



SPECIAL UPDATE

Integration and reimagination

Seeking to serve and thrive in a changed world

By Beverly Lapp, EdD, Vice President and Academic Dean

A week after AMBS made the transition to physical distancing, I attended a webinar for theological school leaders titled **Mustering Spirituality and Imagination in these Extraordinary Times**. We were encouraged by the three presenters to name the fear we all have at some level as we face COVID-19. **Willie Jennings**, PhD, of Yale Divinity School urged us not to sequester this fear but to use the classroom space to bring our content along as we help students hold together what this crisis is calling forth in us. **Nancy Lynne Westfield**, PhD, of the Wabash Center noted that in Western academia, many of us were de-formed in separating the mind from the spirit. **Amy Oden**, PhD, of Saint Paul School of Theology proposed that the pandemic is hastening the shift away from over-rationalization to more integration of content, skills and formation in theological education.

At AMBS we have been working at this integration by centering our degree

programs around three modes of learning: knowing, being and doing. With *knowing*, we invite students to immerse themselves in theological thinking and deep study of the Bible. With *being*, students nurture their spiritual and intercultural formation with practices that enable continuing encounters with Jesus and our fellow humans. With *doing*, students apply their learning to work for God's reconciling mission in the experiential components of the curriculum.

As we move through the crises facing the world today, we feel the urgency of integrating knowing, being and doing in new ways. How can we use the strengths of the AMBS curriculum in our degree programs and Lifelong Learning offerings to reimagine how to thrive and serve in a world that will never be the same after this pandemic? This reimaging is taking shape in our learning community; see p. 3 for examples of how students and faculty are adapting, making theological connections between a world in upheaval and our knowing, being and doing.



We each have the opportunity to revisit our commitments and assumptions as we plan for an uncertain future. At AMBS we value personal interactions and embodied experience, and we know there are emotional, mental and physical costs to extended separation. We've also learned — through our 20+ years of experience in offering distance learning — that students can achieve academic success and have profound learning experiences when studying online. We hope and plan to gather safely again on campus in August, but we will give **(continued on p. 2)**

Top: Yeshie Muleta, an MA in Christian Formation student from Ontario. **Right:** Beverly Lapp. **Credit:** Peter Ringenberg

OUR MISSION

AMBS serves the church as a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world.

Integration and reimagination (continued from p. 1)

ourselves fully to the educational and relational opportunities of our online course formats if the need for physical separation continues past the summer.

This text on AMBS's website (ambsedu/about) reinforced for me the relevance of what we study at AMBS to new and ongoing local, national and global realities: "As followers of Jesus Christ, we grow as leaders prepared to respond to needs in the world today

and tomorrow from a firm grounding in Anabaptist theology that is attuned to global perspectives and contexts — as leaders prepared to share the peace of Jesus Christ, witness to the reconciling power of the Spirit, restore our degraded environment, resolve conflicts, welcome displaced immigrants, nurture relationships of integrity and form communities of shalom."

My prayer is that we would embrace this calling during this extraordinary



time with more assurance than anxiety, more gratitude than despair, and more love than fear. •

Online Easter planning webinar grows out of course experience



The real-life challenges brought about by the pandemic are providing students with countless opportunities to apply learnings from their AMBS courses. One example is a Christian ritual course that sparked not only the creation of a conference workshop but also a webinar for the wider church on planning online worship services.

In 2017, a course on **Christian Ritual in Worship** taught by **Rebecca Slough**, PhD, brought together nine students in a room on campus and six students from a distance by videoconference. Slough, now Academic Dean Emerita and Professor Emerita of Worship and the Arts, initially offered to run separate course sections for each group, but the students at a distance "wouldn't have it," she recalled. "One said, 'This is our future, and we will all have to lead rituals through electronic means during our years of ministry leadership. Now is the time to learn.'"

Slough and her students did learn a lot together. Each student participated fully in the rituals in each class session, and each prepared and led two rituals.

"We made mistakes and had some frustrations with technology, but most importantly, we became imaginative and creative," she said. "The class began to shape how we could lead interactive rituals through a videoconference platform by thinking first from the perspective of the ritual participants."

Two years later, Slough and four of her students drew on their experiences to create a workshop, **Ritual and Distance: The Reaches of Community**, for the March 2020 joint conference of **Pastors and Leaders** (AMBS) and **Deep Faith** (Mennonite Church USA). In the workshop, which three of them led in person and two led via Zoom, they demonstrated what they had learned about creating experiences of real connection and meaningful interaction across geographical distances.

When social distancing practices began across the U.S. a week later, the workshop leaders began to adapt the content for a webinar to equip church leaders. The result, **Planning Easter and Good Friday worship: Fostering meaningful interactions while physically separate**, was hosted March 31

— the week before Holy Week — by the AMBS **Church Leadership Center**. The free live webinar drew 176 participants from Canada and the U.S., and the recording and associated resources at ambsedu/easter-planning had hundreds of views in April.

"I was feeling a little stressed trying to conceive of how to transfer our Good Friday and Easter services to an online setting," said **Todd Gusler** (MDiv 2014), Pastor of Rossmere Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. "Watching the webinar and reviewing the provided documents saved me many hours of lost sleep! My congregation was appreciative and moved by the services."

Michelle Curtis (MDiv 2018), a campus student in the course who also co-led the workshop and webinar, said the course helped her to practice and then demonstrate the social skills required for worshipping via Zoom: "The course prepared me to lead and pastor in the midst of pandemic — by expanding my imagination for what is possible across distance and giving me practical skills to lead and worship through Zoom."

The student leaders also included MDiv students **Melissa Atchison** of Kansas, **Deb Coates** of Washington and **Joyce Peachey Lind** of Virginia. •
— *Annette Brill Bergstresser*

A teachable moment like few others

Experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic as a global learning community is presenting unique opportunities to experiment with and model leadership in a time of crisis — whether it be through “campus care pods” that are tending to the needs of campus residents; weekly Zoom check-ins with the Academic Dean; a student-led initiative to share funds from stimulus checks with students in need through a mutual aid fund; or the creation of a “Hope and resilience” webpage with resources for prayer, preaching, worship, pastoral care, spiritual formation and trauma healing.

In addition to making logistical adaptations to offer all courses and chapel services online during this time, faculty members are integrating into students’ learning processes reflection on the pandemic from theological, peace-building and ministerial perspectives. They’re also incorporating opportunities to practice and develop leadership skills for such a time as this. Examples include:

Janna Hunter-Bowman, PhD, Assistant Professor of Peace Studies and Christian Social Ethics, changed her **Religion and Peace Processes** course to include examination of Christians’ differing theological approaches in response to the pandemic. Students are reflecting on their experiences and exploring transformative ways to engage crisis and conflict constructively during this time.

Rachel Miller Jacobs, DMin, Associate Professor of Congregational Formation, shifted the final project in her **Christian Worship: Theory and Practice** course to be designed for worship via Zoom rather than in person. For her course on **Faith Formation and Spirituality: Family Spirituality**, she plans to engage connections between spirituality, resilience and intergenerational Christian formation in light of COVID-19 as an Adverse Childhood Experience.

Safwat Marzouk, PhD, Associate Professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, is teaching a three-session series via Zoom for two congregations in California and Indiana on how to read the Bible amidst pandemic.

Jamie Pitts, PhD, Associate Professor of Anabaptist Studies, was interviewed by **Perdian Tumanan**, an MA: Theology and Peace Studies student from Indonesia, and other Indonesian theologians on “Doing Theology in the Time of COVID-19” for their YouTube vlog, *Theology*, in May.

Allan Rudy-Froese, PhD, Associate Professor of Christian Proclamation, will address trauma and preaching in his **Preaching** course. In his **Biblical Storytelling** course, students will work on staging storytelling for the camera.

Daniel Schipani, DrPsy, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Care and Counseling, adapted his **Pastoral**

Care 2: Systems, Assessments and Interventions of Trauma course to address the multidimensional realities of disorientation and loss related to COVID-19.

Dan Schrock, DMin, Sessional Faculty, is changing his **Spiritual Guidance Practicum** so students will learn to offer spiritual direction by video call as well as in person.

Drew Strait, PhD, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins, adapted the final paper in his **Strange New World of the Bible 2** course to focus on what the Book of Revelation has to say to a world under pandemic.

While the AMBS Library already had many resources available electronically for students at a distance before COVID-19, **Karl Stutzman**, MLS, Director of Library Services, and **Brandon Board**, MLIS, Information Services and Online Learning Librarian, extended these services to all students and faculty and developed an online guide to help users access materials.

Information Technology Director **Brent Graber**, MA, noted that practices implemented by AMBS in the past to enable distance learning meant that fewer IT adaptations were needed this spring; the pandemic offered an opportunity to extend and refine these practices. •



Safwat Marzouk, PhD, speaks at Pastors and Leaders 2018. Credit: Jason Bryant

Your support makes a difference

In this time of seismic change, we've shifted some of our ways of functioning at AMBS, but our commitment to prepare leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world remains unchanged. And prayerful, relational and financial **support from our alumni, donors and friends is as vital and needed as ever.**

We invite your prayers for those in our learning community who struggle with the demands of the changes we're experiencing — especially international students who are far away from their familiar cultures. Please also pray for students who plan to begin studies

this fall — and that visas would be granted for international students to come to Elkhart. Give thanks with us for how God is using our employees' experience, expertise and theological imagination to continue to form leaders to respond with compassion and act for peace and justice as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, wherever they may serve.

The current crisis brings both opportunities and challenges. We've shared here about how we're making use of the opportunities we see. We're also very aware of the challenges that lie before us in this time of widespread



trauma and economic upheaval. If you're experiencing an abundance of resources during this time, **would you consider making a gift to support AMBS students and programs before our fiscal year ends on June 30?** Thank you for your support of AMBS's mission. •

— Daniel Grimes, MPA, Vice President for Advancement and Enrollment

Grow your leadership skills at a distance

Start seminary studies this fall!

It's not too late to enroll at AMBS for 2020–21. Strengthen your leadership skills in an Anabaptist setting! Non-admitted students get 50 percent off their first course for credit. Check out our upcoming courses:

ambs.edu/onecourse

Study at a distance

- **Master of Divinity Connect** (online and hybrid courses)
- **Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism** (fully online)
- **Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies** (fully online)

ambs.edu/academics

Join the Journey program!

Nurture your leadership abilities. Deepen your theological perspectives. Tend to your spiritual formation. The undergraduate-level nondegree **Journey Missional Leadership Development Program** offers mentor-mentee partnerships, distance-learning opportunities and community support. ambs.edu/journey

Anabaptist Short Courses

Join the forum discussions in these annual six-week online noncredit courses and dig into Anabaptist theology, history and practice. No grades, no papers! CEUs available.

- Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology: Sept. 16 – Oct. 27
- Exploring Peace and Justice in the Bible: Oct. 28 – Dec. 15
- Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture: Feb. 10 – March 23
- Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication: April 14 – May 25

ambs.edu/shortcourses

Webinar recording: "Exploring your call to ministry"

How do you discern a "call to ministry"? This free webinar features a conversation between David B. Miller, DMin; Andy Brubacher Kaethler, PhD; and Amanda (Beachy) Bleichy, MDiv.

ambs.edu/academics

Church matching grants doubled!

AMBS's church matching grant — which matches contributions that congregations and regional churches make toward a student's tuition costs — will be \$2,000 per year, beginning in 2020–21. We're committed to making theological education affordable and accessible, and to partnering with the wider church to invest in current and future leaders.

anabapti.st/match-grant

Hope and resilience resources

This webpage contains resources for prayer, preaching, worship, pastoral care, trauma healing and spiritual formation suggested by AMBS students, employees, alumni and friends.

ambs.edu/hopeandresilience

COVID-19 updates

This webpage contains information about logistical changes at AMBS in response to the pandemic.

ambs.edu/updates



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