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FROM THE DEAN

Blessings from Graceland! In this newsletter, Charmaine Chvala-Smith, Seminary Chaplain, shares about spiritual formation in seminary.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation was observed October 31, 2017. I share a brief article reminding us of the impact the Reformation continues to have on the church.

The fall has begun! You'll hear from Cynthia Gardner, a new MAR student who's begun this fall.

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OUR MISSION AND PURPOSE

Community of Christ Seminary is solidly grounded in the Christian faith and shaped by its religious heritage and tradition. This tradition understands that God's will and purpose for the world and the church continue to emerge out of the process of faithful response to human need. We affirm that the people of God are called to live in community with all creation, and that peace and justice are the touchstones by which the gospel of Jesus Christ is enfleshed.

The mission of the seminary is to educate and prepare — through prayerful scholarship, teaching, service and mentoring — faithful, creative and discerning leaders for ministries in congregations, church and the world. "[S]eek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning even by study and also by faith." (Community of Christ *Doctrine and Covenants* 85:36)

FACULTY PERSPECTIVE REFORMATION 500

Reformation 500

Renaissance – Reformation – Enlightenment. It's hard to imagine our world without these historical moments. Modern faith is equally difficult to imagine without them. While these events took shape uniquely in a variety of places and forms, together their collective impact continue to shape church and world even today.

The Renaissance begins in the 12th and 13th centuries. It marks the end of the "dark ages" and begins a period of intellectual self-discovery, humanism, and transformations out of the medieval world. The Renaissance's intellectual and technological developments help birth the Reformation, including the Gutenberg press (ca 1440). Erasmus and Thomas More were important figures of Renaissance humanism. They were also contemporaries of the famous Reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli.

October 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the day history records that Martin Luther posted his ninety-five (95) theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg. It was a symbolic turning point in the life of the Western world. Luther's theses mark the beginning of a larger revolt growing across Europe against abuses and excesses of the Church (what we know today as the Roman Catholic church) and its authority in social and political life. Chief among Luther's objections was the infamous selling of indulgences. Indulgences were a pardon of punishment for sin (not a pardon of sins,

themselves) offered in exchange for almsgiving to the Church. Related to the selling of indulgences was Luther's protest against the financing of Saint Peter's basilica, which was under construction during his lifetime. Today, St Peter's remains the largest church building in the world. Luther's 87th theses states, "Why does not the pope, whose wealth is today greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?" While St Peter's was finished in 1626, the protestant spirit of his criticisms of church authority continue to ripple through Western culture today.

Without the Reformation, there would be no Radical Reformation and Catholic Counter Reformation, no Puritans, no Oliver Cromwell, and no United States (founded on religious liberty). There would be no denominationalism, non-denominationalism, or contemporary search for ecumenical Christian faith.



Community of Christ members might remember that the Restoration and Joseph Smith, Jr are also unimaginable without the Reformation three hundred years earlier. The influence of Renaissance humanism through 18th century figures like Thomas Paine shaped the world in which Joseph Smith, Jr becomes a prophet. Midst the Enlightenment, the knowledge and authority of human reason is crowding out the established authority of tradition and religion. A 19th century prophet, Joseph Smith, Jr proclaims faith in God's authority and participation in God's Kingdom midst this ripening Enlightenment world. The Restoration expresses a unique American moment in which religious liberty and God's authority are uniquely brought together in the divine call to restore the life and witness of the ancient New Testament church. Today, the fulfillment of Joseph Smith's movement remains defined by this search for God's authority united with individual liberty, fulfilled in the guest for God's just and peaceful reign in history.

Paul Tillich, one of the most influential 20th century theologians, says this quest for God's intentions for human community in history is at the heart of the "Protestant Principle." In his book *The Protestant Era* (1948), he describes the Protestant Principle as a combination of impulses. The first is the religious

imperative to seek God's love and justice for human relations (social, economic, political) in history. This impulse has both secular and religious forms. The second impulse is to protest against any absolute claim made on this order in history, whether it be by a nation, dogmatic religion, economic system or political ideology.

In essence, the Protestant Principle is the impulse to critique and confront secular and religious forms of idolatry. It brings the theological and humanist impulses of the Reformation together. For Tillich, this Protestant Principle continues to drive modern history.

As the Reformation turns 500 this year, I see its impact continuing into the 21st century. Our world continues to reform and be reformed. On one hand, there is a global search for peace and truth in the world through religion and social justice movements around the globe. On the other, there is a thriving spirit of protest in the world today that denounces violence and forms of authority that are associated with exclusion, inequality, and injustices. This search and spirit of criticism go hand-in-hand. They lie at the heart of the Protestant Reformation, and the Restoration.



FROM OUR CHAPLAIN:

SEMINARY STUDY AND SPIRITUAL FOMRATION

Perhaps you've heard the term 'spiritual formation'?

A Christian version might be expressed as "growing in the likeness of Christ," while cultural definitions focus more on "finding my spiritual center." Throughout our lives we are consciously or unconsciously being shaped spiritually: at home, in school, in nature, at camp, or church. But we are also spiritually formed by less obvious power: our nation's self-understandings, the movies, books, TV or internet shows we consume, the news we absorb, and the causes we support.

As disciples intentionally engage in Spiritual Formation, we acquaint ourselves anew with our own inner being, with the ways we see and value others (including the natural world), and with our understandings and interactions with God. These can be more simply described as: Self-Awareness, Other-Awareness, and God-Awareness. All three are essential as we seek maturity on our Christian journey, especially in our roles as disciples and ministers. This deliberate journey is best undertaken with companions and a few tools. The path itself will provide the nourishment needed to keep going.

Choosing to be formed spiritually, though not always easy or comfortable, attunes us to the lives and relationships around and within us. Those enrolling in seminary are looking for more than just some classes to take or more information to learn. After all, those could be found at a university, community college, or online source. Why choose a seminary? We've committed to not only providing students with classes to expand their theological, scriptural, and ministerial knowledge and skills, but also to integrating Christian spiritual practices and experi-

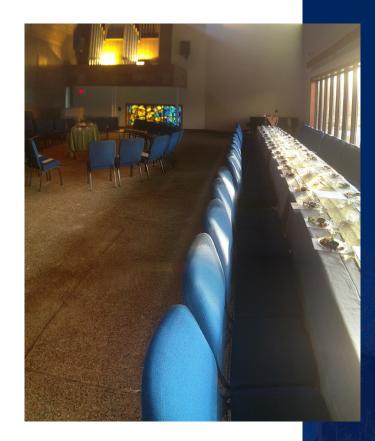


ences into our classes and especially into our face-to-face times together as a community.

What makes seminary study different from taking a collection of online religion courses? It's the difference between learning about Catherine of Siena and praying with her. It's the difference in how we see ourselves and our purpose in the world after spending time in prayer and worship together. It's the difference made as we are reminded that we are beloved children of God and known by Jesus, whom we follow.

With spiritual formation as a lens, it quickly becomes apparent that there's a difference between learning about scripture, and letting it lead us deeper into relationship with God or into awareness of our own discipleship. Through lectio divina, a variety of practices that assist us in hearing and resting in scripture, we are invited to listen to passages in new ways, with our hearts, as well as our minds. By learning and creating Bible Study methods that explore the best historical/critical details as well as spiritual formation dimensions of a text, we let scripture live in and through us in new and relevant ways. Rather than just learning the concept of the Trinity, we may, by composing prayers that invite Father, Son, and Spirit into a mundane aspect of life, connect in new ways with the beauty and vitality of the Trinity.

Spiritual formation is a path; it's not an end in itself. It is an approach to life and a set of practices or tools that help us do the hard work of living honestly before God and self. This can mean delving into some very difficult parts of our inner being and our relationships, so that Jesus, God, the Spirit can begin their work there.



Necessarily, both seminary study and spiritual formation require us to ask the difficult questions. Perhaps you are familiar with some of these:

- "How can the living God meet us in millennia-old writings when our world is so different from theirs?"
- "Why do I find it so difficult to accept that God knows and loves me?"
- "Where have my insecurities become an excuse to judge others, or to distance myself from a relationship or a community?"
- "What would it mean to let go of my comfort and with Christ's help let my heart be broken for someone else?"
- "Can I admit that sometimes God feels distant or non-existent?"
- "What does my desire for control or security reveal about me and how is it connected to trust in God?"
- "How does my perception of myself as a victim excuse me from acting for positive change in the world?"
- "How can times of worship become refuges from busy-ness, so we can focus on the One who matters?"
- "What or who in the world, have I allowed to dictate my worth?"
- "How can I let my critical theological learning become an avenue for encounter with God?"

These are just some of the questions that can draw us deeper. New venues of learning, where fresh ideas and questions cause shifts in our previous understandings of God and ourselves, are exactly the places where prayer belongs. Recognizing how each one's story fits into The Story opens us to the spiritual practices of community, hospitality and humility.

There is no end to the ways in which seminary study and spiritual formation can assist each other in supporting and emboldening those who choose to travel this road. May we engage the call with heart, soul, strength, and mind!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith Seminary Chaplain

OUR SEMINARIANS: CYNTHIA GARDNER



Cynthia Gardner has taught middle and high school students and teachers in rural Missouri schools for 31 years. She holds a B.A. degree in English from Graceland University and an M.A.Ed. from the University of Missouri. She is an Elder in Community of Christ, leading the pastorate of the Columbia, Missouri congregation

I have wanted to be a seminarian for many years simply for the pleasure of reading, thinking, and engaging in meaty conversations. My less selfish goals include:

- Learning to use scripture in a responsible, relevant, and engaging manner in worship planning.
- Learning to better communicate the Good News and the Challenging News in order to motivate people.
- Gaining knowledge needed to engage with religious leaders of many faiths in an informed manner.

After three weeks in my first course, Christian Theology, it appears that Community of Christ Seminary will help me to meet all of my goals. The reading and writing assignments have been challenging, and interactions with peers and Dr. Frizzell on the online platform have been as personal as possible in an online environment. The interface is well-organized and user-friendly. I am excited to be doing theology in this community.



Know someone interested in considering seminary?

Here are some resources to get started with spiritual formation and theological education in mind:

Barreto, Eric D., ed. *Thinking Theologically*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1451483413

Chvala-Smith, Anthony J. *Understanding the Way*, Revised edition, Independence, MO: Herald House, 2011.

Dawn, Marva. *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. ISBN: 978-0802844668

Groody, Daniel. G. *Globalization, Spirituality & Justice: Navigating a Path to Peace*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015. ISBN 978-1626981508

Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2014. ISBN 978-080287185-5



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