. He has taught part-time at the medical college at the University of Saskatchewan. He was a pastor in Saskatoon until he was called to be assistant to Bishop Sid Haugen a little over two years ago. Originally from Cameroon, Bishop Ali was elected Bishop at the Saskatchewan Synod Convention in 2024, becoming the first African-born Protestant bishop in Canada.



LTS BEYOND 114 SEMINARY CRESCENT

By Rev. David Hunter, Chairperson of LTS Board of Governors

When I arrived as a new seminary student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary campus at 114 Seminary Crescent in Saskatoon in September of 1984, it was an exciting place to be. The facilities were excellent, the faculty presented stimulating theological ideas, the students were engaged and eager to learn. There was a substantial student body to get to know. Adding an interesting dynamic to that community was a residence building full of undergraduate students in a variety of different programs. I lived in the “Dean’s House,” so I was fully integrated into the residence community, sharing three meals a day and hanging out in the common areas. Although I am sure the administration faced many difficult challenges then, from a student perspective, it was a very good time to be at LTS.

Fast forward about thirty years and the troubles LTS faced were becoming an overwhelming burden. Seminary enrolment was so low that most of the building was not needed for teaching. The residence could not break even and ended up sitting empty. LTS lacked resources to maintain the property in a condition that was safe and comfortable, much less carry out the expensive repairs that were necessary. With evolving approaches to delivering theological education, the building became a hinderance to our life and mission. The long deliberations for a solution led to notifying the University of Saskatchewan that Lutheran Theological Seminary would relocate to the St. Andrew’s College building in the summer of 2020.

LTS worked for four years in cooperation with U of S to find an appropriate new occupant for the buildings. Despite several expressions of interest, none were found that could both meet the challenges of maintaining the property and fit the university’s expectations for the use of the buildings. In the meantime, security has become more of an issue, with significant property damage created by vandalism, resulting in further degradation of the facilities.

We have been able to negotiate transferring possession of the buildings to the university, which removes a burden of responsibility from LTS. They have concluded that demolition is the most feasible outcome, unless a workable proposal for occupation and use is presented soon. Although this outcome saddens us, we fully support the university’s decision. LTS appreciates our partnership with the university in an arrangement that meets the needs of the campus and of community security while also enabling LTS to move forward and pursue our mission.

In the 1980’s, I did not foresee the pressures of declining enrolment and support for the seminary that would take us out of the building that holds such special memories for me. Yet, in the present reality, I am proud of LTS for making the hard decisions necessary to continue serving the ELCIC by training leaders who are theologically equipped to meet the challenges of this troubled world. May God’s grace continue to sustain us in our commitment to serve the church and the world.



PROFESSOR SCHIEFELBEIN-GUERERRO APPOINTED AS CHAIR OF THE STU COMMON FACULTY

In November, the Common Faculty of the Saskatoon Theological Union recently voted to appoint The Rev. Dr. Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero, Grace Professor of Leadership at LTS, as the new Common Faculty Chair.

The Chair is responsible for overseeing the regular meeting of the Common Faculty and encouraging open and transparent communication among the three schools as they work together and maintain their distinctiveness. The Chair works directly with the STU Academic Dean to ensure that the common degree programs are delivered with excellence.

The current STU Academic Dean, Dr. Lynn Caldwell, noted, “Dr. KSG has strong experience in faculty leadership and collegial governance, a wonderful sense of commitment to the STU community and its programs, and I look forward to his work in this role.”

Dr. Schiefelbein-Guerrero responded to this appointment by stating, “I am honoured that my faculty colleagues have entrusted me with this responsibility, in which I can put into practice the work I am doing on leadership to benefit our students and the Church.”



SASKATOON THEOLOGICAL UNION APPOINTS FIRST DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

The Saskatoon Theological Union (STU) is delighted to welcome Hugh Williams into his new role as Director of Advancement for the STU. Hugh has served as the Director of Donor Relations at Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon (LTS) in 2017, and as LTS’s Director of Communications and Development from 2020 – 2024.

From Hugh:

“I am honoured to accept the responsibility and opportunity to be the STU’s first Director of Advancement, a senior leadership role that will direct the STU’s fundraising and public engagement efforts. This feels like a natural progression from the collaborative communications work I have already been engaging in

with my STU colleagues. I am also excited to bring the same relational, donor-centered approach—which has proven so successful at LTS—to my fundraising work with the St. Andrew’s and Emmanuel & St. Chad communities. I will of course continue to serve the LTS community in the same capacity as before.

To me, the STU represents the aspiration of unity in diversity. This spirit of collaboration is not only foundational to what the STU already is, and hopes to become, but it is also essential in shaping leaders who will serve a global and interconnected church. I look forward to partnering with our generous supporters, alumni, and friends—as well as the gifted staff and faculty here in the STU—as we embark on this transformational journey together.”

LEADERSHIP IN A SHRINKING CHURCH

By Rev. Dr. William Harrison

As most of you know, I was on sabbatical July 1 – December 31, 2024. My time was dedicated to writing a book, called *Leadership in a Shrinking Church: Finding New Vision in Unlikely Places* (planned for July 1, 2025, Seabury Books). This is an immediate conversation for the ELCIC, as we reimagine our church with fewer members. At the core of the book is the recognition that all Christian denominations (with maybe one or two, very small, exceptions) are shrinking in the core countries of the Anglosphere (U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Oceania).

Christianity has tended to focus on becoming bigger. Today, that's a problem for us because people in our society simply aren't joining voluntary organizations of any kind. The trend affects the Lions Club as much as it touches us. Increasing numbers simply isn't feasible. Moreover, we have real questions about the emphasis on numbers, wondering whether it might have led us astray sometimes rather than helping us to share God's good news given in Jesus Christ.

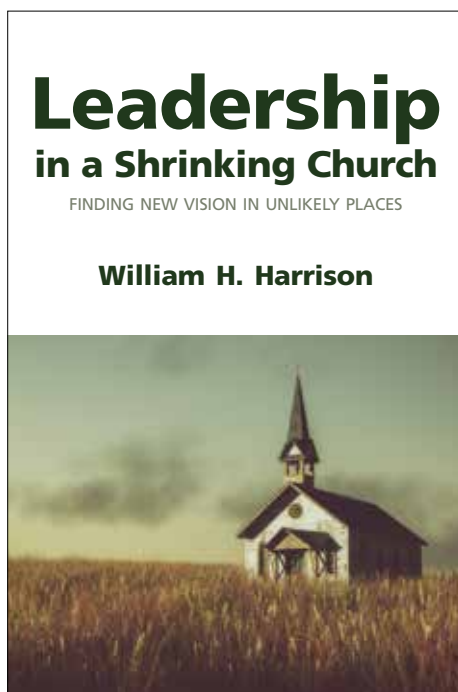
I invite us to rethink the kinds of transformation that we seek in the world, forsaking the numerical growth narrative and moving toward a more complex kind of whole life change that people of good will (Christian or not) can share. The church cannot simply focus on religious transformation (the encounter with love). We must also support intellectual transformation (desire

to ask and answer questions), psychic transformation (recognizing our feelings and engaging with them), and moral transformation (making decisions based on true answers and on concern for others). In other words, the church must focus on being a community engaged with transformation internally and externally.

Indeed, many people in our church are seeking to do exactly these things. Now, we need to change the story that we tell ourselves and others so that it matches our practice. To that end, I do more than discuss hopes for the changing church. The book provides concrete tools for leaders and organizations (congregations, committees, judicatories, and others) to reflect on their current situation and find new ways forward. I invite you to consider building a Gospel Vision Statement, focusing your message on whom you want to reach in transformation and how you will do

it. In addition, every chapter ends with pointed questions, designed to help you and your congregations (and other organizations) toward deeper self-understanding and clearer direction in today's challenging circumstances.

Leadership in a Shrinking Church can serve as both guidebook and workbook as we navigate into the future under the leading of the Holy Spirit.



HOW DO GRACE AND LEADERSHIP GO TOGETHER?

Grace is relationship, but a unique one in which God communicates Godself to the entire Cosmos. For Christians, this self-communication is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Yet, grace is not limited to the activities inside our churches. God reveals Godself through the very people named and claimed by God in baptism. And some of those people, including clergy, take on specific leadership roles in ministry. Below, I offer some initial reflections on how Lutheran theology can contribute to an ecumenical conversation about leadership.

Grace-Filled Leadership

A respected professor was fond of saying that “Lutheranism was born in a university, not a tent meeting.” His statement was not a critique of traditions originating from charismatic movements but acknowledging a different starting point – not the alluring style of leaders but historically-informed and biblically-grounded theological commitments. Much of the literature (and teaching) around leadership highlights distinctive “gifts” or “skills,” tools that one uses to lead effectively. Yet, shifting from “graceful” (trait-based) to “grace-filled” (theological) allows ministry leaders to decentre themselves and instead recentre God’s self-communication in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, leadership requires a toolkit of skills and approaches (it would be naïve not to think so), but this reorientation places the mission and the leader in their appropriate places.

Leadership as Being a Theologian of the Cross

In his 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther notes that “a theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is” (#21b [TAL 1:84]). His concern was to reject a mindset that is too confident in its own ability to understand the “invisible things of God,” which he calls a “theology of glory.” Instead, the theologian of the cross operates from a place of humility and engages with what has been revealed—namely, God’s self-communication in Christ, who served, died, and was raised. Calling “a thing what it

actually is” requires leaders to operate with both honesty and transparency, “giving no occasion for false security or illusory hope,” as stated in the ELCIC ordination rite. The cross calls leaders to reject “solutioneering” (dealing solely with the immediate issue by putting a familiar bandage on the situation) and instead to engage the Body of Christ impacted by the situation as co-partners in the work of mission.

Christ’s Salvific Work More than Sacrificial

Luther did not solely advocate for a sacrificial understanding of atonement but primarily understood Christ’s saving work as that of reconciliation (*Christus Victor*) and connection (“happy exchange”) as enacted through grace-as-relationship; thus, leaders must be careful not to adopt a sacrificial “suffering for Jesus” mentality in their work but instead operate out of a place of relationship. Put simply, leaders, especially those in the ministry of care, are to accompany and console by offering honest solace, encouragement, comfort, and alleviation of distress, not out of a sense of sacrificial duty but by themselves being grace-filled.

These Lutheran touchpoints – highlighting Christ-centered, honest, and healthy dispositions for leading – are gifts for ecumenical relationships as leaders are confronted with the realities of the 21st-century Canadian Church.

~Rev. Dr. Kyle Schiefelbein-Guererro



Please consider giving to the Grace Fund for Faculty, to ensure that our Lutheran professors are empowered to continue their important work in shaping the future of our community.



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