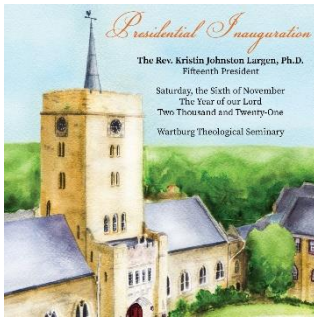


December 2021 / January 2022 Northern Light Newsletter article
by Pastor Jim Duehring, Assistant to the Bishop and DEM



I recently had the honor of representing the Northern Great Lakes Synod at the Presidential Inauguration of the Rev. Kristin Johnston Largent, Ph.D., who is the new president of Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. Wartburg is one of the seminaries of the ELCA, and I graduated from there in 1987.



Returning to Wartburg made me nostalgic for the past. Indeed, the very edifice itself is nostalgic. It is modeled after the Wartburg Castle in Germany where Martin Luther went into hiding and worked on translating the New Testament into German so that the people could actually read it in their own language. The world was about to change. The Protestant Reformation was about to explode on the scene of history.

My experiences at Wartburg Seminary were very formative and positive. They helped sharpen my theological acumen and gave me opportunities to practice my pastoral skills. I felt prepared to enter my profession as a called pastor of the church.

But times have changed for the world and Wartburg Seminary. Only one of my professors remains active on the faculty. The others have retired or have passed on to glory. I have paid attention to some of those changes but not all of the changes. Like many of you, I too can be nostalgic for the way things were. You might feel the same way about your local church. You might long for the days of your confirmation pastor, or the days when Sunday School rooms were filled with the noise of children.

The inauguration of President Largent spoke of hope for the future and also the challenges that await any institution under new leadership in a fast-changing world. President Largent was introduced to give her Presidential Inaugural Address by Dr. René Johnson, who serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors for Wartburg Seminary. It was good to see Professor Johnson, who also teaches at Finlandia University in our own synod, who served as part of the Presidential Search Committee. Professor Johnson reported that in President Largent, they had found an “enthusiastic” communicator. “Enthusiasm” is a great descriptive word, for it comes from the Greek word “entheos,” meaning “God within.”

In her enthusiastic spirit, President Largent shared the following in her Presidential Address:

“I am convinced that, especially now, in this time and place, all institutions of theological education have a critical role to play in God’s mission in the world. In this moment, the world needs a church that can be a “repairer of the breach,” to use the word of Isaiah 58. And therefore, the church needs seminaries that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can form leaders to shepherd and shape the church for this difficult, rewarding bridge-building work.”

While we all can wax nostalgically on what has been, may we enthusiastically believe and live the “God within” that gives us courage to enter a new day. And God bless President Largent as she has taken up the mantle of leadership at Wartburg Seminary where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning.

“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

~2 Corinthians 4:7

The Bible verse inscribed on the invitation to President Largent’s Inauguration