

SYNODICAL REPORT - SPRING 2022

Office of the University Pastors

As we reflect on the past year, we do so with gratitude that COVID-19's impact appears to be lessening on the Wittenberg University campus and in our community. At the same time, we continue to keep those affected by the pandemic in our hearts and prayers.

Recognizing that in-person living and learning have always been the backbone of Wittenberg's residential, liberal arts educational experience, we again welcomed our students to campus in August 2021. In light of our high vaccination rate among students and employees, the low case load in our hometown of Springfield, Ohio, and current CDC guidance, Wittenberg became a mask-friendly University in March 2022, meaning that those who wish to wear masks and those who chose not to wear them should both feel supported in their decisions. Faculty still have the right to require masks in their respective classrooms, and event owners may request the same. Additionally, with the loosening of COVID-19 restrictions, we are excited to host the Class of 2022 graduation ceremony in our traditional outdoor venue, Commencement Hollow, on May 14.

In terms of other noteworthy Wittenberg initiatives and accomplishments, we celebrated record-setting success once again on March 11 with our annual virtual fundraising event, Commit to Witt. This year's theme was "1845 Minutes of Giving," and the effort produced a total of \$640,911 from 1,532 gifts. Our Having Light \$100-million comprehensive campaign is also proving successful with \$93 million in to date. As a reminder, the campaign looks to support all that defines us, especially the people, who inquire, create, inspire, and compete here; the place, where we come together as a community and welcome others to learn and grow; and the present, when the next generation of Wittenberg graduates learns to pass on its light.

This past year, Wittenberg also continued to make strides in its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The University believes in fostering an inclusive, equitable campus climate and culture where all members of our diverse residential community can thrive, and our values call us to remove the barriers that cause inequity and work toward ending hate, bigotry, violence, and injustice. To support this ongoing commitment, all divisions at Wittenberg have been looking within themselves to create and implement strategies and tactics designed to advance DEI on campus. In addition, we recently expanded the scope of our William A. McClain Center for Diversity with increased responsibilities for Corrine J. Carthell, now associate dean of students as well as McClain Center director, and Debbie Beausejour, associate director. Both have been instrumental in facilitating greater understanding, and in creating more diverse programming, and multicultural engagement opportunities.



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Wittenberg places student success at the forefront of our work, most notably in the newly implemented Connections Curriculum, which provides opportunities for students to gain a solid academic foundation in multiple disciplines and then connect their classroom knowledge with practical situations, testing new skills in the wider world. Students are applying concepts from their coursework to experiential learning opportunities such as civic engagement, internships, and research. These opportunities also connect students with future collaborators, potential employers, mentors, and the community.

This past spring break, in fact, more than four dozen students headed out as part of the new curriculum's first-ever "F.I.R.E." (Focused, Integrated, Reflective Experience) Week, which included such options as a home building trip to Georgia hosted by Weaver Chapel and the Susan B. Hirt Hagen Center, an in-depth look at start-ups in Seattle, middle school science project development, and several other experiential learning opportunities. In addition to this curricular innovation, Wittenberg is also engaging the higher education firm Credo for strategic planning and the implementation of best practices in student success. The campus-wide effort kicked off in late January and will lead to deeper student engagement and an even stronger campus environment.

Finally, this year finds us bidding farewell to Matevia Endowed University Pastors, the Rev. Rachel Tune and the Rev. Anders Tune. Following 23 years of dedicated service, the Tunes have decided to retire, reflecting on how "rewarding, challenging and meaningful" the calling to Wittenberg has been for them.

As they shared with our community: "It was a dream to be able to serve in ministry with college students....Whether taking students on trips that intersect faith, learning, and service; teaching in the classroom; being able to see students explore and hone their gifts and talents and discover their callings; walking alongside students and listening to their hopes, dreams, and struggles, even at the darkest times; being part of a vibrant learning community; and worshiping, praying, and learning together, this has been quite a journey. We have a deep commitment to ELCA higher education, and we have been honored to be a part of Wittenberg's emphases on vocation, service, creativity, global citizenship, student engagement, interfaith engagement, and academic excellence, and working with our colleagues in these areas." A retirement celebration is forthcoming.