

For the first time, U.S. Lutheran seminary taps woman president: Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

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A clergywoman and administrator who in the early 1990s helped shape the seminary education plans for the newly merged Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has become the first woman to head a U.S. Lutheran seminary.

Phyllis B. Anderson, 61, was named this month to head the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California, starting in February. She succeeds Timothy F. Lull, who died May 20 from complications following surgery. Ted F. Peters has been serving as interim president of the 1,400-student seminary.

Pacific Lutheran, one of eight ELCA seminaries, is affiliated with the multid denominational Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and environs. Neither the West Coast nor ecumenical academic coalitions are new to Anderson, who has been director since 1998 of the Institute for Ecumenical and Theological Studies at Jesuit-run Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry.

Anderson is not the first woman in North America to head a Lutheran seminary. In 1996 Faith E. Rohrbough became president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.

The chairman of the seminary board of trustees, Steven L. McKinley, a pastor in Richfield, Minnesota, said Anderson's knowledge of "the diversity and spiritual experience of people in the American West" contributed to her selection.

Presidential search director Gary Andeen also praised her work in strategic planning and fund raising, and "her collaborative approach to all decisions."

Born in Baltimore, Anderson attended a Lutheran teachers college before graduating from California State University, Sacramento. She earned her master's degree at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, and her doctorate from Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis.

Ordained in 1978, Anderson has been a pastor and district staffer in Iowa. In 1985 she became director of pastoral studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

When the ELCA formed in 1988 from the merger of three Lutheran church bodies, Anderson was named its first director for theological studies in the Division for Ministry. As such, she oversaw a six-year study of theological education that formed a comprehensive plan for theological education nationally.

Anderson is married to fellow ELCA minister Herbert E. Anderson, who is a visiting professor of pastoral theology at Yale Divinity School and a professor emeritus at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.