Psalm 46 reminds us that “God is our strength, a very present help in trouble. We will not fear, though the earth be moved.” Since the beginning of the pandemic, it seems as if the ground moves under our feet every day. The seminary has adapted quickly to this new reality, using our pre-existing technology that used to join real classrooms in Philadelphia and Gettysburg to a now-totally virtual learning environment. Also, we encounter the risen Christ together as a community through our zoom worship services, a blessing that has truly unified our students, staff, and faculty across the miles.

President Guy Erwin arrived in last August to begin a new chapter in the seminary’s story, introducing a fresh perspective on the needs of the church during such a time as this. Along with Dean Sebastian and the faculty, he welcomed 85 new members to the ULS student body. In January, we welcomed an additional 39 new students. Our overall enrollment is strong: 360 students, including 177 in the Master of Divinity Program (Word and Sacrament), 19 Master of Arts in Ministerial Leadership (Word and Service), and 82 Doctor of Ministry Candidates. Other students are enrolled in the MA, MAPL, STM, and PhD programs. Currently, 56 of our students are concluding their internships. Seventy-five students received diplomas this Spring, enabling them to continue servant leadership in the church. We also celebrate the gifts and service of non-degree students including 24 Affiliates and 33 Certificate course enrollees (CTS, TEEM, CCFF, UTI, and Anglican Studies). We welcomed the regional Bishops to a virtual visit this past February where they met with members of the seminary community and spend time in worship and prayer. We will hopefully return to in-person learning in this coming fall, with events featuring convocation, colloquy, and Dr. Erwin’s inauguration (go to www.uls.edu for more information).

We strive to be a community that celebrates God’s diverse Creation, with intentional focus on inclusivity and equity for all. Last Fall, we created the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in keeping with a Board of Trustees mandate. Our own Brother Ed Henry was promoted to become VP in this new office.

We are grateful to the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, our partner congregations, alumni, individual donors, and synodical support. Thanks to all of our donors, we continue to offer up to full tuition for our degree-seeking students with plans to prayerfully provide in decades to come. As a higher educational institution, we were able to receive federal PPP loans/grants which have helped to sustain us despite the economic hardships in our midst. We strive to be faithful stewards of our resources, looking to guidance from the Board of Trustees and the Endowment Board to help with sound fiscal and resource advice. We welcomed Buff Carlson, the Chief Financial Officer, who began working at the seminary in February of 2020, a few days before the pandemic upended our patterns and routines. He continues to work with Advancement team to forge a sustainable financial strategy for faithful ministry to our students now and in the future. In March, we thanked the Rev. Dr. Zimmann for her years of faithful leadership as she departed for a new position as VP of Advancement at Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

We are thankful for the ELCA synods of Regions 7 & 8 for their faithful accompaniment during these times. Though the earth is always moving, we will not fear, because our partners continue to remind us that God is present amid the challenges we face as we equip the saints for the work of ministry. May God bless you in this moment and strengthen you in the days to come as we continue to encounter Christ when and where we least expect him, but always where he is most-needed.

Rev. Dr. Martin Otto-Zimmann, Director of Church Relations