

THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES – PREPARING PASTORS TO *SHEPHERD* GOD’S PEOPLE: PUTTING THE GOSPEL INTO PRACTICE

The institutional, cultural, and ecumenical challenges to seminaries in forming Lutheran pastors today were superbly engaged by the conference, and now we turn to the theological challenges in preparing pastors to *shepherd* God’s people, putting the Gospel into practice. May God connect our heads and hearts to address the theological challenges. As for myself, I am eager to talk with you about theological education because it is a joyous vocation for me and one that I feel extremely blessed to be able to do. With very little prompting, I could talk for a long time about different aspects of it. However, truthfully and realistically, I will abide by our covenant of time and topic.

As Executive Director for the Board for Pastoral Education in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod my perspective is that the theological challenges are multi-faceted, and, as with light cast upon the diamond of pastoral education in the seminaries, its refractions beam brightly at many angles into the theological education universe. The theological challenges, specifically as challenges in the preparation of pastors to *shepherd* God’s people, in summary are:

1. Preparing **theological** pastors to *shepherd* God’s people
2. Preparing **pastoral** pastors to *shepherd* God’s people
3. Preparing pastors at **varying educational levels** and via **varying educational means/media** to *shepherd* God’s people
4. Inviting the church to understand the challenges and to join in a creative partnership with the seminaries to prepare pastors to *shepherd* God’s people

5. Preparing pastors for **pastoral practice** to *shepherd* God's people
6. Preparing pastors for **today's context** to *shepherd* God's people
7. Preparing pastors to *shepherd* God's people in the LCMS¹

Preparing **theological** pastors to *shepherd* God's people

The first challenge is to prepare theological pastors. We need to make the case not only in our classrooms, but also throughout the church, that theology is more important today than ever. Postmodern culture is fundamentally hostile to the Gospel, because it is hostile to any god which is not of its own devising. We need to prepare pastors who know how to think theologically in the face of that kind of intellectual hostility. We need to make it clear that theology is not a "plug and play" peripheral; doing theology is not a matter of FAQs. Theology is a way of thinking and a way of living, rooted in the Scriptures, the Creeds, and for us the Lutheran Confessions.²

The challenge to prepare theological pastors is not new, but it has to be primary. We need to prepare pastors who are themselves rooted in the Gospel, see themselves in Gospel terms, and who are rejoicing in the Gospel. Obviously only the Holy Spirit can do that work, when and where he grants faith. But this challenge must be at the top of every one of our lists.

We need to send out pastors who actually think in Lutheran categories. All of the theological disciplines need to do a good job, a better job, in this

¹ William W. Carr, Jr., Assistant Professor, Exegetical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, in a 19 December 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann's request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper, was an effective resource for the form of the outline.

² Carr.

regard. The "options" for how to think are more available than ever before. To know what our underpinnings are, our essential categories, if you will, is important.³ To prepare competent, faithful Lutheran pastors in our day is especially important in light of the fact that for some confessional Lutheran theology is a liability and hindrance to the church's mission.

There is more to be said about the challenge of affirming a learned ministry. What Mark Noll said of American evangelicals could forecast the future of Lutheranism as well regarding the failure of the church to sustain a serious intellectual life. We must admit that theological education in some specific programs, at least, has lacked the intellectual muscle. To impact the modern world with the Gospel, seminary faculties and students need to increase their efforts at critical thinking within a specifically Christian framework within a Lutheran confessional framework. They need to apply that thought to biblical criticism, historical inquiry, philosophical studies, linguistics, and the arts.⁴

Acknowledging that there is no inherent contradiction between rigorous reason and fervent faith, our seminaries and theological education network should continue to foster strong commitment and robust scholarship. We

³Jeffrey A. Gibbs, Professor, Exegetical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 30 November 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann's request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper.

⁴Russell H. Dilday, "Theological Education at the Edge of a New Century," in *Theological Education* (published by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Pittsburgh, PA), Vol. 36, Number 2 (Spring 2000), 38.

can maintain our doctrinal standards without being obscurantist, reactionary, or cranky.

My point of view is that this calls for 21st-century seminary students to be seriously immersed in biblical language texts. They need to develop a theological framework, to cultivate the life of the mind so that future generations who follow us in both pulpit and pew will have a vigorous, lively, and intellectually credible faith to proclaim and believe. I believe we must help each other to develop an intellectual and spiritual framework so that we can live and articulate our faith within a global society and apply that faith to complex contemporary problems.⁵

To summarize in a sentence and to move us to the next challenge, I think the first challenge is to get our pastors thinking about life theologically, and then to put the Scriptures within the context of people's everyday lives. It's easy to teach dogmatics, and to give people the right answers. The challenge is to have pastors become reporters and observers of life, so that they can see what's going on in the lives of people, and interpret the world within the larger meaning of God's work in Christ. We must teach our students, not simply to know the Bible or doctrine, but to extrapolate from the texts their meaning for life and theology today.⁶

Preparing **pastoral** pastors to *shepherd* God's people

⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

⁶ Peter Scaer, Assistant Professor, Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, 5 December 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann's request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper.

The second challenge is preparing pastoral theologians. Some people remark to me that the seminaries are doing well in teaching theology, but less so in forming people relational skills in our students and candidates. Seminaries have to take that to heart and try to balance between the first challenge, to prepare theological pastors, and this challenge, to prepare pastoral theologians, because both challenges are real. We need to prepare pastors who not only know how to think theologically, but also are able to respond pastorally --"speaking the truth in love." (Ephesians 4:15)⁷

I believe it is through the sharing of a person's life as well as their intellectual insights and theological beliefs that life-giving change comes to others. Truth must be embodied as well as articulated, incarnated as well as revealed.

Within this challenge is a long-standing concern for me in the reality of problem graduates--men who hurt and even destroy congregations early in their ministry. Of course, I have no statistical idea of how pervasive is this problem, so for the most part, in my experience, it is mostly anecdotal. But nonetheless, I believe that it is a real problem; and no matter what the seminaries do, it doesn't seem to get much better. The Board for Pastoral Education, which I serve, has a deployed staff person on each campus, an advisor for personal growth and leadership development, and each of the LCMS geographic districts conduct a seminarian pre-admission interview by

⁷ Carr.

qualified lay and clergy, and both of these were supposed to help minimize this problem, but I'm not sure that has happened. For the most part, I think that graduates become problems on account of their personalities, which the seminary does little to shape. However, the seminaries are sometimes responsible for the issues over which the graduates fight their churches. The challenge for the professors is to help students distinguish between what's important and what isn't in the ministry. Unfortunately, there is not a consensus on the faculties, for example in the area of worship, and, then it appears, the students are sometimes set up for failure by advocating certain liturgical practices that may not work in many or even most settings.⁸

Further, pastoral students and pastors need to learn to identify themselves with the Office of the Holy Ministry which they bear or will bear. That is to say, they need to recognize that they stand as ambassadors of Christ. This is a balancing act or a tension between two tendencies. The one tendency is to pretend that you are just one of the flock, and not a delegated spokesman for Christ, with all the responsibility that that entails. The other is to think that the office makes you, as a person, somehow spiritually superior. To distinguish between the priesthood of the baptized and the Office of the Holy Ministry encompasses complexities that some pastors find perplexing to demonstrate.

⁸ Cameron A. MacKenzie, Professor, Historical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, 6 December 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann's request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper.

Within this challenge it also appears hard to manage in a classroom dominated vocation the formation of men who love people, and who love to interact with people. There is something very wholesome about a pastor having the ability to enjoy people and to be with people. Just listen! You don't have to witness all the time. This is First Article stuff. Shepherds need to like sheep. The ordained ministry is to be wholesomely oriented toward interacting with, listening to, valuing, and cherishing people. Again, it's obvious, but it needs to be said. We don't need to be preparing pastors who simply don't love people. After all, God made the people! If pastoral students are not God-gifted lovers of others, they should not be in seminary.

The challenge is to prepare pastoral theologians. Now we move to the third challenge.

Preparing pastors at **varying educational levels** and via **varying educational means/media** to *shepherd* God's people

The complexities of this challenge are only increasing. For example, one of our seminaries has an Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology and the other seminary has People Of the Book Lutheran Outreach that includes students with high school diplomas and with Ph.D.'s. English language abilities very widely--not a surprise, since these men serve worshiping groups for whom English is a second (or even third) language. Developing a course for Internet or telecommunications delivery is much more labor intensive and expensive than for a residential classroom, because it requires

not only the instructor, but also the various media specialists. Instructors need to receive training in distance education methods and techniques.

Students coming to the seminary from the pre-seminary programs of the LCMS Concordia University System have taken foundational courses in Bible and the biblical languages and in theology. However, students who have not matriculated through these programs generally have not had these courses. By God's grace the LCMS seminaries are highly regarded by many in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), because they maintain a high commitment to prepare pastoral candidates in the use of the biblical languages.

The work of forming pastors from students of such uneven backgrounds in biblical and theological knowledge and patterns of thinking, and to do so in four years (plus some extra terms for instruction in the biblical languages), is a difficult work. The hardships are even more acute for married students.⁹

This challenge includes the issue of pedagogy--how we teach. While hour after hour of discussion is spent on the substance of teaching at the seminary, little is said on how to convey knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviors that are desirable. There is a significant need for faculties to discuss pedagogy. Academic freedom should not preclude meaningful sharing of best ways to teach students.¹⁰

⁹ Carr.

¹⁰ Richard Nuffer, Associate Professor, Pastoral Ministry and Mission, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, 17 December 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann's request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper.

In 2005 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published a book, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*.¹¹ It examines how a professional school, such as a seminary, develops in its students the specific skills needed to perform the functions they must enact while also giving them the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to become the kinds of human beings--morally, experientially, intellectually--to whom others are ready to entrust the performance of those functions. Pastors embody their roles in their very being, in the sense that they are formed--by their education and their calling--into persons for the Office of the Holy Ministry. Seminary educators must create bridges between the highly academic enterprise of textual study, and the daunting array of practices--from the liturgical and homiletic to consoling and celebrating--expected of their graduates. Four signature pedagogies were found to run through seminary education: pedagogies of interpretation, pedagogies of formation, pedagogies of contextualization, and pedagogies of performance. That is, the teachers of pastors must instruct their students in the disciplined analysis of sacred texts; in the formation of their pastoral identities, and dispositions, and values; in the understanding of the complex social, political, personal, and congregational conditions in which they are embedded; and in the skills of preacher, counselor, liturgist, and leader through which they exercise their pastoral responsibilities.

¹¹ Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

Through the coordination of these four pedagogies, a seminary--when all is working well--prepares pastors who can exemplify the pastoral imagination in their practice.

You can readily understand one of the challenges is to teach seminarians to identify the assumptions they arrive with and addressing them. It is difficult to teach the Office of the Holy Ministry, for example, when students may not have any concept of "office" of any sort. This challenge is simply becoming more pervasive. The entering students are less and less "rooted and rutted" in Lutheranism.¹² With many students enrolling that are relatively unfamiliar with the Bible and have less experience in the church, they often fail to see the need for honest intellectual work.

Within this challenge is new technology. Technology continues to change how we communicate in society, and teaching is a form of communication. Already now, but certainly even more in the future, students will have been educated in and by the newest technology, and will expect it of the seminary as well. But this demands a skill set in professors who do not possess it. Professors will need to spend time, lots of it, learning new methods instead of researching and writing. Professors may sense a need to maintain a personal website to direct people to their research and publications. They may also want one for every course. They teach to provide electronic resources, not just syllabi, but electronic links, PowerPoint presentations,

¹² MacKenzie.

audio recordings of lectures, chat rooms, and provisions for electronic submissions. It appears that the successful teachers and schools will be the ones that really make use of all these things in thorough and creative ways. This is a major challenge.¹³

Further, taking the matter of the proliferation of programs in the church leading to ordination (Alternate Routes, DELTO, Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, Center for Hispanic studies, POBLO, and other emerging situations), all well-meaning programs to help meet the needs of the church, and putting alongside them the need for faculty to be engaged directly with these programs as well as with distance education, new methodologies, courses away from campus, and a host of contextual issues, what happens to intellectual work? How much time is taken from scholarship?

In the midst of this challenge, there is need to think more clearly about new governance patterns that are emerging. Many faculty members would want to put the faculty in the primary governing role. What is the role of the Board of Regents? Who is responsible for curriculum and the content of courses? Another thing new is an emerging class of middle managers who are responsible for the educational delivery system, including design of distance education courses and management of the extension in continuing

¹³ MacKenzie. Cf. also Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Strengthening Congregational Ministry: A Report on a Program to Enhance Theological Schools' Capacities to Prepare Candidates for Congregational Ministry, 1999-2003," in *Theological Education* (published by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Pittsburgh, PA), Vol. 42, Number 1 (2006), 92-94 on recent findings regarding the delivery of theological education via technology. The bias of theological educators is to residential education. But "distance education strategies have proven that teaching and learning, spiritual formation, and community can all be gained through another medium, not so much at the expense of residential education, but as a complement to it," 92

education programs. This phenomena is probably going to grow rather than diminish. Do these staff members have faculty roles? And are they part of the shared governance of the institution? It is crucial that we monitor these patterns.

Inviting the church to understand the challenges and to join in a creative partnership with the seminaries to prepare pastors to *shepherd* God's people

This is the fourth challenge. The church, the "whole people of God in Christ Jesus," needs to recover its calling as a teaching church. In Deuteronomy 6:7 Moses enjoined the people of God (Israel) to teach God--his will and his works--to their children. They didn't, reports Judges 2:10b, and the resulting disaster was centrally religious/theological—alienation from God—but not only so; the deterioration was social and political as well. Those who teach in the church's seminaries need to help the students become pastors, who are teachers in their congregations, who help parents become teachers in their homes.

Also, while the largest single activity of the seminaries continues to be to form pastors for ministry in the LCMS, yet it is not the only activity of our seminaries. The seminaries operate programs for advanced leadership (D.Min.) and advanced theological study (MA, STM, Ph.D.) to prepare new generations of teachers and leaders, and the graduate schools of the seminaries also influence the leaders of other Lutheran and Christian church bodies that send students to our seminaries, because they respect the

academic excellence and theological soundness. The seminaries conduct continuing education events for pastors and teachers and lay people. The seminaries and professors travel to foreign countries around the world, usually during recesses between terms, to teach short courses for Bible schools and seminaries, for partner churches and emerging churches. The seminaries seek opportunities for the faculties to conduct research and to write articles, monographs, and books which are not only of scholarly interest but confess the faith and equip their readers to do likewise.¹⁴

In brief, the invitation is to understand that teaching and research and writing are also the mission of the seminaries--we teach what we believe; plus, teaching is our witness--and that, as the church understands the whole of that mission, they also will encourage and thereby support the seminaries.

However, theological education ought to comprehend the broader people of God and not just an elite cadre of instructors. There should be a strong connection between the seminary and the church, and between study and practice. There are times when some folks at the seminary are ensconced more in an "ivory tower" than they would like to admit, and for that reason the impression is given that they care more about the subject(s) they teach than about people. Sharp, insightful, and confident people serve our seminaries, and because of this they may be incessantly tempted to want to

¹⁴ Carr.

be teachers *of* the church rather than teachers *for* the church. So, even though they love, embrace, and highly value pastoral ministry, their attitude communicates a decidedly different message to the students.¹⁵ Robert Banks observes,

“A theological institution teaches far more than it is aware, and often most powerfully in ways of which it is scarcely aware.” All of this is part of the “hidden curriculum” of theological institutions, and this either supplements, limits, or compensates for their educational practice. What people tend to learn most is what the culture of an institution cultivates rather than what teachers teach.¹⁶

If the overriding context for theological education is the pastoral situation of the local and regional church, the dialogue between church and seminaries is crucial. In looking at the local church, how do you analyze the pastoral situation? We have the tools of sociology, demographics, organizational studies, and social analysis that can be brought to bear. But other factors also need to be brought into the conversation: the history of the local church, the rate of change going on in society, and ethnic and racial influences. Equally important, however, is the need for a contemporary ecclesiology that is energizing the church to be brought into the dialogue as a significant influence.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this is not an easy task. The

¹⁵ William G. Utech, Associate Professor, Practical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, December 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann’s request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper.

¹⁶ Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 211.

¹⁷ Vincent Cushing, “Some Reflections on Institutional and Cultural Issues Facing Theological Education” in *Theological Education* (published by The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Pittsburgh, PA), Vol. 36, Number 2 (Spring 2000), 1.

difficulty is not that we Lutherans lack a sound, strong theology of the church, but whether that theology is indeed operative within the church today. What are the working policies that shape the church? When the theology of the church connects with an analysis of the environment of the local congregation (needs are described, the goals are set, and plans are implemented), a church is in a better position to describe what it sees as the task of theological education for ministry. In simple terms, this means that there must always be a serious and mutual conversation in pastoral analysis going on between church and seminary.¹⁸ While a seminary cannot reinvent itself, I suggest that there are cycles about every decade that would assist the seminaries in keeping up their service to the church and in addressing the contemporary pastoral situations from the strength of our strong theological tradition. An effective joining of a robust ecclesiology with a sound analysis of the pastoral situation can serve both to keep the seminary at a level of pastoral relevance and keep the church at a level of theological literacy. Both are sometimes lacking today.¹⁹ This is definitely a part of the challenge. Above all, I want to suggest that the relation of church and seminary needs to be worked out in a climate of mutual respect and presumption of good will. Cushing identifies the need for this relationship:

It is clear that the seminary is a school of the church, that is its very *raison d'être*. *But*, it is also clear that seminary is a school, and *not* church. The primary tasks of the theological school are

¹⁸ Cahalan, 79.

¹⁹ Cushing, 2.

to explore, teach, communicate, and yield understanding that will serve the church in its theological understanding, in its preparation of pastors, and in relation to the church's catechetical and evangelizing activity. Careful distinctions and appreciation of differing roles have to be made for the relationship of church and seminary to be mutually enriching and educationally sound. The very fact that seminaries are schools of *theology* for ministry means that the business of *doing* theology is, in the first moment, the daily activity and ongoing task of the seminary.²⁰

Permit me to make further comment. If the correlation of pastoral planning and seminary curriculum development is maintained faithfully and kept fresh in terms of a shared community of conversation between church and seminary, then it is possible to distill from this conversation specialized forms of education to respond to the pastoral or cultural needs of specific groups (as in other professions, such as medicine and law). This enables the church to decide how it relates to society and the public role that it will play within society. Otherwise the church runs the risk of becoming a mere chaplain in the court, and the role of ministry is reduced to purely palliative functions of accompaniment and comforting words. This could, unfortunately, bring some students and perhaps schools to settle for this lowest common denominator as a sign of effectiveness in ministerial education.²¹

²⁰ Cushing, 7-8.

²¹ Cushing, 2-3.

Earlier, I mentioned "teaching churches." They are a growing phenomena.²² What about congregation based education for ministry? Wasn't it once that a person who wanted to be a minister went to live with the minister for a while? He followed the pastor around and studied with him, including the study of Hebrew and Greek. Now things have shifted to our theological faculties. Maybe we need to take a new look at the older pattern. I am not suggesting that we do away with schools of theological education, but perhaps there is something in favor of returning to some kind of closer partnership with churches.

There is also need in his paper to refer to the remarkable increase in the numbers of laity who are intent on preparing for some form of public, lay ministries of the churches.²³ This rise in ministry training must be in the scope of our scrutiny. The situation will demand a variety of responses, the most demanding which centers around the format for delivering theological education. Given that one cannot responsibly expect lay people to give up job and support while they study for ministry, the question becomes: Where and how will theological education for ministry take place in the future church? What is crystal clear is that the issue of quality needs to be maintained, but it will have to be quality now understood in relation to a specific type of ministry, or a specific program, and the criteria that affirm quality in those particular efforts. While this is a matter that may involve

²² Cahalan, 83-84.

²³ Cahalan, 89-92.

distance education, the issue is bigger. The central issue that awaits serious discussion is how community shapes and influences both the academic formation and spiritual formation of candidates for ministry. As we would agree, it is not enough merely to convey theological information when discussing preparation for ministry. The entire range of human response must be involved, both intellectually and spiritually. This is best done in a community of disciples. So, distance education is only part of the issue. Moreover, anything less than human and communal assessment, both intellectually and personally, cannot handle the evaluation of suitability for ministry. The question, then, is: How will seminaries respond to this large concern?²⁴

When I first arrived as a professor at one of our seminaries, I noticed how departments of theology seldom took up church related questions. They are most concerned about theology in and for the academy. In fact, I believe it could be said that they are quite removed from issues of pastoral practice. Yet people of our churches bring hosts of pastoral inquiries and pastoral needs to the persons educated in our seminaries. Where is the thinking community of the church? It seems to me the development of thought and practice is the result of the interaction of numerous communities in church: the baptized, the pastors, the seminaries, and the academics. The challenge is to keep theology and practice together. My

²⁴ Cushing, 3.

suggestion is that ordinarily the seminary should exercise a central role of thinking through the pastoral issues both intellectually and for guidance in practice. That does not mean they have the last word, far from it. But they should exercise a thoughtful, critical, reflective, and "framing" word and engage the large pastoral issues facing local or regional churches and areas. Then they should communicate that word for further consideration to the wider church as responsible thought available in carrying out the pastoral ministry of the church.²⁵

Finally, connected with this fourth challenge, there needs to be a reconfiguration of faculty in light of these new relationships, and in the boundaries of the theological disciplines that need to be redrawn. In light of the new relationships, what does it mean to be a faculty member? Perhaps churches should include a theologian-in-residence type of arrangement. Perhaps faculty members should be willing to go to congregations and see how they do things and learn from them. Even the issue of staffing the seminary faculties arises: from whence do they come? And, with the old fourfold encyclopedia of knowledge used in theological education, it has

²⁵ Daniel O. Aleshire, Executive Director of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, in an address entitled "Theological Education and the Church" at the annual meeting of the Denominational Staff for Theological Education and Candidacy, 17-19 January 2007, asked the question: How shall the theological school be related to the church? His answer was that for the mainline churches, the seminaries are no longer culturally privileged. Though churches want an educated clergy, they question the economic justice of keeping the denominational schools going. His hunch, he said, is that the church may not need theological schools, but theological schools cannot exist without the church. Thus, the church says that seminaries are nice, but they may want and/or need to do ministry differently. What's beginning to happen is that the future relationship of church and seminary is dependent on the seminaries, connecting and networking with congregations. The trend among denominations in the US and Canada in pastoral education is congregational centered and territorial trained leaders. The pressing theological education question today is: Is it really worth it?

served the church well. However, theology is a unified study. For example, in the study of law, everybody is a Professor of Law. The disciplines in theological study offer good methodologies, but the guild cannot set the agenda of what is to be studied. I believe that unifying more closely between disciplines would bring a much richer understanding of God and his work.

Preparing pastors for **pastoral practice** to *shepherd* God's people

The fifth challenge is summarized in the LCMS Themes for Pastoral Education:

The church needs pastors who are competent leaders in pastoral ministry. They must be able to integrate strong theology in pastoral practice. With a deep faith in God, a compassionate heart for people, and a gentle and peace-loving spirit they are to serve the saved and the lost by applying the Word of God to people's spiritual needs in diverse situations. As called servants of the Word, they must be able to establish helpful interpersonal relationships, be people oriented and work effectively with them, be forgiving and caring. They must be able to prepare people (through preaching, teaching, worship, and learned practical skills) for their service to God and the church (e.g., Christian Day School, youth, evangelism, stewardship, music, Sunday school, etc.). They must be resourceful leaders to help congregations address the changing contexts of service as a community of faith. A supportive family and a cooperative spirit with fellow pastors in the church bring concord and strength to the pastor and congregation. Through practice, reflection, evaluation, and lifelong education pastors must continue to grow and maintain competency for the office.²⁶

This is a challenge. Theological education ought to orient itself around "in-service" ministry activities, within which intellectual, spiritual, and

²⁶ *LCMS Themes for Pastoral Education*, brochure published by the LCMS Board for Pastoral Education, compiled and written by L. Dean Hempelmann, 2004.

practical concerns form a seamless whole. Curricular offerings and programs have a significant role to play in personal formation for ministry, but they will be most effective when they allow and encourage participants to engage in formative practices as well as learn about them. Learning-in-ministry (as compared to learning-for-ministry) is the most effective approach to pastoral formation. It is like the difference between merely studying a play by reading it together as an exercise, and actually rehearsing and presenting it on stage. To that end, supervised practical experience is a valuable component of ministerial formation. It is good for ministerial students to always have mentors/models who are engaged in the type of ministry for which the students are preparing and in which they will spend the rest of their lives.²⁷ In this regard I have come to appreciate the observation of a church historian, Andrew Walls, regarding the "doing" of theology. To be sure, Walls is talking about the theological task in the Third World, but because the American culture has become so post literate, post-Christian, postmodern, and is experiencing more and more ethnic diversity, I think his insight applies to the Lutheran scene in America as well. Walls states:

The domestic tasks of Third World theology are going to be so basic, so vital, that there will be little time for the barren, sterile, time-wasting by-paths into which so much Western theology and theological research has gone in recent years. Theology in the Third World will be, as theology at all creative times has been,

²⁷ Utech.

about doing things, about things that deeply affect the lives of numbers of people.²⁸

Vincent Cushing puts it this way, "The very fact that seminaries are schools of *theology* for ministry means that the business of *doing* theology is, in the first moment, the daily activity and ongoing task of the seminary."²⁹

Permit me to be more concrete about this challenge. Reed Lessing writes:

80% of the LCMS congregations are stagnant or declining, yet we send [seminarians] out on vicarage to do their evangelism module in these kinds of churches. THIS IS ALLOWING THE BLIND TO LEAD THE BLIND. Our seminaries need to mandate (again) at least one course in parish evangelism. Many, if not most of our graduates do not know how to lead an Adult Bible Class that is engaging, practical, and attracts new members. Our seminaries need to mandate a class on how to teach adults. Finally, generally speaking, our preaching is all too often canned, shallow, trite, and full of theological language that lacks rhetorical power. It is time candidly to admit this and move in ways that will raise up a new generation of dynamic and faithful preachers.³⁰

Further, while there is an over emphasis on tests and papers at the seminary, students are called to served parishes where they will do little test taking and paper writing. Oh, perhaps, they will write newsletter articles and bulletin paragraphs, but the vast majority of their time will be spent articulating the Law and Gospel for people's ears in sermons, Bible studies,

²⁸ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 10.

²⁹ Cushing, 8.

³⁰ R. Reed Lessing, Associate Professor, Exegetical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 13 December 2006, e-mail response to L. Dean Hempelmann's request for the top two or three challenges on the topic of this 2007 International Lutheran Council Seminary Conference paper.

visitations, evangelism encounters, speeches before community clubs and organizations, and similar things. Little things in the classroom could help remedy some of this, such as giving oral exams, requiring more presentations, and/or having students come to the professor's office to explain what they have learned. Even some law school pedagogy might help, like requiring students to read an article and/or book and then call on them to answer certain questions on the spur of the moment before the class.³¹

In this challenge, it is somehow necessary to prepare seminarians to understand that Christianity is not simply faith in Christ, but also love of the neighbor. Obviously, the latter flows from the former. When seminarians think that an intellectual knowledge of Christianity is all that is needed in the parish, they will be very surprised. The Bible is not just a "history" book. It is not a book that has a bunch of information about people who lived long ago, but it is God's Word to us, a Word that still speaks to us and to our lives today. It is important that students can interpret the Word, and also make it relevant to God's people. We need to help students "bridge the gap" between what is done in the classroom and what they will do in the parish.

Preparing pastors for **today's context** to *shepherd* God's people

This challenge is also summarized in the LCMS Themes for Pastoral Education:

³¹ Nuffer.

The church looks to its pastors to know the Holy Scriptures well, to be confidently Lutheran, and to apply the Word of God to contemporary contexts and culture. Pastors need to understand the culture and where it is headed, engaging societal issues theologically. Pastors must be prepared to give a defense to the truths of the Christian faith against competing spiritual claims and movements of world religions and secular beliefs. They must be sensitive to their culture and able effectively to serve peoples with a vast diversity of origins, education, family customs, social structures, and political values. The church needs pastors from different cultures to serve in the pastoral ministry.³²

The challenges we face "in putting the Gospel into practice" are not just theological, but even perhaps more so, cultural.³³ It could be that we are preparing men to be pastors in a church that no longer exists. Few instructors have seen or experienced or wrestled with the ministry challenges faced by recent graduates as they step into congregations, which, if these statistics are accurate, are either plateaued or in decline, where there is a dearth of "our kind of people" around, and where (for good and for ill) the culture of the congregation is most certainly different than that of the surrounding community. How will the graduates translate the Christian faith into the surrounding community? If they have not seen it done by those

³² *Themes*.

³³ David P. Tswaedi, "Leadership Formation in the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa," in *Reaching 100 Million: International Lutheran Leaders Speak Out* (Lutheran Society for Missiology, Allan R.. Buckman, editor, 2005), 30, comments on curricular content of seminary education in Africa and reports that African theologians argue "the content of most leadership formation courses on the continent fail to take cognizance of the soil on which it needs to be implemented; hence the foreignness of the Gospel. It is in the light of this that many African theologians have called for the indigenization or the Africanization of leadership formation." He quotes D. W. Waruta, "The Educational Mission of the Church: An African Perspective," in *Mission in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Unzima Press, 1993), 108, "that the educational mission of the African Church, in spite of the many successes, remains weak and may not have assisted the church to develop deep roots in Africa. There are certainly very legitimate fears that while Christianity has Christianized Africa, the Africans have not succeeded in Africanizing the Christian faith," 30-31. Even as African leaders must look at the strengths and weaknesses of the good foundation laid with classical leadership formation and decide what to do in the future, so also other Lutheran leaders must do the same in their own countries.

who teach, how will they be able to do this, unless they have worked alongside of someone who's actually doing it? Or by someone who talked in the classroom about how it is done? Instead, as one professor put it, we send them out like Mormons on bikes, hoping they will figure it out. We need to honestly ask and answer the question, "What is the seminary culture actually teaching the seminary students"?³⁴

Putting the Gospel into practice in today's pluralistic climate requires more theological sophistication, not less. And it would help if students were to work together more and thus learn to help each other in the parish. Instead of producing a good number of lone rangers, it would be well that we foster cooperation, collaboration, and collegiality among students.³⁵ There is a need to be preparing students to see the gifts they are to each other.

In the context of this challenge of cultural context we need to address the issue of missions in theology. The church is God's mission, but is there a sufficient concern and emphasis on missions in theological education? How does our missiological perspective shape or form our answer, for example, to the worship style debate? What happens if the church is not focused on mission? And even broader questions should engage us: How will our churches carry forward the tradition of Christianity and our Lutheran

³⁴ Utech.

³⁵ Nuffer.

confession of it to current and future generations? What is the evangelizing task the churches need to take up to be faithful to their mission?³⁶

Furthermore, during the last century, according to Andrew Walls, we have witnessed the greatest shift in the demographic and cultural contours of Christianity since the first century. Western Christianity, including its theological institutions, has been the dominate expression in the past 400 years, but now Christianity is declining in its former territorial heartlands and becoming a non-Western religion. But the curricula of theological education in the West, characteristically consisting of the transmission of intellectual content and theological dogma that is strongly laced with Enlightenment influences, poses and answers questions that are irrelevant to constituent churches in many areas of the world while at the same time failing to address biblically urgent questions with which their constituent believers are confronted. The task of theology must be to bring the whole of Scripture to bear upon the questions and choices with which ordinary believers are confronted in their calling to live out the Gospel in their native context. And theologizing must go beyond shaping the mind to engaging the heart, forming the person to live in and through Christ in community.³⁷

³⁶ Cushing, 4.

³⁷ Ralph E. Enlow Jr., "Wrapping Up and Going Forward," at the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education: International Consultation for Theological Educators, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 7-11 August 2006, captured these thoughts attributed to Andrew Walls.

We now move to the seventh and final challenge.

Preparing pastors to *shepherd* God's people in the LCMS

Listen to the LCMS mission statement: "In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by Word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world."

President Kieschnick's sixth point to the 2006 National Circuit Counselor's Conference was,

Integration of doctrine and practice: By God's grace, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod enjoys a solidarity in doctrinal formulations that is the envy of most other parts of the Body of Christ. We simply do not disagree with one another on major articles of faith. Our greatest difficulties and disagreements stem from lack of similar solidarity in putting those doctrinal formulations into practice.

In many cases, conflict within our Synod can be traced to congregational and pastoral disparity in such matters as who should be allowed to commune at our altars, the role of women in congregational life and mission, diversity in worship methodology, lack of clarity in implementation of the doctrine of church and ministry, and differing perspectives on inter-Christian relationships. Continual and even accelerated attention must be given to these questions, specifically, to what degree are our congregations and professional church workers free to decide how to proceed in such matters and to what degree are we bound to uniformity in practice?

In all these matters, it is important for all of us to remain faithful to our common confession of faith, articulated in Article II of our Synod's Constitution.³⁸

³⁸ Gerald Kieschnick, Presentation to the National Circuit Counselors' Conference, Milwaukee, WI, September 2006.

CONCLUSION

Preparing pastors to shepherd God's flock encompasses significant theological challenges. The major challenges considered are sevenfold, and they are complex and confounding.

Preparation must lead men to think theologically. Pastors need to be rooted in Christ, see themselves in Christ, and rejoice in Christ as they serve God's people. Let no one of us despise a learned ministry.

Preparation of pastors must lead men to be pastors. Pastors must embody their theological convictions, identifying themselves with their God ordained pastoral office, representing Christ in the proclamation of his word and work. To be pastoral means to love people.

Preparation of pastors means to take men from diverse backgrounds, different levels of knowledge, uneven patterns of thinking, many with family responsibilities, and through means of effective pedagogy instruct them in meaningful interpretation of Holy Scripture, form them for personal identification with their calling and shape their disposition, engage them in understanding the complex conditions and situation in congregational life, and provide them with learning exercises to develop as preachers and leaders of worship. At this point the challenge also engages technology and newly emerging governance patterns.

Preparation of pastors means a creative partnership between church and seminary. The context for theological education is the pastoral situation of the local church. Dialogue between church and seminary is crucial. But seminaries are schools, not churches, and they are in the business of doing theology. That is their task. And this dialogue between church and seminary will help both do their mission better. Enlistment of new faculty should account for persons who can energetically engage this dialogue.

Preparation to serve God's people as a pastor means to be a competent leader in pastoral ministry, integrating strong theology with pastoral practice. "In-service" activity is effective because it allows students to engage in formative practices as well as learn about them. Learning in ministry is a very effective approach.

Preparation of pastors means ability to apply the Word of God to contemporary contexts. Putting the Gospel into practice is not just theological; it is cultural. A good evaluative question to ask is: Are we preparing men to be pastors in a church that no longer exists? Students in pastoral preparation need to be able to translate the faith for their surrounding community. This is a sophisticated task. And it is becoming harder to do because Christianity is shifting.

Finally, preparation of pastors takes on specific dimensions for each church body. For the LCMS the greatest challenges stem from a lack of

solidarity in putting our sound doctrinal expressions into practice while remaining faithful in our confession.

Thank you for the invitation to join you and address this topic at the third International Lutheran Council's World Seminaries Conference in South Africa. I am deeply honored. God bless and keep you in His love and care!

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