

## Eden Theological Seminary Celebrates 175 Years

03/27/2025 [Sandi Boehlein](#)



### Celebrating 175 Years of Faithful Ministry: A Seminary's Enduring Legacy

For 175 years, Eden Theological Seminary has stood as a beacon of theological education, equipping generations of students for ministry, scholarship, and service. Since its founding in 1850, the seminary has remained steadfast in its mission to form faithful leaders who engage the world with the gospel, a deep commitment to scripture, and a heart for God's people.

As we commemorate this historic milestone, we reflect on the seminary's journey – its humble beginnings, its growth through challenges and triumphs, and the profound impact it has had on the church and society. This anniversary is not just a celebration of longevity; it is a testament to God's faithfulness and the dedication of faculty, students, alumni, and supporters who have carried forth its mission.

### **A Legacy Rooted in Faith**

Eden Theological Seminary was founded by a visionary group of pastors and theologians who saw the urgent need for well-trained ministers to serve the church. From its earliest days, the seminary emphasized rigorous academic study, spiritual formation, and pastoral training. While the world around it changed, the institution remained anchored in its commitment to theological integrity and excellence.

The seminary's first campus was established in Marthasville, Missouri, where it remained from 1850 to 1883. During these early years, students and faculty lived and studied in a rural setting that, while peaceful, presented challenges related to access and resources. As the seminary grew, it became clear that relocation was necessary for the institution's continued development. In 1883, the German Evangelical Synod of North America moved the seminary to Wellston, a suburb of St. Louis. While this new location provided greater access to urban ministry opportunities, the cramped conditions and business and industry encroachment upon the limited space of the Wellston campus eventually led to another move.

In 1924, the seminary relocated to its current home in Webster Groves. This campus has provided a thriving environment for theological education, fostering a strong sense of community among students, faculty, and alumni. One of the more lighthearted traditions that emerged in the early years at Webster Groves was the initiation of new students – often involving an unexpected dunking in the campus fountain, a tradition that was particularly popular around 1930.

### **Transforming Lives for Generations**

Over the past 175 years, thousands of graduates have gone forth from Eden Theological Seminary to serve in a variety of callings – pastors, servants in the public square, chaplains, educators, counselors, and leaders in nonprofit and social justice ministries. Their impact is immeasurable, as they have planted churches, cared for the hurting, taught in seminaries and universities, and engaged in theological reflection that shapes Christian thought worldwide.

One of the seminary's great joys is hearing the testimonies of alumni who credit their time here with deepening their faith, sharpening their understanding of scripture, and preparing them to serve in a rapidly changing world. These stories are a reminder that theological education is not merely academic -it is transformational.

The community of Eden Theological Seminary includes many families whose roots run deep, with some having family members who attended the seminary at more than one of the physical campuses. Generations of families have passed down their love for theological education and ministry, creating a lasting legacy. One such example is the family of Chris McArdle (Class of 2009), whose great-great-great grandfather, JP Welsch, was among the first eight students of Eden Theological Seminary and graduated from the Marthasville campus in 1853. Chris's grandfather, Carl Kemper, married Betty Welsch, great-granddaughter of JP, and together they brought their four young children with them to Eden in 1957 until Carl's graduation in 1960. Other families whose ministries span multiple generations include the beloved Klemme family (Classes of 1924, 1950, and 2006), the

Limper family (Classes of 1919 and 1948), and the Vonderohe family (Classes of 1909, 1948, 1979).

Additional families whose legacies are woven into the fabric of the seminary include the Grunewald family (Classes of 1884, 1910, 1942 and 1945), the Goetz family (Class of 1930, 1960, 2014), the Hosto family (Classes of 1907, 1917, 1920, 1950), and the Langhorst family (Classes of 1903, 1905, 1934). Many others have left a lasting impact on the seminary through their dedication to its mission. Their shared commitment to faith and theological education has strengthened the seminary's community. Their continued contributions to Eden's mission span generations and their legacy of ministry continues to inspire future generations.

### **Looking Back, Moving Forward**

As we celebrate this milestone, we also look ahead. Theological education today faces new challenges: shifting church dynamics, cultural and political complexities, and evolving models of ministry. Yet, just as it has for nearly two centuries, Eden Theological Seminary remains committed to preparing leaders who are theologically grounded, spiritually mature, and missionally engaged.

With strategic initiatives in online education, partnerships with churches and mission organizations, and efforts to make seminary more accessible to diverse populations, Eden Theological Seminary is positioning itself for the future while staying true to its mission.

### **A Call to Celebration and Gratitude**

This anniversary is an occasion for joy, gratitude, and renewed commitment. Throughout the year, Eden Theological Seminary will host special events, lectures, alumni reunions, and worship services to honor this milestone. These celebrations are an opportunity to reconnect with our history, acknowledge God's blessings, and envision the road ahead.

We invite alumni, supporters, and friends to join us in marking this occasion—not only to celebrate the past but also to invest in the seminary's future. Your prayers, encouragement, and generosity will help ensure that Eden Theological Seminary continues to train faithful leaders for generations to come.

As we give thanks for 175 years of God's provision, we also pray with anticipation for the next chapter of this seminary's story. May we remain faithful to the calling that has sustained us for so long, ever committed to the work of equipping and sending forth servant-leaders for the church and the world.

To God be the glory!