

Lutheran seminaries will merge instead of launching a new school

by [G. Jeffrey MacDonald](#) in the [May 25, 2016](#) issue

Two Pennsylvania Lutheran seminaries have dropped plans to dissolve both schools and start a new one as they navigate hurdles in their quest to forge a new institution.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg said in a joint statement April 28 that they would be “forming one seminary” from the two existing institutions.

That marks a change in direction since January, when the two schools affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America said they’d be closing to launch a new institution.

Accreditation concerns caused the change of course, according to Michael Cooper-White, LTSG president. Under state regulations, a new school would not be licensed to grant degrees or administer federal student loans for about two years, he said.

“We would not have been able to attract new students,” Cooper-White said. “To have students who would not be in an accredited school—that was just untenable.”

The consolidated institution is expected to open in July 2017. With new support from ELCA partners, all full-time residential students preparing for ELCA ministry will be able to attend tuition-free, according to David Lose, LTSP president.

In January, both boards hoped a new school launch would provide flexibility for a radical redesign. They foresaw building a new, leaner faculty while eliminating costly tenure-track positions at the predecessor institutions.

Now they’re exploring whether both institutions will endure under the umbrella of a new institution or if one of them will cease to exist. Either way, at least some tenured positions should be retained, according to Hans-Joerg Tiede, an associate secretary at the American Association of University Professors.

“From our perspective, this is a kind of merger,” Tiede said, “and it does create obligations regarding the tenure of faculty from both institutions.” —Religion News

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