

## Introduction

# Lutheran Journals for Church and Academy: Learning from the Past, Envisioning the Future

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At the age of 43 with the start of the year 2016 we begin an exciting new chapter in the life of *Currents in Theology and Mission*. In order to continue to deliver high quality articles, book reviews, and preaching helps to our faithful readers, the editorial team is forging ahead with long-announced plans to launch *Currents* as an entirely online and open-access journal, following the precedent set by several other journals, which have already negotiated the transition from print to online publishing.

There are numerous advantages to delivering *Currents* in this new format:

- The journal will now be *accessible to a world of readers* who never before have been able to take advantage of its rich content.
- The journal will be *searchable in an unprecedented way*, in order to locate themes of particular interest to particular readers.
- The journal will *continue to be indexed* by the major curators of periodical literature, [ATLA](#) and [Ebscohost](#).
- There will be opportunity for *new forms of interactivity* between editors, authors, and readers, although this is a possibility that will only see its potential unfold over time.
- The journal will be *available to international libraries*, to which we have in the past provided complimentary subscriptions but which have become increasingly difficult for us to deliver, given the high cost of mailing.
- There will be a *contribution to ecological well-being* by reducing, even in small measure, the number of trees that are felled to make paper.
- The journal will become available to readers *entirely for free* (although we will continue to welcome financial support from friends of *Currents*, insofar as there remain significant costs even in the online format).
- Finally and above all, the online format makes *Currents financially viable by reducing the enormous costs associated with publishing a print journal*, costs that simply have become unsustainable.

So we make this urgent request to you, the reader. Bookmark the address of *Currents in Theology and Mission* as a favorite in your browser: <http://www.currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents>. Please do so right now, without delay!

We will deliver the content of *Currents* four times per year:

January, April, July, and October. One of the most popular features of the journal, “Preaching Helps,” with its interpretive guidance for preachers, will appear well in advance of the designated weeks in the lectionary. The October issue each year will be devoted to articles assisting readers to think carefully about the lectionary assigned for the coming church year. Timely articles relevant to church, theology, and mission will continue to be published in thoughtful fashion. Book reviews will assist readers to remain abreast of valuable titles and their contents. A new feature, “*Currents Focus*,” will publish articles of particular interest to readers that go beyond the theme of any particular issue.

For this issue we invited the editors from several prominent Lutheran journals to address the topic: “Lutheran Journals for Church and Academy: Learning from the Past, Envisioning the Future.” We are grateful for the generosity and thoughtfulness of the authors contributing to our deliberation of this theme at the advent of a new era for *Currents*.

It is fitting that the first article for this new iteration of *Currents* is written by **Ralph W. Klein**, founder and editor of the journal from 1974–2009. Klein offers both a retrospective and prospective vision of *Currents* and its mission. After rehearsing the historical background of the journal in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, he next outlines what he tried to do with *Currents* during the thirty-five years he served as its editor. Klein concludes by making a number of suggestions for the new online version of the journal and wishes it a long and successful run. The editors express their deep appreciation to Ralph not only for this timely contribution but for his amazing dedication, creativity, and faithfulness in overseeing and producing the journal for thirty-five years!

**Kristin Johnston Largen**, editor of *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, reviews the history of *Dialog*, emphasizing the focus on diversity that is shaping the journal as it moves into the twenty-first century. Diversity is being emphasized in four particular areas: gender and ethnic diversity, theological diversity (including ecumenical theological voices), religious diversity, and disciplinary diversity (for example, engagement with the sciences, literature, and the arts). This is in continuity with the vision of previous editor Ted Peters, who sought to move the journal into rich theological conversations with a broad range of dialogue partners.

**Paul Rorem**, editor of *Lutheran Quarterly*, highlights how *LQ* continues a long tradition of scholarly essays and book reviews in Lutheran history and theology. Starting in 2016, it is adding full-text availability online as a journal published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

**Richard O. Johnson**, editor of *Forum Letter*, offers a perspective on the history and mission of *Lutheran Forum*. Rooted in efforts to accelerate the acculturation of the Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Forum* began in its present form in 1967 as an independent voice of critique and commentary on issues facing contemporary Lutheranism. Over nearly five decades, the journal and its companion, *Forum Letter*, have advocated a Lutheranism that is evangelical and catholic. *Lutheran Forum* presents a lively pan-Lutheran forum, offering responsible and respectful dialogue about matters theological, ethical, liturgical, and ecclesiastical.

**Tim Huffman**, longtime editor of *Trinity Seminary Review*, offers an insightful commentary on the present state of Lutheran publishing. All printed materials face financial challenges today, with theological journals particularly vulnerable. These challenges are magnified as denominations decline and sponsoring institutions struggle. At the same time a “Luther Renaissance” is producing a wealth of new resources, needing to be introduced and interpreted for ministry practitioners. Journals need to adapt, using online/digital publication and accelerated reviews, in order to meet the challenges while serving their readers.

**Carmelo Santos**, interim editor of the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, offers reflections on this online monthly journal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which focuses on issues of theological ethics from a purposefully broad perspective. Listening and engaging voices from the margins needs to be an intrinsic part of theological and ethical methodology. The *JLE* can be a privileged locus where listening to and engaging the margins can occur.

**Frederick J. Gaiser**, editor of *Word & World*, describes what it means for the journal to provide “Theology for Christian Min-

istry” as published by the faculty of Luther Seminary since 1980. Though based in a Lutheran institution and reflecting Lutheran theology, the journal is diverse in readership, authors, board, and staff. Addressing both word and world, it seeks an open conversation with the world in all its aspects. As theology for Christian ministry, it seeks to direct this conversation toward Christian pastors and students.

This issue introduces the new feature, “*Currents Focus*,” with a fascinating article by **Benjamin Durheim**, who applies insights from the Finnish school of Luther interpretation to the issue of communal social ethics. The author contends that Luther’s theology of Christ present in faith can be translated into the communal unification of Christ with the believing community. The article draws implications from this translation for communal action on behalf of social justice and transformation. Communal unification with Christ in faith provides a Lutheran theological warrant for action by the believing community on behalf of systemic social reformation toward justice.

Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linksy, the authors of *Leadership on the Line*, remind those who exercise leadership in changing times that “People do not fear change. They fear loss.” The editorial team of *Currents in Theology and Mission* has deliberated carefully the advantages of moving to a fully online, open-access journal over against our predilection for holding journals in our hands, using highlighters, and writing notes in the margins. For those readers who may be dubious about this change, we too experience loss of the familiarity and convenience of a journal that came straight to our mailboxes. For all the reasons noted above, we press on, trusting that by this time next year our loyal readers (together with many new ones!) will join us in celebrating a rich harvest from this investment for the long-term future of the journal.

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