

CENTRAL SEMINARY | WINTER 2026

THE VOICE





Staci Cooper, current Master of Divinity student, and Ruth Rosell, director of the Buttry Center for Peace and Nonviolence, represented Central Seminary at the International Peace Festival in Kansas City in September 2025.

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CENTRAL SEMINARY

8620 W. 110th Street, Suite 200
Overland Park, KS 66210
(913) 667-5700 | (800) 677-2287
www.cbts.edu

EDITORIAL STAFF

Pamela R. Durso, President
pdurso@cbts.edu

Craig S. Doty, Senior Director of Brand Advancement
cdoty@cbts.edu

MAGAZINE DESIGN

Kathryn Gauer, Type A Creative LLC
kathryn.gauer@gmail.com



A Word from the President

리더십의 중심 센트럴, 센트럴에서 리더십으로

In 2026, Central Seminary celebrates 125 years of offering innovative and transformational theological education. The seminary's story began not with abundance, but with vision, courage, and faith. In 1900, there was no Baptist seminary west of the Mississippi River. Rev. Evan B. Meredith and other leaders imagined what did not yet exist, and Joanna Barber Lovelace generously provided resources to make it possible.

Founded on August 20, 1901, the seminary was established to provide “for the education and training of ministers of the gospel, missionaries, and teachers to the end that all may be saved through the presentation of the truth revealed in God’s word.” This founding purpose continues to guide the seminary today. Classes began that same year in the Fowler mansion—with no library, no dormitory, and no certainty—only faith, determination, and reliance on God’s provision.

From the start, Central chose to shine its light outward. By 1903, students from other denominations were welcomed; by 1920, students came from eleven countries. Women joined the seminary as early as 1909. Over the decades, Central has embraced global partnerships, multilingual programs, and innovative learning methods to expand access to theological education, consistently prioritizing inclusion, innovation, and mission.

Central’s legacy shows that when education is accessible, leadership is diverse, and learning is global, the gospel is embodied more fully. Yet this work is never finished. As we celebrate 125 years, Central continues to form and equip leaders, guided by God’s Spirit, carrying forward a legacy of faith, courage, and vision—preparing pastors, lay leaders, and congregations to serve boldly and faithfully for generations to come. ✨

2026년, 센트럴신학대학원은 혁신적이고 변혁적인 신학 교육을 제공해 온 125년의 여정을 기념합니다. 본교의 역사는 풍요로움이 아닌 비전과 용기, 그리고 믿음에서 시작되었습니다. 1900년 당시 미시시피강 서쪽에는 침례교 신학대학원이 단 하나도 존재하지 않았습니다. 에반 B. 메러디스 목사와 여러 지도자들은 아직 현실이 되지 않은 미래를 바라보았고, 조안나 바버 러브레이스 여사는 그 비전이 실현될 수 있도록 아낌없는 헌신으로 자원을 제공했습니다.

1901년 8월 20일에 설립된 센트럴신학대학원은 “하나님의 말씀에 계시된 진리를 선포함으로 모든 사람이 구원에 이르도록, 복음의 사역자와 선교사, 교사를 교육하고 양성한다”는 사명을 품고 출발했습니다. 이 설립 이념은 오늘날까지도 센트럴을 이끄는 변함없는 중심 가치입니다. 같은 해, 파울러 저택에서 첫 수업이 시작되었습니다. 도서관도, 기숙사도, 미래에 대한 확실한 보장도 없었지만, 그 자리에 있던 것은 믿음과 결단, 그리고 하나님의 공급하심에 대한 전적인 신뢰였습니다.

창립 초기부터 센트럴은 그 빛을 교회와 세상 가운데로 비추는 길을 선택했습니다. 1903년에는 타 교단의 학생들을 받아들였고, 1920년에는 열한 개국에서 온 학생들이 함께 배움의 공동체를 이루었습니다. 여성들 또한 1909년이라는 이른 시기부터 신학교 공동체의 일원으로 참여했습니다. 이후 수십 년에 걸쳐 센트럴은 신학 교육의 지평을 넓히기 위해 글로벌 파트너십과 다국어 프로그램, 그리고 혁신적인 학습 방식을 적극적으로 수용해 왔으며, 포용성·혁신·선교를 일관되게 최우선 가치로 삼아 왔습니다.

센트럴의 유산은 교육이 접근 가능하고, 리더십이 다양하며, 배움이 세계적인 때 복음이 더욱 온전히 삶으로 구현된다는 사실을 분명히 보여 줍니다. 그러나 이 사명은 결코 완료된 과제가 아닙니다. 125주년을 맞이한 지금도 센트럴은 하나님의 성령의 인도하심 가운데 지도자들을 세우고 준비시키며, 믿음과 용기, 비전의 유산을 다음 세대로 이어가고 있습니다. 이는 목회자와 평신도 지도자, 그리고 교회 공동체가 세대에 걸쳐 담대하고 신실하게 섬기도록 하기 위함입니다. ✨

Pamela R. Durso

A Word from Central's Board Chair Happy New Year, Central Seminary!



Central is a wonderful theological institution with a top-notch faculty and staff, engaged students, generous donors and a committed Board. This year is going to be a memorable one in the life of our institution for many reasons, but most especially as we celebrate our 125th anniversary.

My name is Jacqueline Saxon, and I serve as the current Chair of the Board of Directors for Central Seminary and am delighted to greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Central is a wonderful theological institution with a top-notch faculty and staff, engaged students, generous donors, and a committed Board.

This year is going to be a memorable one in the life of our institution for many reasons, but most especially as we celebrate our 125th anniversary! *125 years of equipping and empowering present and future ministry leaders to seek God, shape the church, and serve humanity and all creation.* That mission statement can be found on our website, and I couldn't agree more. It is my hope that we will continue to do that and more in the years to come.

Another statement found on our website says: *Central Seminary is a vibrant community with diverse voices and many opportunities for personal and professional growth.* I find evidence of that every time the Board meets, and we get the opportunity to hear from and engage with faculty, staff, and students.

It is an honor to serve as Board Chair, and I serve alongside a wonderful group of faith-filled people from across the country. Their stories—each reflecting a unique calling to this institution—are deeply meaningful and inspiring. I have been a member of the Board since the spring of 2020. Beyond my role as Chair, I am the Executive Minister for the Mid-American Baptist Churches of Iowa and Minnesota (ABCUSA) and have been in that position since the fall of 2018.

Once again, Happy New Year, and thank you for your continued support, because together we know that the Future Is Central. 🌱

Peace,

Jacqueline L. Saxon
Rev. Jacqueline L. Saxon

ANTIOCH CENTER

AT CENTRAL SEMINARY

Equipping congregations. Empowering leaders. Strengthening communities.

As Central Seminary celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2026—honoring a long and rich legacy of offering innovative and transformative theological education—it is also investing boldly in the future of the church. At a time when congregations are navigating rapid cultural change, shifting demographics, and new demands on leadership, Central is responding with hope and vision through the establishment of the Antioch Center at Central Seminary. The Center embodies the seminary's enduring commitment to equipping congregations, lay leaders, and pastors for courageous, adaptive, and sustainable ministry in a changing world.

The Antioch Center at Central Seminary is both a place and a calling. Geographically,

it stands near the intersection of Antioch Road and 110th Street in Overland Park, Kansas—a crossroads where people, communities, and stories meet. Spiritually and theologically, it draws its name and purpose from the city of Antioch, the first great crossroads church, where diverse believers were gathered, formed, and sent into the world. In Antioch, the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, and from that place of learning, prayer, and shared leadership, the church was commissioned for mission beyond familiar boundaries.

Like its biblical namesake, the Antioch Center is grounded in the conviction that faithful ministry is forged at intersections—between tradition and change, local context and global

*Don't miss any exciting news about the Antioch Center! Scan the QR code or text **ANTIOCH** to (913) 270-3062 to join our mailing list.*



vision, formation and action. It is a place where congregations pause to listen, learn, and discern together, drawing strength from community and clarity from shared purpose. Theologically, the Center embodies a sending posture, equipping lay leaders, congregations, and pastors to respond creatively and courageously to where the Spirit is leading next.

Standing at a literal crossroads, the Antioch Center is spiritually located in the space where formation meets mission, where diverse voices are welcomed, and where the church is continually renewed for the sake of the world.

Culturally Responsive Resources and Learning Opportunities

The Antioch Center will advance congregational vitality for both lay leaders and pastors through the creation of robust educational opportunities and practical resources tailored to today's diverse church contexts. The Center will offer a wide range of programming, including webinars, certificate programs, and customized tools designed especially for small, rural, and multilingual congregations across the Midwest. Existing certificate programs—such as the Certificate in Chaplaincy and the Certificate in Peace and Justice—will be integrated into the work of the Center, while new certificates will be developed in response to emerging needs.

The Antioch Center will also provide expert guidance and congregational coaching for both lay leaders and clergy on critical issues such as fragile church finances and outdated accounting systems, stewardship of large and aging facilities, mental health challenges within congregations and surrounding communities,

accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities, and innovative outreach strategies to engage youth and young adults. These offerings will be supported by adaptive, multilingual learning platforms that deliver culturally responsive resources and foster coached learning communities.

Multilingual Lay Leadership Training Hub

The Antioch Center will also serve as a hub for comprehensive lay leadership training that equips leaders to serve effectively in their unique ministry contexts. Existing programs at Central Seminary—including the Hispanic Lay Institute (Spanish), the Judson Communities Certificate Program (Burmese and Karen), and the Ola Hanson Bible Institute (Kachin)—will be supported and expanded. In addition, new English-language lay leadership training courses will be developed and delivered. Building on this foundation, the Center will launch Lay Leader Communities of Practice, cohort-based learning experiences designed to meet the distinct needs of various denominations, cultural communities, and shared affinities.

Deepening Partnerships

Finally, the Antioch Center will expand and deepen partnerships with denominations that directly serve congregations, recognizing collaboration as essential to sustainable impact. The Center will work closely with denominational partners to co-create relevant content and support recruitment, while also convening regional gatherings to engage denominational leaders and host targeted listening sessions. Insights gained from these conversations and shared data will guide the identification of emerging congregational needs, shape flexible engagement

Lilly Endowment Support

In October 2025, Central Seminary proudly announced the receipt of \$2.34 million from Lilly Endowment Inc.—a remarkable and transformative investment that fuels three visionary initiatives. Together, these efforts will significantly strengthen the seminary's educational and financial capacity to prepare and sustain pastoral leaders, enrich the church through adaptive and accessible leadership formation and resourcing, and expand mentoring, peer networks, and culturally responsive resources that will equip and empower students and alumni for faithful and enduring ministry.



Lilly Endowment Inc.

A private foundation since 1937

strategies, and strengthen partnerships, ensuring that the Center's work remains responsive, collaborative, and grounded in the lived realities of congregations.

The Antioch Center will begin its work in spring 2026 with a three-part Congregational Learning Series designed to address pressing challenges facing churches today. In September 2026, The Center will expand its offerings with the launch of comprehensive lay leader training programs and continuing education opportunities for pastors, further equipping congregations for faithful and sustainable ministry.

The Antioch Center is co-directed by Rev. Rhonda Hetzel and is funded in part by generous grants from Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Pathways for Tomorrow and Thriving Congregations Initiatives. 🌿



Meet the Director

Rev. Rhonda Hetzel is Co-Director of the Antioch Center and Program Director of the Thriving Congregations Initiative, a long-term, mission-driven effort supporting churches as they navigate complexity and change. Since assuming the program director role in 2022, she has helped congregations rediscover purpose and build futures grounded in faith, relevance, and resilience.

At the Antioch Center, Rhonda leads the expansion of non-degree educational programs designed for lay leaders and congregations, particularly in rural, small-church, and multicultural ministry contexts, to address the growing need for strong lay leadership amid shifting ministry demands. Rhonda is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), currently serving as the Senior Minister of Eastgate Christian Church in Independence, Missouri. 🌿

Join us for the “What Do We Do?” Series

Three-part Congregational Learning Series designed to address pressing challenges facing churches today.

Scan the QR code to register for the session.

MARCH 12, 2026 | 7:00–8:30 P.M. (CST) **“We Don’t Have Any Children in Our Church: What Do We Do?”**

Led by Rev. Trevor Beauford, Senior Organizer for Faith Communities, Children’s Defense Fund (Washington, DC)



APRIL 14, 2026 | 7:00–8:30 P.M. (CST) **“Our Church Building Is Too Big and Too Empty: What Do We Do?”**

Led by Rev. Mark Elsdon, Co-Founder of Rooted Good, supporting innovative faith-based leaders in property development, money and mission alignment, and social enterprise (Madison, Wisconsin)



MAY 21, 2026 | 7:00–8:30 P.M. (CST) **“Mental Health Struggles in Congregational Life: What Do We Do?”**

Led by Rev. Jermaine Alberty, Founder and Principal Consultant, SALT Initiative (Las Vegas, Nevada)



Join the Celebration!

For more than a century, Central Seminary has been a place where all who feel called to theological education and service can find a seat at the table. This year, we celebrate our milestone 125th anniversary, and we want YOU to be part of this special occasion!



Anniversary Worship Celebration
Saturday, November 7, 2026, 10:00 a.m. CT
Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church
Kansas City, Missouri

Or watch live on YouTube at
youtube.com/centralseminaryKS

Share your Central memories,
photos, and stay up to date
on anniversary events at:
www.Central125.com



Join us as we honor a legacy
of faith, learning, and service that continues
to inspire generations!

The O'Dell Challenge: A Testament to Radical Partnership

Thanks to the generous hearts and the inspiring leadership of Jim and Jeanne O'Dell, our Year-End Appeal became a beautiful testament to the power of our collective "Yes."

When Jim and Jeanne O'Dell stepped forward with a \$100,000 matching gift challenge, they didn't just offer financial support—they issued an invitation. Their faith in our community sparked a response that exceeded every expectation.

- **Goal Surpassed:** Together, we exceeded our \$200,000 Year-End Campaign goal, securing the essential "fuel" for our 125th year of mission.
- **Emergency Aid Restored:** Your response raised over \$10,000 specifically for Student Emergency Aid. After the fund was nearly depleted, your compassion ensured that students facing crisis can continue their education without interruption.

Thank you, Jim and Jeanne O'Dell, for your vision, and thank you to every donor who rose to meet the challenge. 🙏



"We love to help our international students as well as those who have decided to change vocations mid-life."

—Jim and Jeanne O'Dell

Meeting the Need

Training Faith-Based Counselors for the Korean American Community



Gina Lee, Master of Arts in Care and Counseling (MCCC) Program Coordinator, third from left, pictured with MCCC students from the Atlanta site.

The Master of Arts in Care and Counseling (MCCC) degree was launched at Central nearly five years ago to prepare students for a range of spiritually integrated counseling and caregiving roles in the Korean American community. As of the Spring 2026 semester, 44 students are enrolled. This 36-credit-hour graduate degree program is taught entirely in Korean by Korean instructors, using Korean-language textbooks.

The curriculum is designed to form Christian counseling professionals who are well balanced in theological insight and clinical competence. Grounded in the theological foundations of Christian counseling, students deepen their personal spiritual maturity while systematically exploring counseling theories and developing practical skills essential for effective ministry in diverse contexts.

A growing body of research indicates substantial unmet mental health needs within Korean American communities. Many Korean Americans underutilize mental health services because of stigma, cultural expectations, and language barriers. As a result, Korean American churches and community centers—where Korean-speaking staff are readily accessible—often become the first point of contact for individuals experiencing emotional or psychological distress, placing them in a vital position to bridge access to care.

These findings point to a strong and ongoing demand for culturally responsive, faith-integrated caregiving and counseling services. They underscore the ongoing need for pastoral and clinical counselors who are theologically grounded and clinically trained, fluent in Korean, familiar with Korean American cultural values, and able to pursue seminary education that is both geographically and linguistically accessible.

Graduates of the MCCC program are prepared to function as professionally trained, faith-based counselors in a wide range of settings both within the United States and abroad. They provide pastoral counseling and care within Korean churches and offer Christian counseling services for individuals and families through Korean mental health centers and related organizations.

Central's MCCC faculty bring extensive caregiving and counseling experience within Korean community organizations and church contexts. This background equips them with deep cultural and social insight into the Korean American experience, complemented

이 글의 한국어
원문은 여기에서
읽을 수 있습니다:

*Read this piece
in Korean here:*



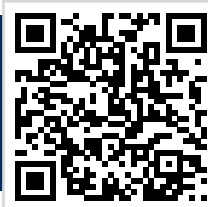
by their strong academic preparation and their commitment to pastoral spirituality.

In addition to rigorous academic instruction, the curriculum places significant emphasis on field education and ministry practicum. Each semester, students participate in supervised hands-on caregiving and counseling ministries in local churches, Christian organizations, and community-based settings. Through ongoing evaluation, supervision, and mentoring, students are guided in reflecting on their experiences and integrating counseling theory with real-world practice. This applied training prepares graduates to serve effectively in counseling centers, congregational settings, or as trained lay leaders within their communities.

Central Seminary, grounded in a long-standing tradition of theological education, is also a leader in global online learning. Regardless of geographic location, MCCC students participate in real-time lectures and discussions through state-of-the-art virtual learning platforms, receiving a rigorous and immersive educational experience equivalent

to on-campus instruction. In addition, compared with similar programs, the MCCC degree features relatively affordable tuition, increasing access to high-quality professional training for a broader range of students.

Currently, students and graduates of the MCCC program are located across the United States and Canada and include pastors, pastors' spouses, lay leaders, and missionaries. Through affordable tuition and a flexible learning environment grounded in Zoom-based instruction, the program seeks to expand participation among those living outside the United States. This accessibility enables ministry leaders to gain practical tools that directly strengthen their local ministry contexts and extend a positive impact on Korean American communities as well as global mission fields. 🌿



Learn more about the
Master of Christian Care
and Counseling degree.

Meet the Program Coordinator

Gina Gyounghee Lee is Central's MCCC Program Coordinator and is currently completing her dissertation in Central's Doctor of Ministry program.

I came to the United States approximately 42 years ago as the wife of a graduate student. After my husband earned his Ph.D. in chemistry, our family—including our two daughters—settled in the United States and has lived as Korean American immigrants for more than four decades. During this time, I experienced many of the challenges commonly faced by Korean American immigrants, including cultural differences, language barriers, loneliness, homesickness, and the complexities of raising children amid generational and cultural gaps.

I earned a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree from Central. I have nearly 30 years of counseling experience across a variety of settings, including mainstream counseling programs, private practice, nursing homes, Korean community organizations, and Korean American churches. I hold an Illinois State Psychotherapy License as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

My lived experience as a Korean American immigrant has given me a deep personal understanding of the emotional and psychological challenges faced by this

community. I believe this perspective has significantly informed my teaching and mentoring of MCCC students, many of whom will go on to serve Korean American populations after graduation. 🌿



Gina Lee, center, pictured with Central Seminary staff members Jenna Chon, left, and Ju Yeon Kim, right.



Meet a Student

Sang Eun Lee, a graduate of the Central's Korean MDiv program, is current enrolled in the MCCC program. She also serves on the praise team at Woori Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

My journey to Central Seminary began with an unexpected suggestion. During a time of personal discouragement, a pastor from the church I was attending asked if I had ever considered studying theology. I was stunned. I had only recently

started attending church, after growing up in the Catholic tradition. I barely understood Scripture, and I certainly didn't see myself as someone spiritually "qualified" to pursue seminary studies. I didn't even know where or how such a thing would be possible.

When I first came to the United States, my goal was simply to complete a graduate degree that would strengthen my career back in Korea. But once I began studying here, I realized my studies didn't excite or challenge me. The content felt dry, disconnected, and uninspiring.

Sensing my exhaustion and uncertainty, the pastor gently suggested Central Seminary and told me about their Korean-language program. At the time, I was struggling with classes because of the language, and the idea of studying in my native tongue was deeply appealing. It was also a new academic field that promised the challenge and sense of purpose that I had been missing. And yet, I still couldn't shake the feeling that theology might be "too much" for someone like me.

But one morning as I opened my eyes, a song of praise began to rise spontaneously from my lips. I found myself humming a hymn. That same morning, I called Central. To this day, I'm still not entirely sure what gave me the courage to make that decision so suddenly—but looking back, the way everything fell into place felt like confirmation. It was as if everything and everyone around me were cheering me on. I now believe that the Holy Spirit was gently leading me—not pushing me but walking beside me—until I could say yes.

As I began my first online class, my heart was pounding, and my hands were trembling. I still remember the fear and my wondering, "Can someone like me really do this?" I decided to rely on what I knew best: perseverance. I realized that the only way forward was through consistent effort. Gradually, the anxiety began to ease.

One of the greatest blessings in my journey has been the support of my professors. Their teaching, patience, and encouragement continue to guide me. The classmates I've met along the way have become sources of insight, comfort, and accountability. In many ways, they have been catalysts, helping me refocus whenever I feel tired or distracted.

Beginning my studies at Central came with many challenges and uncertainties. Beyond academic concerns, I faced very real issues of finances and time management. Of all these challenges, the financial burden—perhaps the most daunting—was lightened by the generosity of people I have never met, whose names and faces I do not know, yet who quietly pray and give in faithful partnership.

Because of Central's supporters and their faithful giving, students like me receive scholarships that lift heavy burdens. Each gift, no matter the size, becomes a source of strength to someone simply trying to keep going. For one person, it means survival. For another, it means hope. And for another still, it becomes the spark that keeps the fire of calling alive. Today, Central students and graduates are serving as pastors, missionaries, counselors, and teachers all over the world. I, too, now serve where God has placed me—sharing the Word, caring for the vulnerable, and living out the Gospel. And it all began with those supporters saying a quiet, faithful yes.

If supporters ever wonder whether their giving truly matters, let me assure them that it does. If they continue to walk with Central, more students will be trained, more lives will be changed, and the Kingdom of God will continue to advance. With deep sincerity, I say to them: Your small acts of support have made God's great work possible.

I've come to believe that the skills I once used to build systems and businesses in the secular world might now be used—humbly and faithfully—for building the Kingdom of God. I don't pretend that my gifts are rare or extraordinary. I know there are many who are more skilled than I am, and countless others who serve with greater passion and deeper sacrifice. And yet, I cannot help but wonder if God brought me all the way to the United States—not to bury my gifts in a storage room of forgotten tools—but to repurpose them for something eternal.

To me, Central is not just a place to study theology. It is a community that equips students to build their lives on the Word of God and to serve the world with the love of Jesus Christ, and I believe this is possible only because of the support, encouragement, and generosity of many.

I am sustained by the quiet, persistent work of the Holy Spirit. Even when I grow weary or feel tempted to take shortcuts, I trust the Spirit continues to uplift me, guiding me to grow—not in pride, but in faith, humility, and endurance. I am here only because God has not given up on me. ✨



8620 W. 110th Street, Suite 200
Overland Park, KS 66210

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



*"God's word doesn't change,
but the way in which
one shares God's word
is always changing.
Central is going to stretch
you emotionally and
spiritually in ways you
can't possibly conceive,
and that's a good thing."*

Rev. Matt Norlen
Master of Divinity, Class of 2000

Your calling. Your values. Your seminary.

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