

Pastoral Formation in the LCMS
How Do We Address Pastoral Needs?
By David Wollenburg

Part 1

To some people, the Specific Ministry Proposal may look like a radically new approach to pastoral education. And indeed under the proposal, the *technology* which Synod will use for training pastors is new. However, *philosophically* and *theologically* the proposal stands well within the broader tradition of pastoral education in the LCMS. As this article will demonstrate, for much of our history, the Synod has had two different avenues to pastoral education. And it has frequently affirmed the need for both types of pastors that these approaches produced. It is only within the last several decades of our history that the LCMS has come to think of the M.Div. degree as the primary--if not exclusive--credential for receiving a call into the office of the public ministry within the Synod.

The Specific Ministry proposal recognizes the different needs of the Church, and it seeks to meet the Church's needs through these different avenues of pastoral education. It recognizes the full range of education, experience, and engagement with fellow pastors that can be used to prepare men for the work and office of the Holy Ministry. At the same time it can begin to solve the Synod's need for faithful pastors who will fulfill the Great Commission in this 21st Century.

The Beginnings of the LCMS and the “Theoretical” Seminary

The history of the nineteenth century is the history of the maturing of the United States of America as a nation. During this time the “frontier” virtually disappeared,

commerce and transportation systems developed and the population grew from 5,308,483 to 75,994,575, as a result of waves of immigrants.¹ It was during this period that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was formed in response to “the tide of Lutheran immigration (that) was beginning to surge,”² and the need to call and recall these immigrants to faith.

The year of the 300th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, 1817, was significant for Lutherans all over the world, but especially so for those in Germany. Lutheran historian Abdel Wentz notes that, “The formation during that year of the Prussian Union of Lutheran and Reformed churches by royal decree,”³ caused great distress for those Lutherans who wanted to maintain their confessional identity.

In Dresden an influential Lutheran pastor, Martin Stephan, “a powerful preacher and a man of remarkable personality and great organizing ability,”⁴ gathered a group of followers who emigrated to St. Louis, and Perry County, Missouri, (about 110 miles south of St. Louis). They arrived in their new home in February of 1839. We are told that, “In Stephan’s company there were five other ministers, ten candidates for the ministry, a number of teachers and professional men, merchants, craftsmen, laborers, and farmers - a total of 612 souls.”⁵

¹ Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 2.

² Ibid.

³ Abdel R. Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), 92.

⁴ Ibid., 110.

⁵ Ibid.

Three of those candidates for the ministry, Theodore J. Brohm, Ottomar Fuerbringer, and J. Friederic Buenger, worked during the summer of 1839 to build a log cabin in which to house Concordia College which eventually became Concordia Seminary. The course of study was modeled after that of a German *Gymnasium*. And so were sown the seeds of the theoretical seminary – Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.⁶

In the meantime Pastor Stephan had fallen into disgrace because of “the sins of fornication and adultery, ... and of prodigal maladministration of the property of others, [and] ... false doctrine.”⁷ He was defrocked and on May 31, 1839, “Stephan stooped over a cane ... was conducted to the waiting ferry. [And] ... rowed across the Mississippi River” to Red Bud Illinois.⁸

In the disgrace and confusion that followed, the leadership of the Missouri Lutherans fell to the youthful C. F. W. Walther. From 1839 to his death in 1887 the history of Missouri Lutheranism is closely identified with the story of Walther’s life.⁹

Following Stephan’s banishment, “Some of the pastors, Walther among them, began to doubt their call to the ministry. (And) many of the colonists ... doubted that they were really Christians or that the true church of Christ existed among them at all.”¹⁰

Walther put it this way in a May 4, 1840, letter to his brother:

The chief questions with which we are now concerned are these: are our congregations Christian Lutheran congregations, or are they sects? Have they the power to call and to excommunicate? Are we pastors, or are we

⁶ W. H. T. Dau, *Ebenezer: Review of the Work of the Missouri Synod During Three Quarters of A Century* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 229-230..

⁷ Forster, 418.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 422.

⁹ Wentz, 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

not? Are our calls valid? ... Is it possible for us to have a divine call, since we have forsaken our call in Germany and run away?¹¹

To answer these questions a public debate was held April 15, and 20, 1841, in Altenburg (Perry County), Missouri. Walther presented and defended “the Scriptural view of the doctrine of the Church and the ministry.”¹²

He successfully maintained that the church consists of an invisible communion of saints, that where the true faith is, there the true church is. ... Consequently, he maintained, these congregations of the colonists must be regarded ... as part of the true church of Christ, and as having full authority to call pastors.¹³

Abdel Wentz, says, “This not only eased the minds of the colonists but also established the fundamental principles of church organization which characterize the Missouri Synod to this day.”¹⁴ Later, when as a result of Walther’s work and publications the LCMS was formed in 1847; Walther became its first president and leading theologian.

The Altenburg crises and debate, along with Walther’s later work, *Kirche und Amt* (translated as *Church and Ministry*),¹⁵ are, I believe, at the heart of the debate which continues in the LCMS today concerning the pastoral ministry: Namely a) who should be ordained and b) the relationship of pastors to congregations. The result is that these questions also contribute to the question of whether the preparation of pastors should be primarily “theoretical” or “practical.”

¹¹ Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³ Wentz., 112.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Carl F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987).

For those who, under C. F. W. Walther formed the nucleus of what is today The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, there was clearly a need for a “theoretical” seminary. When ownership of Concordia Seminary was transferred to the LCMS in 1850, the articles of transfer stipulated:

That the institution remain what it is, namely, a college offering courses preparatory for the study of theology and for the training of teachers of elementary and secondary schools, together with a seminary (theological) in which students receive a theoretical training in theology.¹⁶

Thus the “theoretical” seminary historically endeavored “to give men (a) broad basic education and training (to) enable them to function in a proper way as theologians of the church, regardless of the ministry to which they should be called.”¹⁷ In later years the key to this theoretical training in theology was the pre-theological preparation of the student. Entering students were expected to have:

A high level of understanding of the history and literature of the Bible ... a broad liberal arts education ... the ability to use the languages of the Word as it was given to us by God through the holy writers ... Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew for the Old Testament ... Latin to help him study the writings of the early church and of the Reformation; German, to help him unlock the treasures of the great Lutheran teachers.

... In addition he should have the usual courses in the historical development of mankind and some elementary courses dealing with the social, economic, and political problems of the day...and an adequate understanding of the biophysical world (natural and social sciences).¹⁸

The Beginnings of the Practical Seminary

¹⁶ Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 118. (Emphasis added.)

¹⁷ Karl. L. Barth, "Concordia Seminary - A Theological Seminary," in *Light For Our World: Concordia Seminary 150 Years*, ed. John W. Klotz (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Seminary, 1989), 5-6.

¹⁸ Arthur C. Repp, "Pastoral Training of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," in *Toward A More Excellent Ministry*, Ed. Richard R. Caemmerer and Alfred O. Fuerbringer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 63-78. 67-68.

About the same time as the Lutherans from Dresden were immigrating to the United States, a man by the name of Wilhelm Loehe, was being prepared to affect the future of this fledgling American church even though he himself never visited the United States.¹⁹ “When he was ordained in 1831 Wilhelm Loehe was an absolutely convinced, Biblically-oriented, confessionally-bound Lutheran ready to give himself to the pastoral ministry.”²⁰ Eventually he became the pastor of the Lutheran church in the village of Neuendettelsau, Bavaria, where he stayed for the remainder of his ministry. There “the village pastor’s reputation grew” to the point that “his sermons were published throughout Germany and even reached America.”²¹

Meanwhile, in the United States, the Rev. Friedrich C. D. Wyneken, a graduate of the universities of Göttingen and Halle, had begun his work as a missionary.

Using Fort Wayne, Indiana, as a base, Wyneken made Gospel forays into northwestern Ohio, southern Michigan, and northern Indiana, (where) he searched out the lost, lonely, and straying among the scattered German settlers.²²

During a four month mission trip in 1834, Wyneken “organized three congregations, preached 58 times, baptized 68 children and two adults, confirmed one, administered the Lord’s Supper to about 180 persons, married one couple, buried one, and collected \$16.50.”²³ But he felt helpless in the face of the enormity of the task and so

¹⁹ A.M. Bickel, *Our Forgotten Father: A Biography of Pastor William Loehe* (Napoleon, Ohio: Author, 1997), 27.

²⁰ Heintzen, *Love Leaves Home: Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, Mo: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 18-19.

²³ *Ibid.*, Quoted from the *Minutes of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania of 1839*.

began to issue tracts and pamphlets appealing for help, which carried his words back to Germany.²⁴

In Germany, Pastor Loehe read one of Wyneken's pamphlets, titled *An Appeal for the Assistance of the German Protestant Church in North America*. In this pamphlet Wyneken told in graphic detail how German immigrants were dying in the American wilderness without the consolation of the Gospel.²⁵ This, in turn, caused Loehe to issue his own appeal for money and "any pastor, ministerial candidate, or school teacher to volunteer for immediate service in America." The response was immediate, the money poured in, but there were no volunteers.²⁶

Wyneken visited Germany in 1841 where he made personal contact with Loehe. During that visit Wyneken pledged his wholehearted support to Loehe. "After 18 ... months in Germany, Wyneken returned to New York on June 18, 1843, with bag, baggage, and promises. Not the type to wait for others to act, he began in 1844 to train two young men in his Fort Wayne parsonage."²⁷ The theological training for these men, who had both previously taught school, chiefly emphasized preaching and catechizing.²⁸ Wyneken became the second president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod²⁹ He left Ft. Wayne, in 1845 to become pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Baltimore, Maryland.

²⁴ Ibid., 19

²⁵ Heintzen, *Love Leaves Home*, 15.

²⁶ Ibid., 17.

²⁷ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*. 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Wentz, 115.

His successor, Wilhelm Sihler, who became a “founder, professor, and president of the practical seminary in Fort Wayne, ... also resumed in his parsonage the theological training of the two students,” whom Wyneken had begun to prepare for the pastoral ministry.³⁰ What is noteworthy in light of the events to follow is that Sihler, the “son of a Prussian military officer (had) a doctorate from the University of Berlin and (had been) an instructor at Dresden.”³¹ He had come to America in 1843 in response to Wyneken’s appeals for help in mission work among the Germans, and later became the first First-Vice President of the LCMS.³²

The progress of the two students,

...made a deep impression on Sihler and suggested to him the great potential for the church, of a body of pastors with minimal practical training, who could be put into the field quickly, yet would serve effectively. A seminary to train such pastors on American soil was the desperate need of the hour. But to whom could he turn for help? Wilhelm Loehe. Wyneken had already ... called Loehe’s attention to the need for a seminary of sorts. Sihler himself before leaving Germany had visited Loehe and discussed thoroughly the American mission projects. Accordingly, Sihler now proposed to Loehe the founding of a school for the training of orthodox Lutheran pastors on American soil.³³

These three men, Loehe, Wyneken, and Sihler, all classically trained pastors and theologians, had a passion for mission work: the need to spread the Gospel to those in the America who had either fallen away or who had never had the opportunity to learn the truth of the Gospel. “A seminary was the key to an indigenous ministry.”³⁴

³⁰ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 21-23.

³¹ Wentz, 116.

³² Ibid.

³³ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 23.

³⁴ Ibid., 29.

At the urging of Sihler “to establish a seminary on American soil so that the young missionaries, instead of receiving their entire theological training in Germany, might obtain some of their education in America and thus become acclimated to the local conditions,”³⁵ Loehe responded with enthusiasm. And a seminary was born.

Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, was the first institution owned and controlled by the LCMS. Known for most of its history as “the practical seminary,” it spent the majority of its existence (1875-1975) in Springfield, Illinois, before moving back to Ft. Wayne, in 1976, where is it located today.³⁶

The original purpose of the “practical” seminary was defined as, “the training, as quickly as possible, of preachers and pastors for (the church).”³⁷ When its founder, Wilhelm Loehe, deeded the seminary to the Synod in 1847, he wrote, “It should not be a theological institution in the usual sense of the word, but a nursery (*Pflanzschule*) for preachers and pastors, whose study would be a serious preparation for the office itself.”³⁸

Qualification for admission was defined in this way:

Only those young people who not only possess the natural gifts required for the office of the ministry, but who have also been equipped with the needed rudimentary education and in whom a good foundation in knowledge of the saving truth has been laid, will be admitted.³⁹

³⁵ Walter A. Baepler, Editor. *A Century of Blessing: Ft. Wayne, St. Louis, Springfield, 1846-1946*. (Springfield, IL: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1946), 11.

³⁶ Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace* 117.

³⁷ Erich H. Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets: The Anatomy of a Seminary, 1846-1976* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

Both the purpose, and the preparation required of the students of Concordia Theological Seminary, in those early years were designed to meet the practical needs of day-to-day pastoral ministry in the congregations and in the mission fields of the church.

Educational & Geographical Moves

In 1852, the Synod added a third year of study to the Ft. Wayne Seminary's program. Called the proseminary, the first year of study prepared students for the study of theology. This was the beginning of the educational upgrades to the "practical" seminary, but first came some geographical moves.

The combination of overcrowding at the St. Louis Seminary, the dawn of Civil War in the United State, and economic restraints brought an end to the first Fort Wayne residency of Concordia Theological Seminary. When the seminary moved from Ft. Wayne to St. Louis in 1861, the severest shortage of laborers had been met.

The histories of the two seminaries, Meyer's *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, published in 1965, and Heintzen's *Prairie School of the Prophets*, published in 1989, present two different views of the results of that first year. These reports reveal the tension that has existed over the years between the "practical" and "theoretical" tracks of preparation for pastoral ministry. Meyer reports:

There were only 36 students at the St. Louis Concordia in 1861-62. At the close of the school year, ...only six were sent out as pastors. The theoretical Seminary that insisted on the intensive plan of preparation contributed none of these six graduates. But the need for pastors was exerting a great pressure on the leaders of the seminaries and of the Synod.⁴⁰

Heintzen, on the other hand says,

⁴⁰ Meyer, 44.

The newly arrived practical seminary was the larger of the two divisions, and the combined enrollment in 1861-62 was only 36. At the close of the school year six graduates entered the ministry, all from the practical division. At the beginning of the 1862 school year, there were 28 in the practical division and 13 in its proseminary. In view of the dire needs of the church, recruits were few.⁴¹

Men recruited for the practical “division” from Germany had met the needs of the church. By 1861, 106 of the Missouri Synod’s 155 pastors were alumni of the Ft. Wayne Seminary.

Meanwhile the “proseminary,” or “pre-seminary,” still located in Ft. Wayne, eventually began to send more men to the theoretical seminary. But the tensions remained, as did the difference in the number of graduates. Baepler notes, “By 1872 the theoretical seminary at St. Louis had graduated 130 candidates for the ministry, while the practical seminary at Fort Wayne-St. Louis had prepared 298 men as missionaries and pastors.”⁴²

With the two Seminaries combined and more and more students in attendance, The Synod soon faced a housing problem. It became a question of either erecting additional buildings as a part of the south St. Louis campus, or of moving the practical seminary to another place. The matter was decided when property and a building erected in 1854 by the North Illinois Synod in Springfield, Illinois, became available to the Synod. Thus the Convention of the LCMS in 1874 elected to separate the two seminaries “organically” and move the practical seminary to Springfield, Illinois.⁴³

⁴¹ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophet*, 57.

⁴² Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 127.

⁴³ Baepler, *A Century of Blessing*, 21-22.

There is general agreement that while the purpose of this move was, on the surface, a purely practical one designed to relieve the housing problem, there was also a deeper motive involved. “The practical seminary with its reduced training program had been able to produce many pastors equipped to perform basic, routine work in parish. But Walther (and the Synod) was not minded to settle for numbers at the expense of academic training.”⁴⁴ Indeed the histories of both seminaries report a private letter of Walther’s to a pastor C. M. Zorn, dated 23 November 1876:

Just between you and me, the larger number of so-called “practical preachers” in our synod has always been our weak side, since more and more of these have been added, who, before they entered the theological seminary, were not only devoid of practically all mental development but also weak in both ability and character. They are in danger of becoming our Achilles heel. In their ignorance they often see heresies where nothing of the sort exists. I merely plead with you, have patience with the dullards.⁴⁵

The combining of the two seminaries at St. Louis in 1861, followed by the separation of the two seminaries in 1875, established the direction of Synod’s system of preparing men for pastoral ministry. Theological education in the LCMS was to become more and more focused on “theoretical” training versus “practical” training.

The System Established and Upgraded

At the same time as the Ft. Wayne Seminary was moved to St. Louis, the “proseminary program” was moved to Ft. Wayne and became a separate entity. The result was the beginning of the Concordia College preparatory system of the LCMS. Richard Solberg reports it this way:

⁴⁴ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 66.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 67, and Meyer, 43.

When in 1881 the state of Indiana amended its charter and officially designated this institution as Concordia College, it confirmed the pattern under which the Missouri Synod would eventually establish 11 other similar institutions as feeders for its major theological (and theoretical) seminary in St. Louis.⁴⁶

Beginning in the 1920's it is reported that "more and more people asked questions about the LCMS pre-ministerial system. A few clergy wanted to know why they could not have a B.A. besides a seminary diploma."⁴⁷ The move was on to upgrade the education of those who were preparing for the pastoral ministry.

The result was the establishment of Concordia Senior College in Ft. Wayne after many years of discussion. The decision was made in 1947, when the Synod adopted the recommendation of the Board for Higher Education "that Synod establish a two-year senior college (junior and senior years) as an additional unit in the professional training of ministerial students."⁴⁸ And by "September, 1957, the first year class began at Concordia Senior College, Ft. Wayne, Indiana."⁴⁹

On March 29, 1962, the North Central Accrediting Association accredited the Senior College. Which led in turn to regional accreditation of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and it began to offer the B.D. degree to its graduates.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Richard W. Solberg, *Lutheran Higher Education in North America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 149.

⁴⁷ Edgar Walz, *Diamond Bricks Live On In The Scandinavian Village* (Freeman S. Dakota: Pine Hill Press, Inc, 1998), 40. (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁸ John W. Behnken, *This I Recall* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 70.

⁴⁹ Walz, 60-62.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

But while Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois continued to prepare men of various backgrounds. “Almost imperceptibly, the seminary was reshaping and strengthening itself for the future.”⁵¹ It expanded its curricular offerings and faculty, and increased its enrollment to 433 by 1959.⁵² And it was “beginning to look more like the St. Louis seminary every day.”⁵³

By 1967, “the Springfield seminary had become a functional part of the Synodical system (and) the New York Convention of that year made it an integral part.”⁵⁴ The Board for Higher Education of the LCMS, in its report to that convention said, “In the United States professional theological study is post baccalaureate. Both seminaries do and should work at this level.”⁵⁵

But then came another “upgrade,” and this one was precipitated by changes on the American scene of theological education.

From B.D. to M.Div.: Another “Upgrade”

The book, *The Advancement of Theological Education*, was published in 1957. This book was a follow-up to an extensive survey conducted by the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS), the predecessor of today’s ATS

⁵¹ Ibid., 195.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 198.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 204. (Emphasis added.)

(Association of Theological Schools),⁵⁶ of its member institutions and some other schools as well. Throughout the work the presumed divinity degree is clearly the B.D.⁵⁷

At the same time, in the same work, the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) was being put forward as a replacement for the B.D. designation. *The Fact Book on Theological Education 1970-1971* indicates that by that year, two-thirds of the enrollments for 3-year degree programs among accredited member institutions were in M.Div. programs rather than B.D.⁵⁸

And so in 1971, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, stated the following in its report to the Synodical Convention in Milwaukee:

B. Change in Degree Nomenclature

The American Association of Theological Schools has adopted the position that assumes that the Bachelor of Divinity degree is no longer appropriate as the first theological degree and that the B.D. will be discontinued. AATS further assumes that the Master of Divinity is an appropriate, recognized degree for ordination for ministry.

With the concurrence of the Board for Higher Education, the Board of Control authorized the implementation of this change in degree nomenclature so that with the present academic year our graduates will receive the M.Div. degree instead of the B.D. Appropriate measures are now being formulated which will enable former B.D. recipients to convert their degrees to M.Div. degrees.⁵⁹

Similarly, in the same 1971 Convention Workbook, the report from Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, contains this statement: “The class that will vicar

⁵⁶ The ATS is the national accrediting agency of Theological Schools and Seminaries in the United States, its opinions are therefore formative for the way in which these schools structure their programs.

⁵⁷ H. Richard Neibuhr, Daniel Day Williams and James M. Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

⁵⁸ *The Fact Book on Theological Education 1970-71* (Dayton, Ohio: American Association of Theological Schools, 1971), 39.

⁵⁹ Sent to Reconcile: Convention Manual (Reports and Overtures), 49th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, July 9-16, 1971 (St. Louis, MO, 1971), 288.

next year will be the first to receive the new master of divinity (M.Div) degree, which will replace the old B.D. degree.”⁶⁰

The break had been made. No longer was the emphasis on the “theological diploma,” as the first professional degree. Beginning in 1971, in St. Louis, and 1974, in Springfield, the emphasis of the program of pastoral education was viewed as graduate or “theoretical” theological education. The intentionally “practical” track of preparation for the pastoral ministry had disappeared from the seminaries of the LCMS **and the preferred route of preparation was attainment of the Master of Divinity.** Or so it would appear.

Final Changes: Synod “Blows Up”

There is not time or space to go into what happened in the following years in any detail. But a doctrinal controversy over Biblical interpretation that had been brewing in the Synod since sometime in the 1950’s exploded in the early 1970’s. As a result, on February 20, 1974, most of the faculty and students of Concordia Seminary “walked out” and formed a new Seminary named “Seminex,” meaning “Concordia Seminary in Exile.”⁶¹ Eventually a large number of pastors and congregations of the Synod left; formed their own organization, and eventually became a part of today’s Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 291.

⁶¹ Frederick W. Danker, *No Room in the Brotherhood* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton Publishing House, Inc, 1977), 302ff.

Then, following the 1974 “walk-out” in St. Louis, the Synod in Convention in 1975, resolved to move the Springfield seminary back to Fort Wayne on the “beautiful campus of Concordia Senior College, whose program was to be phased out.”⁶² Needless to say there was much consternation in Ft. Wayne and throughout the Synod, but the deed was done and the move took place on July 1, 1976, and “the two schools occupied and operated on the Ft. Wayne campus during 1976-77.”⁶³

The Senior College, which had been instrumental in moving the Synod’s preparation of pastors from a two-track system of “practical” vs. “theoretical” formation to a single system of graduate education for pastors, was no more.

An Observation about Practical Training and Outreach

The graph that follows shows, the LCMS reached its peak membership in the early 1970’s, just about the time of both the “walk-out” and the closing of Concordia Senior College, Ft. Wayne, Indiana. These events, in turn follow the demise of the “practical” training route for pastoral education in the LCMS and one cannot note any of these events without also noting the others.

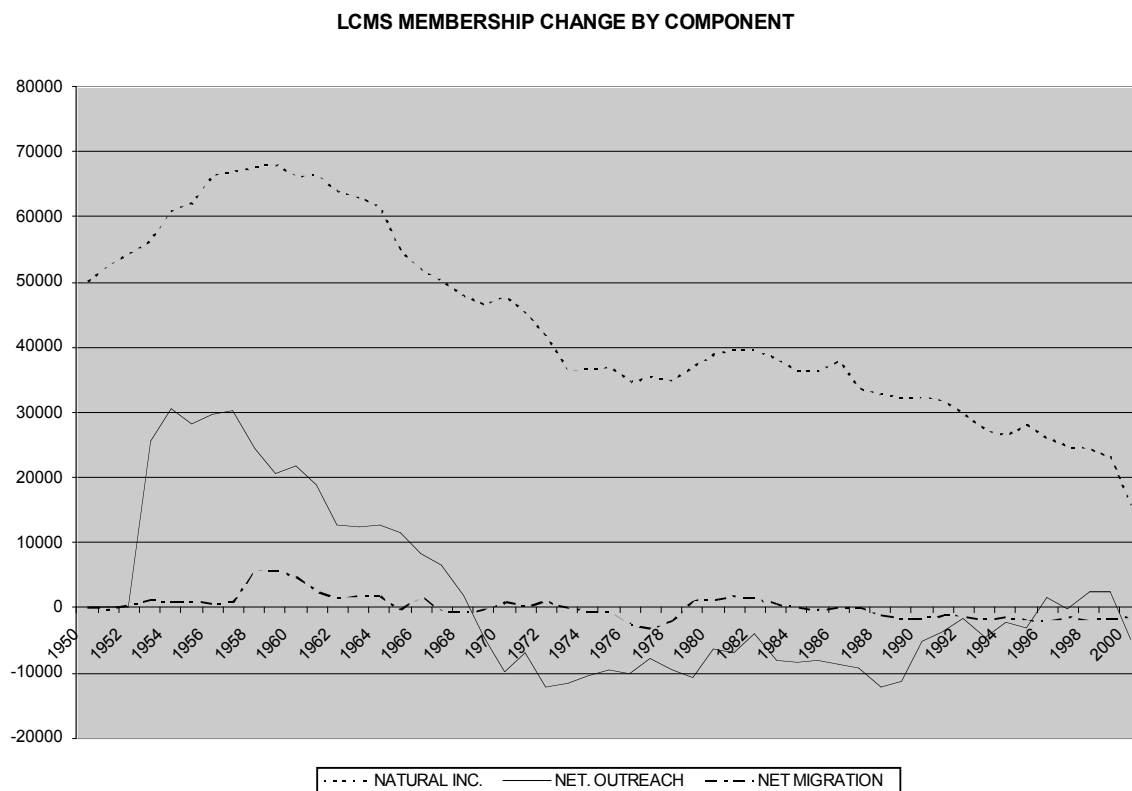
John O’Hara, Director of the Office of Statistics of the LCMS who provided this table, noted in the e-mail which accompanied it: “As you can see, the primary source of our membership growth was natural increase, driven by the baby boom birth rate for

⁶² Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 211.

⁶³ Walz, 102

white females in the 1950's and early 1960's. Virtually all U.S. mainline denominations show similar trends, i.e., growth rates tied to the white birth rate.⁶⁴

Table 2



Source: John O'Hara, Director of the Office of Statistics, LCMS⁶⁵

While I agree with that assessment, I do not believe it tells the whole story. It must also be noted that the table shows that the “Net Outreach” of the LCMS since 1950 was the strongest in the late 50's, when the “practical” seminary in Springfield was still fulfilling its original purpose and its graduates were still filling the pulpits of the LCMS.

Since about 1969, when practical pastoral formation entered rapid decline in the LCMS, the “Net Outreach” of the LCMS has been below even the 1950 level for all but

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ John O'Hara <john.ohara@lcms.org>, "Peak Membership," 22 December 2004.

about three years (1997-2000). Other figures show that during the period 1982-2002, the number of “Pastors, missionaries, and teachers” in the LCMS has *dropped* from 5,840 to 5,373, while the number of vacant parishes *grew* from 586 to 1,175, and the number of graduates of the seminaries entering the ministry *fell* from 351 to 157 per year.⁶⁶ Based on current enrollment these numbers are changing as the number of graduates is increasing, but it does not appear that the current trend is significant enough to reverse the demographic slide of the LCMS without additional intervention.

⁶⁶ The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Department of General Services, Office of rosters and Statistics, *The Lutheran Annual 2004* (2003), 722

Part 2

The Influence of Mission(s), Church Growth, and Lay Ministry

“The Christian faith is intrinsically missionary...Christianity is missionary by its very nature, or it denies its very reason for existence.”⁶⁷ But the church has not always seemed to pay close attention to its mission.

By the early 1960’s, mainline churches were beginning to experience the loss of members. The growth spurts of the 1940’s and 1950’s had come to an end. “Many younger Americans grew up disengaged from any form of traditional faith community and their worldviews differed sharply from those of their parents and grandparents regarding religious practice...with devastating effects on business-as-usual in mainline churches.”⁶⁸

Many answers to this dilemma have been proposed. They range from Diana Butler Bass’s call for the renewal in local congregations so that they may become *Practicing Congregations*,⁶⁹ to Stephen Compton’s call for *Rekindling the Mainline*. Compton’s central thesis is that “Old denominations are renewed as the percentage of new churches in their total number of churches increases.”⁷⁰ Whatever the choice, one

⁶⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in 'Theology of Mission* (NY:Orbis, 1991), 8-9.

⁶⁸ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 22-23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁰ Stephen C. Compton, *Rekindling the Mainline* (The Alban Institute, 2003), 47.

thing needed is an answer to the question, “Where do we find leaders for new churches, and how do we prepare them to lead?”⁷¹

One of the answers is the move toward the ministry of the laity, or ‘lay ministry.’” And so, concurrent with the move toward graduate theological education, an emphasis on “lay ministry” also developed in the LCMS.

. The term owes its genesis to the Reverend Oscar E. Feucht, who became the first full time executive of adult education for the Synod in 1946.⁷² Although his 1974 book, *Everyone A Minister*, was such a huge “hit” in the LCMS that by October 1976, it was already into its third printing, he has been largely misunderstood.

Feucht has been accused of “redefining theological terms” by using the word “ministry” for the work of the laity.⁷³ In fact, what he concludes is, “The exercise of this universal priesthood does not do away with the institutional church or the necessity of the pastoral office.” He continues:

It is a God-ordained basic means to multiply the church’s ministry by utilizing the full membership of a parish; it is carried out not only in the church edifice, but in the family, the neighborhood, the community, in fact, throughout the world wherever there are disciples of Jesus Christ; in this way it fulfills the great commission which Christ gives to all who accept Him as Savior and Lord.⁷⁴

LLTI – Lutheran Lay Training Institute

⁷¹ Ibid.. 161.

⁷² Alberto Garcia, *Church Leadership Seminar - Student Manual* (Mequon, WI: Concordia University Wisconsin Print Shop, 2004), 30.

⁷³ Rolf Preus, "Ministers: What is Their Job? Who is Their Boss? Why Do We Need Them?" (www.christforus.org/Papers/Content/ministers.html, 16 November 1991), accessed: 19 April 2005, 2.

⁷⁴ Oscar E. Feucht, *Everyone A Minister* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), 149.

Under Feucht's leadership the LCMS encouraged the establishment of Lutheran Bible Institutes in the congregations of the Synod to train laity for full time service. The 1950 Synodical Convention adopted "Resolution 3," a memorial titled "*For Such a Day as This-More Men for Christ!*" The subtitle of the memorial is "A Call for Greater Lay Enlistment." It first "Resolved," reads:

That our congregations throughout Synod launch out upon an intensive effort for the ***enlistment and training of the laity*** for every phase of the Church's work, and that our laity as such be alerted and encouraged to discharge its priestly functions

And it concludes with this "Resolved:"

That Synod express its joy over the fact that an ever-increasing number of lay people are manifesting an interest in serving the Church on a *full-time basis*, and that it stand ready to offer guidance to these people and use them whenever possible.⁷⁵

The story does not end there.

In 1959 the Synod approved the creation of a "two-year training school," for the laity. And on September 19, 1961, the Lutheran Lay Training Institute (LLTI) opened its doors on the campus of Concordia College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Now called "Concordia University and is located in Mequon, Wisconsin). The 1962 Synodical convention passed a resolution in support of the Institute, and its graduates became recognized as "Certified Lay Ministers of the Synod."⁷⁶

In 1971-72 the University began an extension program for lay ministry training. The Extension Program was shifted to "regional centers" for instruction in 1992. The

⁷⁵ *Reports and Memorials Twenty-Sixth Delegate Synod, Forty-First Regular Convention, June 21-30, 1950* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 376. (370-377). Emphasis original.

⁷⁶ *Proceeding of the Forty-Fifth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 1962). Resolution 1-69, 90.

faculty and Board of Regents of the University approved the TEE model (Theological Education by Extension, distance education model) of instruction as a part of that move.⁷⁷

And so “lay ministry” and TEE became established as a part of LCMS history.

Hispanic Institute of Theology

In 1979 a Board for Missions report called TEE “a tremendously important open door.”⁷⁸ This “open door” was next used in the LCMS to meet the need of ministering to the growing numbers of Hispanic immigrants in the United States.

Alberto Garcia, Director of the Lay Ministry Program since 1992, records his accession to the program (and the beginning of a new initiative) with this paragraph:

During the 1977-78 school year Concordia College, Milwaukee under the direction of President Wilbert Rosin and Dean David Schmiel in consultation with Hispanic pastors developed a “Program to Train Hispanic Lay Workers.” Rev. Alberto L. Garcia was approved by the Board of Regents to carry this out.⁷⁹

At about that same time, Doug Groll who had been a missionary in Venezuela in the late 1960’s, and early 1970’s, was asked to “restart” the Institute for Hispanic Studies at Concordia College in River Forest, Illinois⁸⁰.

It had been established as a residential program, funded jointly by The Board of Missions and the Board for Higher Education (BHE) of the LCMS. But it was very

⁷⁷ Garcia, 30-35.

⁷⁸ Suelflow, 388-9.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ I am indebted to Doug Groll for the information that follows regarding the Hispanic Institute of Theology. He shared this information with me in an interview conducted in my office on February 17, 2005.

expensive: “Sometimes there would be two students for a year, sometimes ten, but always three faculty members.”⁸¹

Therefore, in 1985 the Executive Director of the BHE went to the Advisory Board of the Institute for Hispanic Studies to seek a less expensive way to accomplish its purpose. Dr. Groll had been introduced to the work of Rev. Dr. Ralph Winter and the Presbyterian Church in developing TEE in Venezuela. Based on his experience, and with the aid of Rev. Rudolph Blanke, who had headed up the extension program of the LCMS in Venezuela, the TEE model was presented and adopted.

In 1986 Doug Groll was called to lead the project. Late in the spring of that year both seminaries of the LCMS (St. Louis and Fort Wayne) were invited to be involved. St. Louis responded positively and was represented by Dr. Jack Preus, III, dean of the faculty of the seminary. On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving of that year the Board of Regents of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, called Dr. Groll to be the Director of the Hispanic Institute of Theology of Concordia Seminary. TEE had come to the Seminary, albeit at a deployed location (River Forest, Illinois). Its influence was just beginning to be felt, but it was that influence that also raised some major questions.

Wichita Deacons and DELTO

One of the major questions raised was the question of the relationship of the pastoral office to the laity of the church. It is not a new question for the LCMS, as the previous section has intimated, but it did need to be addressed. And it was.

⁸¹ Ibid.

In 1989, the LCMS responded with a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled: “Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement.” Here is a part of what it says:

The Lutheran church, recognizing that both the priesthood of believers and the one who holds the pastoral office have important functions to fulfill in carrying out the mission of the church, rejects all tendencies to confuse them by failing:

- a. to recognize that the pastoral office has been instituted by God for the special purpose of publicly preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, and remitting and retaining sins;
- b. to recognize the importance of training pastors for this special office;
- c. to recognize that lay men and women are spiritual priests who have an important role to play in the spiritual life and mission of the church; and
- d. to recognize that the distinctive task of the pastoral office is not that of organizing other people to do the “real ministry” but is that of serving them faithfully with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the holy sacraments.⁸²

This report was “commended to the Synod for reference and guidance” by the 1989 LCMS convention.⁸³

At that same convention (1989) the LCMS adopted “The Recommendations of Lay Worker Study Committee Report as Amended.”⁸⁴ Resolution 3-05B authorized “the training of lay workers by Districts and other entities for service within the District.” It established the title of “deacon” for the men who would be licensed by their District Presidents. And it set strict guidelines for their training and service.⁸⁵ Because this

⁸² *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures), 57th Regular Convention (1989)*, 306. The entire document is contained on pages 302-15 of the Workbook. Printed as a pamphlet the current quote is on pages 19-20.

⁸³ Suelflow, 322.

⁸⁴ *Convention Proceedings, 57th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis, MO, 1989)*, 111-113.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

convention was held in Wichita, Kansas, these men became known as “Wichita Deacons.”

But “Missouri” was not happy! Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger, Chairman of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Synod and a member of the “Lay Worker Study Committee,” followed the adoption of Resolution 3-05B with an address to the convention in which he supported the actions of the convention. In that address he said:

We have many dedicated lay ministers who for up to 20 years have been asked to carry out a ministry of Word and Sacrament without recognition or supervision, without roster or doctrinal oversight. If we want to undermine Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, the surest way is to leave things the way they are, and to have no accountability or supervision. The adoption of Res. 3-05 does not initiate a single new practice in the doctrine of the ministry of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It will, however, initiate proper supervision of those practices which we have long recognized as being consistent with our understanding of the doctrine of the ministry so that we may all together *tell everyone what He has done*.⁸⁶

Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession makes this statement: “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.”⁸⁷ But not everyone was convinced that the “Wichita Deacons” really met the criteria of being regularly called (the Latin is “*rite vocatus*”). That discomfort led to the genesis of the DELTO program. We turn next to that history.

DELTO Beginnings

⁸⁶ Ibid., 114. “*Tell Everyone what He has done*,” was the theme of the convention.

⁸⁷ Theodore G. Tappert, Editor, *Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 36.

Following the 1989 “Wichita Deacons” resolution (see above), there was, as has already been noted, a great deal of consternation in the Synod concerning these under-trained workers. But that convention had also passed another resolution: Resolution 6-16 *Resolved,*

That the Synod in convention direct the Board for Higher Education Services (BHES) to immediately begin to study the establishment of alternate routes to the pastoral ministry in addition to the normal Master of Divinity or colloquy programs.⁸⁸

One of the Overtures (6-15) that lead to this resolution was from the Atlantic District. It pointed to the shortage of men entering the seminaries at that time as well as the need to open up routes to the pastoral ministry for men of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.⁸⁹

In 1995, the Synod passed a resolution “To Establish the Procedure by Which Laymen Licensed to Perform Function of the Pastoral Office Be Called and Ordained into the Ministerium of the LCMS.”⁹⁰ Included in that resolution was the following addition to Bylaw 2.09 of the Synodical Handbook, “Eligibility for Individual Membership:”

Candidates who have satisfactorily completed an approved Synodical educational program for the pastoral ministry involving extensive use of distance learning and/or a mentoring system must be declared qualified for a first call and recommended by the faculty of one of the seminaries

⁸⁸ *Convention Proceedings, 57th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 1989), 150.

⁸⁹ *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures), 57th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 1989), 246.

⁹⁰ *Convention Proceedings, 59th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 1995), 120-1.

before the effective date of the first call to service in the church, as assigned by the Board of Assignments as provided by Bylaw 2.11.⁹¹

TEE had “officially” established its influence on the theological training programs of the LCMS and DELTO was on its way. Indeed, even though DELTO is not named in the 1995 resolution, it had already been established at the Ft. Wayne Seminary.

On November 11, 1994, the Academic Policies Committee of Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS), Ft. Wayne, Indiana had passed a “Proposal for faculty consideration: Texas/Southern Program.”⁹² This resulted in the formation of the first DELTO Cohort – the so-called SOTEX 1 group.

The Atlantic District, having submitted Overture 6-15 to the 1989 Synodical Convention,⁹³ was interested in bringing DELTO to its area of the country. What followed were a number of meetings to discuss what began as “The Manhattan Projects” in the fall of 1993.

By July of 1995, DELTO had become “An Alternative Route to the Ordained Ministry—A Proposal.” Later that year (October 1995) an “Operating Agreement” was formed to begin DELTO in the Northeast. The document itself says:

This current project design represents the cooperative work of the Districts, the College (Concordia Bronxville, NY), Seminary (CTS, Ft.

⁹¹ Ibid., 121.

⁹² On file with the Author. For this document and several others I am indebted to Dr. Daniel Mattson, Associate Executive Director, Planning & Administration Mission Team, Board for Mission Services. Dr. Mattson was involved in the early discussion that led to DELTO and other educational programs of the Synod. Others from the Board for Mission Services who have been involved include Dr. Robert Scudieri, Associate Executive Director, National Mission Team, Rev. David Born and Rev. Chris Reinke the Northeast and Western Regional Directors respectively.

⁹³ *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures), 57th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 1989), 246.

Wayne) and the Synod (Standing Committee for Pastoral Ministry [SCPM]). With all constituents kept fully informed.⁹⁴

So, DELTO had begun based on the TEE model of theological education. No longer was theological formation and education being left solely to the seminaries of the Synod. Synodical Districts, the Board for Mission Services, and others had also become involved. But no one was really satisfied with what was being done.

Therefore, an “Oversight Committee” was established by the LCMS in the summer of 2001. Its purpose was to “fix DELTO.”⁹⁵

Multiple issues have been addressed; namely, admission requirements, theological issues, and nomenclature (what to call the students and graduates). Some of those issues are revealed in the following letter of recommendation for a student desiring to enter the program dated 19 June 2003:

To Whom It May Concern,

Please know that the congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church is, by vote, unanimously in favor of entering the DELTO program. As a congregation we are satisfied with Deacon⁹⁶’s ministry to the congregation and the community. We do not believe that ordination will make him any more a pastor to us, but we understand that it is necessary for Deacon To feel equal to his peers in the church. We hope we can help him, and ourselves, to achieve respectability in the eyes of our brethren.

*Yours truly,
Congregational Chairman*

This letter illustrates a multilayered problem. The men who graduate from the DELTO program desire recognition by the church. The congregations they serve have

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *Convention Proceedings, 61st Regular Convention The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 2001), Resolution 3-08B, 111.

⁹⁶ See: *Convention Proceedings, 57th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, 1989). Resolution 3-05B. This Convention of the LCMS established the title “deacon” for men serving temporarily in Word and Sacrament ministry “in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies.” It said, “This title would distinguish him from an ordained pastor.” These ‘Wichita Deacons’ were the original target of DELTO.

the same need. These congregations recognize that they are not just “congregational” on their own; they are also a part of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. They are connected by choice and they wish that connection to be recognized by the whole church body. These congregations feel that they need both: Membership in the LCMS, and a certified and ordained DELTO pastor in order to survive. It is the legitimacy of DELTO graduates that is questioned by many clergy and laity alike.

It should be noted, however, that this is not a problem that is unique to theological education. A 2005 article in “The American Journal of Distance Education” makes the point that even those who earn “online doctoral degrees” from recognized and reputable institutions have difficulty finding positions with those same institutions. Some of the problems expressed were:

A number of respondents expressed concern about the quality of the education received in this format. ...For at least some of the search committee chairs, a degree earned online was not of sufficient rigor and would be regarded as suspect. ... (And) References to (face-to-face) interaction with faculty and fellow students, a known shortcoming of online courses (sic), were among the most frequent comments.⁹⁷

Summary and Conclusions

Robert Ferris, in his book *Renewal in Theological Education*, documents the fact that since about 1930, “efforts toward evaluation and redirection of theological education have formed a sub-theme for the programs of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada”. He expresses disappointment with almost every effort cited – from the work of H. Richard Niebuhr and “The Study of Theological

⁹⁷ Jonathan Adams, and Margaret H. DeFleur, "The Acceptability of a Doctoral Degree Earned Online as a Credential for Obtaining a Faculty Position," *The American Journal of Distance Education* Volume 19, No. Number 2 (2005), 80-81.

Education in the United States and Canada,”⁹⁸ in the 1950’s, to the work of Edward Farley beginning in the 1970’s. Of the latter he says, “Farley’s proposals for renewal are disappointing, to say the least,” because, he continues, “Farley is unsurpassed as a diagnostician. What remains to be developed is a compelling prescription to cure the disease.”⁹⁹

In the LCMS the terms, “practical” and “theoretical,” have historically been used to define differing levels of preparation for theological training. They also define the depth and content of theological education. “Practical” training was designed to train men as “quickly as possible” for the pastoral ministry,¹⁰⁰ while the “theoretical” training was designed to prepare men to “function ... as theologians of the church.”¹⁰¹

The Specific Ministry Pastor proposal aims to reduce the perceived inequities in such terminology by first of all ensuring that men in this program are recognized as pastors of the congregations where they serve: they will occupy the Office of the Holy ministry for the people in that place. At the same time, the proposal provides the opportunity for these men to continue in training so that through continuing education their theological skill and acumen might continue to be fostered and grow.

⁹⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 108. This is Niebuhr’s report of the study by the AATS. It is also the source of the description of residential seminaries (theological schools) as the “Intellectual center of the Church’s life.” It was this study that led AATS and its member schools to embrace the M.Div. preferred first degree for pastors.

⁹⁹ Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education: Strategies for Change* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1990), 7-20.

¹⁰⁰ Heintzen, 37.

¹⁰¹ Barth, 5.

Contrary to what it may seem to be this is in now way and diminution of the Pastoral Office. Currently men in the DELTO program, which has shown its worth by producing a number of quality pastors, serve as “vicars” for up to 4 years, and “licensed Lay Deacons” by serve for many years as lay deacons. In both instances the circumstance of the situation in which they are serving requires that they absolve sins, administer the sacraments, and (of course) preach the Word. While some may worry about the un-ordained proclaiming the Word without proper theological training and others may be concerned about their administration of the sacraments without benefit of ordination, local circumstance and/or ignorance makes it necessary.

By moving toward and early ordination, supervised ministry, and required continuing education, the SMP proposal upholds and honors the one Office of the Holy Ministry to degree not now possible in our circles. It also honors the right of the local congregation to call one of its “own” as pastor and then to nominate that individual for continuing theological education using a distance education model.

By anticipating a minimum completion time (for the full program) of 4-5 years it honors the scriptural mandate for a seasoned ministry. And by making an on-going program of theological education available it recognizes the need for depth and breadth of training and experience.

Because men who are admitted to this program must be nominated (or identified) for admission to theological training by a local congregations and/or the local District, we are assured that men will not enter this program simply as a matter of personal convenience, but will be sent by the very Church that has and will call them. As they are

formed they will also be serving, and as they learn they will also be translating their lessons to life experiences.

In the meantime, men who for one reason or another “self identify” as having the gifts and inclination for pastoral ministry but who have not yet been called to serve will continue to enter the residential programs of the Seminaries where they will be exposed to the best theological minds our Church has to offer. As they gain knowledge and experience in residence they will be formed as theologians of the church. “Who knows whether (they) have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

The Specific Ministry Pastor Proposal offers us the best of both world, and seeks to resolve the clergy-laity tension of ministry that has been a driving force in our beloved Synod for years. We dare not allow this time to pass.