

The In Touch

Volume 61, Issue 12

Our Mission: To Seek, Know, Love and Serve Christ in all Persons and in all Creation

Ramblings from the Archdeacon…..

Northwestern ECMN Mission Area Happenings

The White Earth School of Theology

Archdeacon Reverend Leland H. Grim

Welcome to **Advent,** our liturgical season of spiritual preparation and anticipation at the beginning of the Christian church year. This is when we expectantly and hopefully await the coming of Christ into the hearts and daily lives of our HTEC believers through grace, prayer, and service.

Our Episcopal Indigenous sisters and brothers, at the White Earth Indian Reservation, the largest Minnesota, reservation that encompasses over 1,300 square miles in the northwestern part of ECMN's Mission Area of the state, are also expectantly awaiting the coming of Christ into the hearts and daily lives of their believers through the development of a new White Earth School of Theology (Hereafter WEST).

Indigenous theological education, to be realistic and relevant, must be founded on the experience, thought-world, and identity of Indigenous wisdom keepers and people. If God is incarnate to Indigenous people, theological education must be no less than incarnate in a Native world. Indigenous Christians believe that Jesus is good medicine. He was and continues to be recognized as one who speaks the words of life and who calls us to demonstrate radical love (Hoklotubbe and Zacharias 2025). The WEST is being developed on this belief and hope.

The days of theological education that produced "gentlemen theologians" in the Western/English colonization mode are long gone. It is a challenge to see if WEST can be founded on the experience, thought-world, and identity of Native people, where their theological education can prepare Indigenous public leaders who can live and love as fully as God has intended.

There has been a growing disconnect between theological curricula and contemporary realities, leaving a gap in contextual responsiveness and practical engagement. Some theological education models are shifting from traditional academic silos (biblical, historical, practical) toward holistic, context-driven approaches emphasizing spiritual formation, missional engagement, and practical skill development

There is a need for flexibility with depth, allowing the Gospel to meet learners in their own context. This approach demonstrates that theological education can maintain its academic rigor while also fostering spiritual life. It helps form leaders who not only understand the church's doctrine and confessions but also know how to listen, accompany, build bridges of hope and learning in new ways: by joining the minds, hearts, and hands of those called to serve because it is profoundly transformative.

In the 21st century, global mission movements prompted the creation of Indigenous theological institutions forming leaders who serve with wisdom, compassion, and joy in the Gospel of Christ. Those institutions sought to contextualize theological education to their local cultures, moving beyond Western/Euro-centered colonial models to develop theological reflection rooted in the experiences of local communities so their churches could move forward with faithfulness, humility, and hope.

A holistic approach to training invites students to grow in three dimensions.

- **Knowledge**: based on scripture, theology, and reflection. A spiritual formation nurturing personal spiritual growth and character alongside academic knowledge.
- **Do:** expressed in leadership, preaching, and service. Action-reflection is integrating classroom learning with ministry experience.
- **Being:** Shaped by emotional intelligence, humility, and spiritual discernment. Mentorship is the crucial role of mentors in shaping the next generation of leaders.

This holistic approach is based on the conviction that ministry is not just something we do, but something we become. The goal is not to produce experts, but faithful servants, capable of proclaiming the Gospel with authenticity and love. The Holistic/Integrated Model Cultivates: head (cognitive), heart (affective), and hands (skill) simultaneously, often through spiritual formation, bible study, and practical application.

Theological education, as both a spiritual and intellectual enterprise, serves as the backbone of Christian ministry and mission in the contemporary world. In today's global and pluralistic context, theological education faces both significant challenges and unprecedented opportunities. The rise of secularism, moral relativism, religious extremism, and socio-political instability calls for a renewed emphasis on robust theological formation (Vanhoozer, 2008).

As the world continues to change, ECMN and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Hereafter ELCA) remain committed to the pursuit of sound theology that is both intellectually rigorous and spiritually formative. It not only preserves the doctrinal integrity of our Churches, but also fosters critical thinking, compassion, and competence among ecumenical Christian leaders and communities. The growing complexity of global cultures and technologies further underscores the need for theological education that is both contextually relevant and globally informed so we get to know God more deeply, interpret God’s Word faithfully, and serve to transform God’s people effectively.

As ECMN and ELCA face a variety of challenges, including secularism, global crises, social justice issues, and religious pluralism, the need for well-equipped, theologically sound leaders is more important than ever. In a world of shifting ideologies and competing worldviews, ECMN and ELCA must have leaders who understand and articulate the Gospel, with clarity, integrity, and conviction.

Theological education equips students to engage critically with social issues such as poverty, inequality, racism, and environmental stewardship. As Palmer (2007) points out, good education transforms not just the intellect but the heart, preparing individuals for ministry that is both competent and compassionate. In a world where individualism, consumerism, and superficial spirituality are rampant, theological education provides a counterbalance, cultivating leaders who are deeply rooted in their faith and capable of leading with humility and love.

Christians are called to engage in interfaith dialogue and work alongside people of other faiths for the common good. Theological education equips students with the skills necessary for respectful, informed dialogue with adherents of other religions.

One of Christianity's foremost challenges is the increasing secularization of society, which has led to declining interest in formal theological education. Theological education must therefore rearticulate its significance by addressing pressing contemporary issues such as social justice, environmental stewardship, and interfaith relations, thus demonstrating its continued relevance in a changing world. Theological education must be contextualized to be meaningful, engaging local languages, symbols, and socio-political realities. Without such contextualization, theological education risks alienating students and producing leaders disconnected from the communities they are meant to serve.

Furthermore, there is a widening gap between academic theology and practical ministry. This disconnect undermines the purpose of theological education, which is to form holistic, spiritually mature, and mission-oriented leaders. There is the challenge of faculty development and generational transitions. Many institutions face a shortage of qualified, contextually informed theological educators. Older faculty are retiring, and younger scholars often migrate to other fields or regions with better opportunities. This creates a vacuum in leadership and continuity. Investment in mentoring, scholarship funding, and faculty training is urgently needed to sustain the future of theological education.

People at White Earth are calling for a contextual approach to theological education that speaks meaningfully to their people's lived experiences, cultural identities, and local challenges. Contextual theological education affirms that theology is not done in a vacuum. Instead, theology must be rooted in the concrete realities of the people it serves. The contexts of culture, socio-political structures, gender, economic disparities, and inter-religious dynamics shape how individuals understand and live out their faith.

To become effective, WEST must imagine its mission in light of global realities, embrace contextualization, adopt innovative pedagogy, and foster practical ministry formation. According to Bevans (2002**),** theology must be "done" within the context of human experience, where revelation is interpreted through the lenses of culture and history. Therefore WEST must have an imagined theological curriculum that moves beyond a Western-Eurocentric framework to embrace local Indigenous expressions of faith.

Traditional models of theological training--often Western, academic, and abstract--have struggled to address the contextual needs of diverse Indigenous communities.

Indigenous theological reflection should often begin with communal narratives, oral traditions, and embodied practices. WEST education should incorporate Indigenous theory of knowledge, traditional symbols, story-telling, and the role of community elders in moral formation (Ukpong, 1994). This not only validates local culture but enriches national theological discourse.

Moreover, reimagining theological education requires a shift from a purely academic emphasis to a holistic model that integrates spiritual formation, practical ministry, and social engagement.

WEST must provide spaces where students are spiritually nurtured, mentored in leadership, and equipped to address real-life issues such as poverty, injustice, climate change, and religious pluralism.

As Palmer (2007) emphasizes, good education is not just about the transmission of information but about the transformation of the person—intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Pedagogically, contextual theological education calls for participatory and dialogical methods. Practical components such as internships, fieldwork, mentoring, and spiritual retreats are essential to shaping well-rounded leaders who can serve effectively in churches, communities, and the public square (Foster et al., 2006). Teachers are not mere dispensers of knowledge but facilitators of learning communities.

Students are encouraged to bring their experiences, questions, and insights into the learning process. Case studies, local research, contextual Bible study, and community immersion projects can provide dynamic learning experiences that connect theology with daily life. Those approaches nurture critical thinking and pastoral imagination, preparing students for relevant ministry.

The future of contextual theological education also lies in partnership and collaboration. WEST will be successful because of the partnership that our ECMN Bishop Craig Loya and ELCA Northwestern Minnesota Synod Bishop Bill Tesch

leaders have developed to engage in mutual learning and exchange. Resources being shared now must be sustained and increased in the future. Contextual theological education must resist intellectual colonization and promote an ecumenical spirit of dialogue, respect, and mutual enrichment (Tiénou, 1990).

Digital theological education, when adapted contextually, can break geographical barriers and reach marginalized communities. However, it must also account for technological disparities and be tailored to different levels of access and digital literacy.

Reimagining theological education through a contextual lens is not optional; it is imperative for ECMN and ELCA parishes and missions in our northern Minnesota world. Such an approach affirms the importance of local realities, challenges intellectual domination, and bridges the gap between faith and life. It prepares leaders who are theologically sound, culturally rooted, spiritually mature, and socially engaged. As we look to the future, theological educators and institutions must embrace this reimagined vision—one that honors the Gospel and the diverse contexts in which it takes root.

Indigenous people in both western and indigenous cultures have embraced and respected Jesus throughout generations. Promoting and developing WEST is a positive way for the White Earth people to further embrace and respect Jesus and enlighten their community.

The initial students and founders of the developing WEST program can take pride that they are the pioneers setting the stage for many other students in future generations. They will be rightfully delighted with the tradition they set for WEST and the White Earth community.

Respectfully submitted, November 12, 2026

Archdeacon Leland H. Grim

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12/1~12/31

~ Brent Schlieff **~ Jim Davison**
~ Charlie Klatt **~ Alan Wright**
~ Alexander Kennedy **~ Sara Kennedy**
~ Scottie Kathryn Corrin **~ Ladd Corrin**



12/14 ~ Dixie Juel
12/30 ~ Mark Grim

Watch Holy Trinity Livestream On Facebook

Service bulletin is on our website: www.ifhtec.org
Sundays @ 10:00 am
Services can also be viewed on KCC-TV



2026 CHRISTMAS KIDS SHOP
Schedule

The Christmas Kids shop is open and ready with lots of great items to choose from. Children can
come and shop for free for Christmas gifts for their family while adults are enjoying a
Christmas goodie in the café



At Holy Trinity (820 4th St.), the church with the red doors.

Hours are: Thurs 12/3 4:00 - 6:00 PM
Sat. 12/5 10: AM - 2:00 PM
Thurs 12/10 4:00 - 6:00 PM
Sat 12/12 10: AM - 2:00 PM







An Advent Moment

For Prayer, Meditation, Reflection, Anticipation

The Church will be Open Thurs. Evenings 5:00-7:00pm <u>Dec. 3rd, 10th</u> & 5:00- 6:30 pm Dec 17th



Notice: We need volunteers - *Readers for Sunday's & Altar Guild Members*

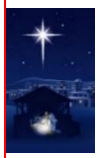
December '26 Sunday Service Lay Responsibilities

Dates	Celebrants	Acolytes	Lectors & Lessons	Greeters
6  Holy Eucharist 10:00 am **2nd Sunday of Advent**	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim	Lee Grim	Erik Strand	
13  Holy Eucharist 10:00 am **3rd Sunday of Advent**	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim	Lee Grim	Tricia Brennard	
20  Holy Eucharist 10:00 am **4th Sunday of Advent**	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim	Lee Grim	Jeanne Corrin	
24 Holy Eucharist 4:00 pm **Christmas Eve** 	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim	Lee Grim	Linda Vance	
27 Holy Eucharist 10:00 am **1st Sunday after Christmas**	Rev. Dr. Samantha Crossley Deacon: Lee Grim	Lee Grim	Molly Pavleck	



DECEMBER 2026



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5 Altar Guild
Holy Eucharist 10:00 a.m.				*Kids Christmas shop* *4:00 – 6:00 pm* Advent Moment 5-7 pm - Holy Trinity		Tricia *Kids Christmas shop* *10 – 2 pm*
6	7	8	9	10	11	12 Altar Guild
Holy Eucharist 10:00 a.m.				*Kids Christmas shop* *4:00 – 6:00 pm* Advent Moment 5-7 pm - Holy Trinity		Tricia *Kids Christmas shop* *10 – 2 pm*
13	14	15	16	17	18	19 Altar Guild
Holy Eucharist 10:00a.m.				Faith United Church Blue Christmas Service 7:00 PM Advent Moment 5-6:30 pm @ H T		Donna & Karen
20	21	22	23	24	25	26 Altar Guild
Holy Eucharist 10:00 a.m.	Newsletter Deadline (Lee)			 Christmas Eve Service 4:00 pm		Donna & Karen
27	28	29	30	31		
Holy Eucharist 10:00 am		Vestry 5:00??				
