

OUR HISTORY

Bethel University is a leader in Christian higher education. Under its banner, Bethel Seminary continues as a world-class evangelical institution of theological education offering a variety of master of arts degrees, a master of divinity degree, a doctor of ministry degree, and several certificates. Accreditors have praised the seminary's approach to developing whole and holy Christian leaders through an emphasis on biblical/theological foundations, transformational leadership, and spiritual and personal formation. With locations in St. Paul and San Diego, as well as a model distance learning program, Bethel Seminary is breaking new ground in effective ministry training.

Our history dates back to 1871, when founder John Alexis Edgren responded to the need for an educated ministry among the Baptist churches of Swedish immigrants. Except for 1884-1888, when the seminary was located in St. Paul, Minnesota, and then in Stromsburg, Nebraska, its first half century was spent as the Swedish Department of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and its predecessor, Baptist Union Theological Seminary.

In 1914, the churches of the Baptist General Conference (now Converge) assumed full support of the seminary, moving it back to St. Paul. There it joined Bethel Academy to become Bethel Academy and Seminary of the Swedish Baptist General Conference. Accredited in 1944, the seminary offers theological education in accordance with the standards established by the Association of Theological Schools.

With the offering of college degrees, the institution became Bethel College & Seminary in 1947. Following a period of rapid growth, especially in master's programs, the school became Bethel University in 2004.

Swedish Pietism left its mark on the seminary. The current vision seeks to keep the curriculum Bible-centered, to emphasize the building of a vibrant spiritual life, and to embody a spirit of tolerance in areas of evangelical disagreement. At the core of the program is an unwavering loyalty to the Orthodox-Reformed formulations of the Christian faith. Bethel's graduates have played a significant role in advancing the worldwide mission of Converge.

God blessed the seminary with scholarly teachers, some of whom achieved fame in wide circles of influence. Men of former years, such as Edgren, a philologist and biblical scholar, and Carl G. Lagergren, a theologian, laid a solid foundation on which well-trained scholars of the present continue to build.

Because Converge is a small denomination, the seminary has maintained a close relationship with

the churches through the years. A significant portion of each seminarian's education is underwritten by tithes and offerings from the conference. The school is dependent on this constituency for support in prayers and financial assistance. In turn, the seminary is committed to the ministries of the denomination.

Bethel Seminary is mindful of its founder's original purpose: "The instruction will be so conducted that above all the spiritual life may gain strength and, secondly, that knowledge may be gained and understanding developed." Edgren amplified this principle by stating its intended result in the life of the graduate: to "go forth in the Master's service with an increased faith and a deeper insight in the Christian life, and thus be the better prepared by example and teaching to lead others."