

Newsletter Article Sample

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Time like an ever-rolling stream soon bears us all away. (O God Our Help in Ages Past)

We live in the ages. (attributed to Albert Einstein)

Taking the Long View

Bishop Duane Danielson of the ELCA's Western North Dakota Synod tells the story of the first thing he did after being surprised by his election some years ago. He went on a long cross-country ride with a friend who drives big rig tractor-trailer combinations. "Best thing I could do to prepare for the office," I've heard the bishop say. "It taught me that when you drive one of those things you have to look much farther down the road than when driving a car."

In his book, *Leadership on the Line*, Ronald Heifetz of Harvard writes of the importance of "going to the balcony" on frequent occasions. According to Heifetz, leaders in any arena are constantly swept up in day-to-day activities to the point we fail to see the larger patterns and longer-range contexts that should influence decisions and actions. It is only as we can get above the mundane, go away to a place of reflection, or in other ways take in the bigger picture that a wider wisdom can be gained.

Our Lord seemed to grasp the importance of being a big-picture thinker and long-range planner. His balcony trips were actually desert escapes for long periods of prayer and contemplation. On occasion he would slip away while long lines of seeking souls in search of healing still awaited his balmy touch or comforting gaze. Taking the long view with regard to his own personal mission, according to Luke's gospel, at a certain point he abandoned his aimless itinerant wandering and "set his face toward Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51) in order to fulfill his cross-bound strategic plan.

An institution such as ours is always engaged in a delicate dance of balancing short-term needs and opportunities with long-term visions and sustainability. Our institutional "orbit" should never be circular around only one focal point. Rather, it is an elliptical orbit around two foci: (1) Near-by and short-range objectives; and (2) Long-range positioning and far-distant future possibilities. Among the responsibilities of the faculty, Board of Directors, and my office (the principal partners in what we refer to as "shared governance") is the careful stewarding of our resources in such a way as to maintain this elliptical orbit. There is always the strong temptation to meet pressing short-term needs. We could provide full scholarships to all our students for a couple years or so, thereby reducing the rising student indebtedness—but only if we decided to spend down all our undesignated reserves. After so doing, we'd be on the verge of hanging out a "going out of business" sign! On the other hand, if we're too cautious and penny-pinching in the short-term, we may lose institutional momentum, weaken the quality of our "offer" of high-quality theological education, and thereby jeopardize both short- and long-term institutional futures.

In pondering my personal and our shared leadership, I frequently find myself going to the balcony built over the course of eighteen decades by all those who have gone before me and others who now steward the Seminary's current life and future status. Reading the reflections of and stories about my predecessors helps me gain perspective. One of my "perspective-giving" images is that of Samuel Simon Schmucker trudging back up the hill to Seminary Ridge in the aftermath of the great Civil War battle fought here on our campus. Old Dorm was filled to overflowing with anguished dying soldiers. The carcasses of fallen horses and soldiers in shallow graves were strewn in every quarter. In those hot and humid summer nights, surely old Sam had to keep his windows open and fall asleep to the stench of decaying human and animal flesh. When I think I've been having a hard time, I remind myself of Schmucker's post-battle bouts of depression and conclude, "I've never had that bad a day!"

In our personal and collective taking the long view, more important than looking backward is facing the future. As a Seminary community, we continue doing so through the work of our Long Range Planning Committee, in faculty and staff discussions, and under the ultimate leadership of the Seminary's chief stewards, the members of the Board of Directors. While we've been through two comprehensive planning processes over the past half-dozen years since my arrival, we remain in search of a "branding" phrase or synopsis that captures in a few words our overall mission focus. At the risk of it's being banished before being given fair hearing as a possible "banner" for the next several years, I ask your feedback (to jspangler@ltsg.edu) as to whether or not the following captures both Gettysburg Seminary's rich history and expectant hope for the future: *Growing Leaders for Parish and Public Square*.

This issue of *Seminary Views* offers some glimpses into recent happenings and what's before us on the near horizon. There have been marvelous moments of late in which we received generous gifts and commitments toward our long-term visions. Pr. Vic Myers \$1.25 Million "pledge" is an incredible and inspiring stewardship story! We are excited as our faculty grows in new directions with the addition of Dr. Kristin Johnston Largen in the systematic theology field. An expanded joint venture with long-term partner, the Adams County Historical Society, holds promise of at least realizing the long-held dream of rehabilitating Old Dorm and putting ourselves much more "on the map" for Gettysburg's many visitors.

I hope you'll join us in sharing your hopes, dreams, concerns and conclusions as to where this school of the Church should be headed in the days to come. And I wish you well in your own place of service as you take the long view even as the demands of day-to-day ministry can never be set aside.

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The above piece is a sample of a newsletter article intended to update a seminary constituency on the state of planning, in which the author also seeks reader feedback regarding a possible communication "centerpiece."