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Waterloo Lutheran Seminary at 101 Years of Age Deeply Rooted - Stretching Upward and Outward

Marge Watters Knebel

Chair of the Board of Governors

Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Waterloo Lutheran Seminary is deeply rooted. During the 2011-2012 academic year we celebrated those roots to the full. With lectures, a drama, photo and art exhibits, musical celebrations, a trip to Wittenberg, a new plaque, an historic joint meeting of the governing boards of WLS and Wilfrid Laurier University, parties and more, we recounted our history and honoured our forebears. It was a season of celebration, and now we turn to a season of anticipation.

To anticipate is to “regard as probable” according to the Oxford dictionary. It implies an awareness of the future that prompts current action. Anticipation or hopeful expectation is fundamental for us, the disciples of Jesus Christ, because we believe that God is continually working out God’s purposes in and through all of creation. Because we are God’s children, we are free to act with a kind of blessed abandon, taking risks and embarking on ventures with uncertain destinations. This does not mean that we are to be reckless or imprudent, but rather, bold.

With feet firmly anchored in 100 years of academic endeavour steeped in the Christian faith, we are stretching upward and outward toward “Being a Public Seminary.” In 2005 the Board of Governors adopted a strategic initiative by that name. Many of the Seminary’s plans and programs since then have brought that vision to life. While we have continued to train Lutherans for the ministry of word and sacrament in Lutheran congregations, we have also focused our energies on becoming a public theological centre for leadership formation, open dialogue and service to others. As Dr. David Pfrimmer wrote in the strategy document, “It is our theological task to understand what the Charter Story of God in Jesus Christ contributes to our national and global stories that are being rewritten [in our time].”

In the fall of 2012, as we begin our 101st academic year, we stand at the threshold of opportunity and challenge. Our mission plan includes four pillars: academic, worship, residential and pastoral counselling. The academic plan will see the launch of an exciting new undergraduate program, with a small group of high school graduates embarking on a faith-based, intellectual journey in *Christian Studies and Global Citizenship*. Our graduate program offerings have been refreshed and a DMin in Pastoral Leadership is now available as well as a DMin in Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy. At the Masters level we are developing new contextual experiences for MDiv students to better equip them for leadership in the church of tomorrow.

The worship pillar will have us singing along with *Inshallah*, our global song choir that now boasts almost 100 members. It will also call for the development of a regular worshipping community that provides unique experiences for people from diverse traditions at the University and the community. We would like to continue experimenting

with forms of music and worship that will provide meaning to people participating in this new model for Christian community.

The residential plan envisions some of our undergraduate students forming a “Living Learning Community,” using Wilfrid Laurier University’s well-established, successful model. It also includes our on-going exploration of the development of the Seminary’s property with plans to build a residence and a new worship/arts centre.

Finally, the pastoral counselling pillar will see the opening of a counselling centre that will serve as a teaching facility for students in the *Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy* program, and at the same time, provide services to University students and members of the community. Our conversations with the University’s providers of mental health services tell us that the need for counselling services far exceeds their capacity to respond; and we believe that we are uniquely poised to live out our mission by being of service in this way.

In 2005, the vision of “Being a Public Seminary” was planted in the fertile soil of deep faith, academic excellence and forward-looking programs. In 2012 at 101 years of age, we have been living the reality of that vision as we have embraced and supported many different “publics.” To be sure, there have been challenges at every turn, but with our roots firmly anchored in Christ’s love we are ready to stretch upward and outward in faith and service to our Church, the community and the world.