Jody Horner Begins Service as 16th President of Midland University

Following an extensive nation-wide search, the Midland Board of Directors at its meeting in December, 2014, named Jody Horner as the new president of Midland University. She began her service as Midland’s 16th president officially on February 1st.

President Horner is a proven executive, having served in major leadership positions with the Cargill Corporation, with international headquarters in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis. She headed human resources for Cargill in North America, managing college recruiting as a key part of that position. She was also a leader for the Cargill Innovation Center, creating a world-wide effort for new products and services for the corporation. Most recently she was president of Cargill Meat Solutions and Cargill Case Ready, with over 5000 employees, headquartered in Wichita, Kansas.

Jody Horner is a life-long Lutheran, with childhood roots in the Augustana Lutheran Church of West St. Paul, Minnesota. She and her family were members of Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Maple Grove, Minnesota, before moving to Wichita. She is a graduate of St. Olaf College, one of Midland’s ELCA higher education partners.

She has served as an active member of the Board of Directors of St. Olaf and gave leadership to the College’s strategic plan. She also served as Board Chair of Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization during many of her years in Wichita. President Horner has quickly engaged herself in the life of the Midland community. “I'm looking forward to connecting with all corners of the Midland community in the weeks ahead and am truly inspired by the commitment to service that I have already witnessed throughout our network of supporters,” said President Horner. “Midland is a special place with a proud history and bright future.”
On Friday, January 16 and Saturday, January 17 Midland University held its first-ever Midwinter Ministry Conference. This two-day event was organized in response to requests from both clergy and lay leaders in churches in the region for more continuing education opportunities addressing important issues in congregational life and mission.

The theme of this year’s conference was “Connecting the Generations: Spirituality and the Church.” Leaders and attendees for the event represented almost 50 different congregations. Participants addressed critical questions facing most congregations: How can we bring young adults back into our churches or attract them in the first place? How can we reach out to people who say they are “spiritual” but aren’t participating in churches? How can we encourage greater intergenerational faith and ministry?

Two nationally noted speakers served as Keynoters for the conference: Naomi Schaefer Riley, writer for the Wall Street Journal and New York Post and author of Got Religion? How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can bring Young People Back; and Rev. Richard Melheim, founder of Faith Inkubators and author of Holding Your Family Together. Seminars were led by Kwarne Pitts, M.Div. Senior at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago; Dan Smith, business and marketing entrepreneur and teacher in the Midland Department of Business Administration; Rev. Lance Ferguson, Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE, whose congregation is experimenting with new forms of intergenerational ministry; and Rev. Dr. Neal Anthony, Midland Dept. of Religion, who taught a special January Term course for 25 Midland students entitled “Integrating Millennials into the Church.” These Midland students were active participants in the conference.

On Wednesday, February 11th Midland University Performing Arts students sang with the legendary song writer and singer Barry Manilow at Omaha’s Century Link Center. The Midland Choir performed before thousands in attendance at the opening night of Manilow’s “One Last Time” tour. The Midland Choir received this invitation as a result of its performance last November at the first Gospel Honors Choir event in Omaha. “This was an amazing opportunity for our students to perform on a monumental stage and at such a major event,” said Jim Logue, Director of Choral Music at Midland.

Midland choral groups also experienced a very busy and exciting spring tour, March 13 to 18. This year they headed north to the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Three groups, the Midland Chamber Choir, the Clef Dwellers, and the Acoustics Group, performed at churches and high schools along the route. The churches part of the tour were Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, Wayne, NE; Brandon Lutheran Church, Brandon, SD; First Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD; Redeemer Lutheran Church, Alden, MN; Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Maple Grove, MN and Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, Omaha, NE.

The choral groups also sang at selected high schools enroute, including Oakland-Craig, NE; Tekamah, NE, Washington High, Sioux Falls, SD; New Prague High, New Prague, MN; Park Center High, Brooklyn Park, MN; Perpich Center for the Arts, Golden Valley, MN; and High School for the Recording Arts, St. Paul, MN. In a special highlight of the tour, the Midland choral groups performed on March 16 at the Mall of America as part of the MOA 2015 Music Series.

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An important announcement was made when the Nebraska Synod Assembly was held on the Midland campus, May 29-31, 2014, namely the reestablishment of a formal seat for a Nebraska Synod representative on the Midland Board of Directors. Several years ago the Midland Board was streamlined by eliminating a variety of categories into which members had to fit. This made it more difficult to fill important needs of experience on the Board. Ties between Midland and the ELCA and the Nebraska Synod remained strong, but the formal linkage via Board membership was missing. Formal action taken last fall by the Midland Board provides for the Bishop to hold membership on the Midland Board. Should the Bishop choose not to assume the Board position, a Synod representative will be nominated jointly by the Bishop and the Chair of the Midland Board. Reestablishing this formal link between the Synod and the Midland Board was in keeping with a resolution passed in spring 2013 by the Nebraska Synod Assembly.

As announced in previous issues of this newsletter, Midland University is seeking to create a perpetual chair in campus ministry. The campaign will allow Midland to return to having a full-time leader of campus ministry to help bring the Christian message to the growing number of students on the Midland Campus.

The campaign is being carried out in three phases. In Phase One, generous gifts from Midland alumni and the family of Rev. Henry Kleinert, for whom the University Pastor position will be named, laid the foundation for a successful campaign. Approximately 120 Midland alumni who knew “Pastor Hank” as their campus minister have contributed to this effort.

We have just entered Phase Two of the campaign, with a goal to seek out funds from congregations, especially in the Nebraska and Western Iowa Synods. Last fall the Thrivent Foundation awarded Midland a special grant of $40,000 to help with this phase and to continue to strengthen our relationship with congregations in the region. We are currently preparing proposals to congregations that can make gifts from their endowments or special offerings.

We are simultaneously beginning Phase Three of the campaign. This phase has a goal of raising the bulk of the project’s funding through gifts and pledges from individuals who were friends of the late Pastor Kleinert and from friends of Midland University who want to see a strong campus ministry program at Midland. If you are interested in contributing, contact Rev. Dr. Bill Nelsen at Midland (nelsen@MidlandU.edu or 507-327-2149).
Message from University Minister Rev. William Nelsen

New days are here at Midland, and the outlook is good – very good!

Over the past four years Midland experienced very rapid enrollment growth. This past fall our enrollment rose to 1362, the highest number in our history. This growth, under the leadership of President Ben Sasse, resulted from expanded marketing, new scholarship programs in academics, performing arts, and athletics, and our Four-Year Guarantee.

Now, a new era has begun with the unanimous election in December by the Midland Board of Jody Horner as our new President. As described on the front page of this newsletter, President Horner brings to Midland excellent executive and Board leadership experience in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. As a lifetime member of the Lutheran Church, and her status as an alumna and Board member with our sister institution, St. Olaf College, Jody is well versed in the values offered by quality higher education institutions linked closely with the church.

President Horner has already stated her commitment to continue growth for Midland – growth in relation to both numbers of students and growth in enriching academic experiences. Midland will strive to grow in numbers of students served, continuing to explore the Dana campus and other options for expansion. The creation of a new honors program (linked to the new Luther College of the Liberal Arts at Midland) and the development of international studies programs in Germany, Tanzania, and elsewhere will present enriching new educational experiences for future enrollees at Midland.

So, stay tuned folks for more to come! God has blessed Midland and its people. May these blessings continue in vital and meaningful ways in the years to come.