**Spring 2024 Report to the University of Dubuque Board of Trustees**

**Beth McCaw, Vice President, and Dean of the Seminary**

**Evaluating Our Mission**

Beginning with my appointment in January 2024, the seminary faculty and staff have been engaged in a season of “curiosity and recollection” as we review the data and fruit related to seminary programs, and the initiatives underway related to three major Lilly Endowment grants. Faculty have traced meaningful connections between programs and the UD and UDTS missions. Points of strength include a commitment to holistic formation and growth, with graduate feedback and data demonstrating comparative strength in spiritual formation and longevity in ministry. Our exercise of hospitality and love in community is distinctive among seminaries in that it is built across face-to-face and virtual platforms with students from diverse walks of life and locations. We heard in recent focus groups that we have a distinguishing combination of rigorous learning that “meets students where they are,” while preparing them to serve quite practically in innovative ways in a changing church landscape.

With these in mind we are refreshing the articulation of our mission and story in writing the self-study for accreditation.In November we will host our ten-year reaccreditation review from the Association of Theological Schools, our institutional accreditor for all degree programs except for the 30 credit Master of Arts in Ministry, which is accredited through the Higher Learning Commission. As trustees, you will be engaged in the ATS site visit. More information will be provided at the beginning of the fall in preparation. We anticipate that the self-study and accreditation exercise will inform a refresh of our curriculum in 2025 as we prepare the next chapter of programming, building further upon the 2014 *New Day Dawning* vision*.*  At this juncture the UDTS Council of Advisors – which serves both the seminary and the Board in work with the seminary - devoted their spring 2024 meeting to focused consideration of the seminary mission and programs. Rev. Shelli Latham reports for the Council:

*The UDTS Council of Advisors gathered for our spring meeting on March 19, 2024. This virtual meeting provided opportunities to explore emerging opportunities at UDTS, to listen to Seminary stakeholders (including students, alums, faculty, staff, and church/denominational leaders), and to take stock of the overarching needs of Christian ministries and their leaders. Our group was excited about the curriculum refresh and grateful to UDTS for meeting church leaders (from the inquisitive lay leader taking a first certificate course through doctoral students) where they are. Common threads which emerged across conversations include an appreciation of UDTS’s scaffolded degree and certificate offerings (which grow with students’ emerging sense of vocation), gratitude for faculty willing to learn and teach beyond the seminary’s walls, and a desire for UDTS to continue to expand upon their practical ministry-instruction.  The Council feels privileged to provide guidance to the seminary, and encouragement to the board and new constituents regarding the Seminary’s mission and programs. Many of the Council are supporting the self-study efforts, and all of us look forward to building upon this meeting’s fruitful conversation as we engage in 2025 curriculum-revision conversations.*

An overview of the current seminary programs follows. Noteworthy in the programs and in the data are the trends of significantly more stable enrollment than our sister PCUSA seminaries, a dramatic increase in enrollment in our completely refreshed certificate offerings - which become a place from which to serve the church in subsequent offerings, and remarkably steady enrollment in our M.Div. compared to most seminaries in the country. These trends make us curious to understand well – and support – the particular gifts we have to offer in the theological education landscape.

**Overview of University of Dubuque Theological Seminary Programs and Plans, 2024**

**The Congregational Equipping Program** *Nine 8 week Certificate Classes 124 students*

With feedback from focus groups and guidance from CapEd, in 2024 UDTS has completely overhauled our online “lay education” programs for any and all church leaders. The program has been renamed “Congregational Equipping” as we heard of interest by those who may not desire to take the full set and become commissioned lay pastors, but want to grow and serve in select ways benefitting churches suffering from a shortage of those trained in ministry. This is part of the UDTS commitment to *meet you where you are.* Lilly funds from the “Being There” grant have enabled us to bring our best and core faculty into the creation of the content for these classes. They are structured so that they optionally may be adapted to run as co-branded and co-taught with regional judicatories which want to put their own imprint on the training of local cohorts, but do not have the bandwidth to create and run their own programs. The second course, launched mid March 2024, exceeded the usual enrollment cap with 24 participants. Initial feedback has been strong, and already we are receiving inquiries from other judicatories. There will be an ongoing need to continue to invest in and improve our technology and communications to be cutting edge for this program and the online portions of our degree offerings.

**The Master’s Programs**

**Master of Arts in Ministry** *30 Credits Online 13 students*

Responding to changing student needs, the newly designed MA in Ministry (MAM) is a 100% online 30-credit degree preparing graduates to be pastoral leaders in local, regional, and missional contexts. It is the only fully online 30 credit Master’s degree available through Presbyterian seminaries. The degree is especially geared to the increasing numbers of students pursuing non-traditional pathways to ordination; licensure or commissioning for lay ministry; or bi-vocational lay leaders desiring to deepen their Christian ministerial and theological training.

Many students in the MAM are pursuing commissioning as lay leaders in the PCUSA. The degree offers students a way to complete their required courses for commissioning as well as earn a Masters. Similarly, an ecumenical partnership with Episcopal Bishop Kemper School (BKSM) for Ministry provides graduate credit for denominational-specific courses required for Episcopal students seeking ordination. This partnership offers a clear on-ramp for their students who would like to earn an MA or MDiv, while doing their denominational training through BKSM, and provides Episcopal students at UDTS a way to satisfy their requirements integrated with their Masters. As more denominations move toward alternative pathways to ordination, the MA in Ministry is strategically positioned to meet this need by offering a shorter timeline to graduation and a fully online education paired with the signature UDTS commitment to preparing pastoral and ministerial leaders for the Church and the world.

**The Master of Arts in Reformed Theology** *36 credits, hybrid 6 students*

The Master of Arts in Reformed Theology is a new degree which utilizes a partnership with Theology Matters to serve those desiring deep theological study in the Reformed tradition. The launch of the degree has been supported through a Pathways to Tomorrow Grant from the Lilly. This degree in offered cooperation with a parachurch organization with a wide constituency that contributes to our laddering of degrees. This will expand our constituency into various Presbyterian denominations beyond the PCUSA. The inaugural class launched in August 2023 with six students.

**The Master of Arts in Mission & Discipleship** *40 credits, online and/or in person 2 students*

This degree is a mid-range credit offering that can be completed online and/or in person, is flexible in content, and encouraged the missionally innovative and contextually aware goals represented in New Day Dawning. The seminary is exploring ways that this degree might be used to serve the burgeoning portion of ATS enrollment interested in MA degrees rather than the traditional MDiv. We are also exploring how it may be adapted for non-traditional candidates for ordination who have other supplemental education or training.

**The Master of Divinity** *75 credits, online and/or in person 10 residential, 40 distance students*

Despite 2023 being the first year in which Association of Theological School enrollment in MA degrees exceeded the M.Div., UDTS maintains strong M.Div. engagement. Among sister PCUSA schools it seems that a higher percentage of our graduates continue to have interest in ministry in congregational and other grassroots ministry. Exploration is underway on how to grow the residential/commuter section of this program, develop new types of graduate assistance positions, increase a draw from the undergraduate theology department embedded in the seminary, and/or enhance a unique and intimate tutorial experience in our face-to-face offerings held on Mondays. We also are seeing some of the students from the Missio Madison and Madison Learning Community initiatives, directed by Dr. Christopher James and funded through Lilly Endowment grants, take increasing credits toward credit-bearing certificates or full M.Div. enrollment.

**The Doctor of Ministry** *3 years in seminars, 1-3 years in project phase 53 students*

The DMin program consists of three years in seminar, including one week per year in residence followed by a captstone project – either a ministry focus paper or a thesis. All successful projects aspire to deliver some measure of congregational or contextual revitalization and must be of publishable quality. As of January 1 2024, the Doctor of Ministry program had more students (56) enrolled in all phases of the program, i.e., both in seminar and project phase) than any other degree program at the seminary. This, despite the fact that we launched one new cohort this year (with 9 students), not multiple cohorts, as we had hoped to do and as we expect is still possible in future in light of demand. Our current cohorts in seminar phase are being led by:Dr. Susan Forshey and Father Kevin Goodrich (started in 2024); Dr. Richard Shaffer and Dr. Sarah Dingman (started in 2023); Dr. Annette Huizenga and Dr. David Congdon (started in 2022). At present our 2025 offering is being planned by Dr. Bradley Longfield and Dr. James D. Gunn, both of UD/UDTS.

We are planning additional cohorts at diverse locations to meet a variety of constituencies, including cohorts based in the Madison (and possibly Lincoln, NE) learning communities; one embedded at Synod School in Storm Lake, IA; at least two more offerings of the innovative Clergy Coaching model being developed by Dr. Elmer Colyer with funds from the Lilly “Being There” grant; multiple cohorts in Reformed theology (e.g., in Hilton Head, SC). A challenge has been the dearth of scholarship funds for D.Min. students, and stipends for D.Min. adjunct co-instructors which are modest after factoring in expenses.

It is a great privilege to continue to serve in fresh ways at the University of Dubuque and in the seminary. Thank you for the trust granted for me to take up this ministry as dean, and for your consideration and support in our call to serve Christ’s church and God’s beloved world in needed and creative ways.

**The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary Mission Statement**

***We are a Christian seminary dedicated to forming God’s people***

***for servant leadership in ministry and mission:***

***• Gathering in gratitude and faithfulness, to be reformed according to the Word of God.***

***• Growing in the Church’s biblical faith in the Triune God.***

***• Excelling in theological education and scholarship.***

***• Living as faithful stewards of God’s gifts.***

***• Engaging the changing needs of the church and world*.**