

A Ministry of Theological Teaching and Scholarship at Saint Paul

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It has been my privilege to serve on the faculty at Saint Paul for 19 years. I understand this role as a calling. Through the church God has called me to serve in this role as teacher and theologian. My church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, recognizes my appointment to Saint Paul as a pastoral call; this allows me to remain in good standing on the clergy roster of the ELCA. I remain accountable to my church body by means of annual reports about my ministry of teaching.

I understand theology to be disciplined, critical reflection on the Christian faith. Theology is “faith seeking understanding.” This means that theology begins from faith and seeks for deeper understanding of the dynamics of faith. Faith lives as it is embodied in the practices of the faith from prayer and meditation to solidarity with those who are marginalized. Thus theology begins with faith and it seeks to serve the faith so that we can witness to our faith in ways that are faithful and effective, that are truly life-giving in a world where there is so much that is death-dealing.

Since faith and church (the gathering of believers) are inextricably linked together, theology also begins with and from the church and seeks to serve the church. All in the church are called to some form of leadership role, so all my teaching and work as a theologian aims to **educate** and form **leaders** who can then be more faithful and effective in their witness.

I understand Christian **discipleship** to be about trust in the love of God manifest in a distinctive and ultimate way in Jesus of Nazareth and about seeking to follow in Jesus’ way. Like Jesus we are to “bring good news to the poor. . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4: 18-19) We do this in response to the love and mercy God has shown us. My work as teacher and theologian aims to help folk understand all this more deeply so that together we can **renew the church and transform the world**. In terms of **transforming the world** there is a particular call to be with and for those who are poor and oppressed.

My research has focused on Friedrich Schleiermacher, 19th century Protestant theologian. My two books (one already published, one forthcoming) focus on his Christian Ethics which I characterize as an “ecclesial ethics of piety and a transformative theology of culture.” His ethics, then, attend to how we are to be church and together work to transform the world. My scholarship, like my teaching, is centered on questions about **renewal of the church** and **transformative social witness** and it prompts readers to think and act in these two directions.

More generally, my work in historical theology seeks to introduce students to forebears in the faith, to witnesses who have gone before us. I know that in seeking to understand the lives and faith of others on their own terms—how and why they made their witness—we grow in depth of understanding—we are helped to name and understand more deeply where and why we stand where we do. We can also gain courage to make our own witness by learning that those who went before faced challenges and uncertainty like we do.

My work in contextual education seeks to help students toward deeper appreciation of the importance of context and cultural competence in ministry. If we are to **renew the church and transform the world** we need to know how to listen and understand people where they are at. We need to “pitch tent with the indigenous practices of people” (Tex Sample’s understanding of incarnational ministry). Above all, contextual ed seeks to help students become reflective practitioners of ministry who know how to be with people in genuine ways. Then, together, they can discover how to live out their **discipleship**.