



Report from the Dean of North Park Theological Seminary

As we have emerged from the challenges of the pandemic, our community has moved beyond surviving to thriving. Throughout the pandemic we continued to adapt and adjust as we worked to meet the needs of our students, and we have emerged in a position to better serve them where they are, from our campus in Chicago, online, at one of our locations inside Illinois prisons, or at one of our regional sites. We invite you to join with us in celebrating the good work God is doing through the seminary and continue to hold the seminary in prayer as we navigate the ever-changing landscape of higher theological education. As the only seminary of the Evangelical Covenant Church, we are grateful for the opportunity to form women and men for ministry and witness the many ways God continues to be at work in and through North Park Theological Seminary!

ENROLLMENT AND EXPANSION

NPTS continues to thrive and innovate, bringing theological education to students in new ways while maintaining our solid theological foundation that has guided the school for more than 130 years. We are meeting the ever-changing needs of our students through innovation in our course schedules and delivery methods, which better meet the needs of students today. The fall of 2023 saw a decrease in the overall number of new students enrolling in seminary compared to the fall of 2022; this slight downward trend follows a national trend as reported by the Association of Theological Schools.

DISTANCE COHORTS

Students in our distance cohort programs, Ignite in the Pacific Southwest Conference and Equip in the Midwest Conference, continue to progress. The third cohort of Ignite graduated this past May while two additional cohorts of Ignite students move through their program and two cohorts of Equip also continue. Conversations are underway with superintendents from all of the regional conferences, as well as representatives from Covenant Offices, to develop a plan to expand the distance cohort model beyond the Pacific Southwest and Midwest conferences, making this model of education accessible to

pastors from all conferences and greatly increasing the accessibility of a theological education to those serving in ministry across the Covenant. Our goal is to launch a new Covenant distance cohort in the fall of 2024.

SCHOOL OF RESTORATIVE ARTS

With a vision to bring theological education into the Illinois prison system, North Park Theological Seminary launched the School of Restorative Arts (SRA) inside Stateville Correctional Center in the fall of 2018. This innovative approach to prison education not only gave incarcerated men the opportunity to study theology, but it also bridged the gap to outside students and created the opportunity for outside students to study alongside their inside classmates, inside a maximum-security prison. The SRA program is giving hope to students to better themselves and bless others. In 2021, the SRA expanded to Logan Correctional Center, a medium-security prison for women. The SRA program is based on a cohort model with students accepted into a four-year master of arts in Christian ministry with restorative arts degree program. The inaugural cohort at Logan Correctional Center includes 18 dedicated students who are on track to graduate in 2025! We celebrate the significant achievements of each of our students as they progress toward graduation. The SRA provides a truly unique opportunity for outside and inside students to study, learn, and encourage each other side-by-side in the same classroom—the only program in the country where this is possible.

COVENANT ORIENTATION

In the fall of 2020, in partnership with Develop Leaders/Ordered Ministry, NPTS took on a greater role in the administration of the Covenant Orientation program. Develop Leaders/Ordered Ministry continues to provide oversight to the program content and requirements, with NPTS providing administrative support. The partnership is going well, and by streamlining services, the cost to pastors enrolled in the program has been reduced by nearly half! Through this partnership, Covenant Orientation classes continue to be offered throughout the year in person, online, and in hybrid formats, which allow pastors several options to take classes in ways that best fit their learning style and meet their needs.

GRADUATION

This May we celebrate with 55 total graduates as they complete their studies and receive their

diploma! Dr. Willie Peterson brought the commencement address, and we celebrated awarding Rev. Mark Novak an honorary doctor of theology degree, recognizing his decades of service to the Covenant Church and beyond. The second cohort of students at Stateville Correctional Center also graduates in May with 24 graduates. Our Stateville graduates were honored to have Rev. Dominique Gilliard give the commencement address, as well as an address from Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton. We are profoundly grateful for these students who have faithfully answered God's call on their life to enter ministry and for the blessings they have been to NPTS; we know they will continue to bless others through their ministries going forward.

FACULTY AND STAFF UPDATES

We celebrate the close of the 2022-2023 academic year, marking the first year with Dr. Dennis R. Edwards as dean of the seminary and vice president for church relations. Dr. Edwards joined the faculty of North Park Theological Seminary in the fall of 2019 as professor of New Testament and was called to serve as dean in the fall of 2022. Dr. Edwards has built upon the foundation of the seminary and continues to move the seminary forward. Through his strong leadership, we continue to make innovative changes establishing NPTS as a healthy, vibrant institution well positioned to form students for ministry while creating an inclusive environment that allows students, faculty, and staff to thrive. North Park is fortunate to have a leader with the skill, experience, and dedication of Dr. Edwards for this time in the life of the seminary.

Following a national search, the search committee chaired by Dr. Hauna Ondrey, interim dean of seminary faculty, unanimously voted to call Michelle Dodson to the Milton B. Engebretson chair in evangelism and justice faculty position. This position dates back to a 1986 partnership between the Covenant Board of Church Growth and Evangelism and North Park Theological Seminary. Renamed the chair of evangelism and justice in 2022, this role will serve as a member of the NPTS faculty and director of the master of arts in restorative justice ministry offered at Stateville and Logan Correctional Centers. On the basis of her pastoral wisdom, academic acumen, and proven dedication to liberative carceral pedagogy, Dodson is being enthusiastically recommended for this role.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis Edwards

Dean of the North Park Theological Seminary and VP of Church Relations