



Dear Friends,

We are certainly living in challenging and unprecedented times. Due to our limitations on meetings and with several previously scheduled meetings and gatherings being canceled I am writing to give an update on the Seminary in the midst of these times. Below is a summary update on several areas relating to the work of Seminary; our work and ministry continues to move forward and we are continuing to adapt as the situation changes.

1. COVID-19 Response

- a. The Seminary continues to work through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to create an environment that is safe to have students return to in-person classes in the fall of 2020. Visit <https://www.northpark.edu/fall-2020/> for more information on the efforts of the University to reopen campus to students this fall.
- b. The Seminary was well positioned to make a quick transition to fully online instruction in the spring given our previous experience in online education.
- c. The campus remains closed to in-person classes and employees will continue to work from home for much of the summer. Employees will start to return to work on a staggered schedule in July.
- d. Two SRA students passed away this spring due to complications from COVID-19 and several other students, both inside Stateville and out, have either been infected or have had a close family member infected with COVID-19.
- e. We have been offering financial assistance to students in crisis through our existing Deacons Fund and other funds, as we are able.

2. Enrollment

- a. Our summer and fall numbers are higher than our three-year average, despite the slowdown with COVID-19 related issues. We anticipate adding more students to the fall enrollment numbers before the start of the semester begins in August.

3. Accreditation

- a. We have submitted necessary updates to both ATS and HLC to keep them informed of our plans to continue to provide classes during this unprecedented time.
- b. Several NPTS faculty and staff are assisting in the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation process that will culminate in a HLC site-visit to the campus next fall.

4. School of Restorative Arts

- a. We lost two of our students to COVID-19 and we may lose more in the weeks and months to come, as the situation inside Stateville and other prisons does not allow adequate precautions to be exercised to decrease the spread of the virus.
 - i. Dean Clifton-Soderstrom coordinated memorial services for both students that passed due to COVID-19 and both services were attended by family members of the students.
- b. We finished the spring semester and are currently holding the summer semester through correspondence classes as Stateville is on lockdown.
- c. We are hopeful that video classroom technology can be added to a classroom in Stateville by the fall so classes can resume virtually.

- d. We will be expanding the SRA program this fall to include a campus at Logan Correctional Center, a women's detention center in the Illinois Department of Corrections system. Logan already has the capability to hold online, virtual classes. We anticipate admitting a cohort of 20 women this fall.

5. Faculty/Staff Transitions

- a. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom continues to serve as Interim Dean of Faculty through the end of 2020 and we are continuing the process to discern a permanent appointment to this position.
- b. Ellen Kogstad retired from her position as Director of the C. John Weborg Center for Spiritual Direction in June; we are very grateful for the years of dedicated leadership Ellen provided to the Center. Following a national search, we have called Rev. Dr. Rob Peterson to serve as the next Director.
- c. Michael Walker concluded his Theology Teaching Fellowship this us this spring and we are not able to replace this position at this time.

6. Financial update

- a. We worked with the Business Office and each of our staff and faculty to reduce spending as much as possible for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- b. Revenue lines in the Seminary budget remain strong as our programs, especially Ignite, continue to grow and we are expecting to launch in the Midwest Conference this fall.
- c. Overall, realistic budget projections show a significant reduction in revenue for our fiscal year beginning July 1; therefore, the Board of Trustees and the financial management team of the University is working to implement cost-saving measures for the upcoming year to position the University and Seminary to remain financially viable.

7. Distance Cohorts Update

- a. The Ignite program in the Pacific Southwest Conference continues to be strong with 87 students between three cohorts. We had already planned take a year off from enrolling a new cohort this fall with plans to launch a new cohort in the fall of 2021.
- b. Equip, a distance based cohort program in the Midwest Conference, will launch this fall with an in-person class held in Nebraska.
- c. The cohort in the Great Lakes Conference continues to move along and will have an online class this summer instead of the planned face-to-face class.
- d. Conversations with the East Coast Conference continue to move forward and we anticipate a fall 2022 launch if everything continues to progress well.
- e. We are exploring the opportunity to launch a distance cohort in the Midsouth conference that will be based in Houston. If all continues to move forward, we will launch during the upcoming academic year.
- f. We also continue to explore opportunities in other regional conferences to establish cohorts in other areas as well.

8. Nyvall Hall Renovation

- a. We are grateful to the many donors who supported the renovation efforts of Nyvall Hall. The project finished very well and we are delighted to have the renovated facilities.
- b. A celebration and Open House to highlight the renovation and show appreciation to our donors will be planned when we are able to have group gatherings again.

9. Grant Initiatives

- a. Thriving in Ministry Grant: All three of our grant areas, Thriving Vocationally, Thriving Prophetically, and Thriving Spiritually continue to move ahead and adapt to the current pandemic.

- b. Thriving Congregations: We have recently applied to Lilly Endowment for an additional grant to support congregations and specifically bridging the gap between congregations and leaders that are incarcerated and those that are not incarcerated.

10. Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture

- a. Good conversations have continue between Jewish leaders and Palestinian Christians because of the 2019 Symposium on the Holy Land. Dean Kersten has been invited to moderate these conversations as they continue to move forward.
- b. We have made the difficult decision to cancel the Symposium for the fall of 2020 with the hope that we will be able to resume in the fall of 2021.

We are continuing to move forward and carry the mission of the Seminary forward. I am encouraged to see our community come together during these challenging times to support each other and move forward together. Our future is bright and I am looking forward to a time when we can come back together in person.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David W. Kersten". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. David W. Kersten
Dean, North Park Theological Seminary
Vice President for Church Relations, North Park University