

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalog:
A Focus on the Senior Courses from 1930 till 2005

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Church History

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was opened on its current site in Mequon Wisconsin in the year 1930²⁹. It had had various homes before that but for our purposes we start in Mequon. The Seminary of the Wisconsin Synod has always had a relatively straightforward goal: to train men to go out into the Pastoral Ministry. In this paper we are going to look at the different courses taught at this Seminary, to seniors from the 1930's up to the present, 2005. These were the courses the Seminary taught in order that its students would be properly trained that when they receive a call they would be able to fulfill their duties of sharing God's Word with souls.

Throughout the years that it has been training men for the fulltime ministry of the Gospel, the Seminary has realized that there are two factors involved in the proper education of a pastor. The first is creating an understanding of God's Word. This is necessary, because a pastor must know what God says to his people in the Bible. The second is to create an understanding of how to share what they have learned from God's Word with other people, both young and old.

When a student is at the Seminary he receives a massive amount of instruction concerning what God says in the Bible. We will use the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalogs as our guide to the instruction that is given the students in both branches of their education. This instruction of God's Word takes place different ways, as we will see in our look at the catalogs. However what is interesting to note, is that because God's Word does not change, neither has the manner in which the senior seminarians are taught had to change much throughout these past 75 years.

In 1930 classes were given to the seniors concerning Exegetical Theology, Historical Theology and Systematic Theology. Back in those years many of the classes

that the seniors had were combined with the middlers. This being the case, they were on a two-year rotation. In the 1930-1931 school year for their Isagogics course the seniors and middlers went through the New Testament and Poetical books of the Old Testament. In the way of Old Testament Exegesis the seniors along with the middlers studied Isaiah I and Psalms that year and finally for New Testament they had Romans.

The Historical Theology section of the education for a senior was comprised of Church History and Symbolics. Church History was divided into three different periods; The first: The Ancient Church and the Middle Ages, to 1300 A.D. The second: Corruption of the Mediaeval Church, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. The third: Modern Church History, with special consideration of contemporary church developments in America. The seniors and middlers studied that second group. For Symbolics the seniors studied the Formula of Concord and the Large Catechism.

Finally to wrap up their study of God's Word they had their Systematic Theology course. This course was comprised solely of Dogmatics. Again the seniors and middlers classes were combined and that year they studied Soteriology and Eschatology.

Today classes are still offered in Biblical Theology, Historical Theology and Systematic Theology. Biblical Theology is offered throughout all three of the years of education at the Seminary including the senior year. This is done so that a graduate is able to translate God's Word ^{from} for the original languages for himself. As it is written in the WLS Catalog of 2004-2005

“Biblical Exegesis – Through, intensive, and reverent study of the Holy Scriptures is the very heart of our seminary training. No one can be a God-pleasing public witness of Christ unless with a believing heart he understands the message which our God and Savior has called us to proclaim to a world of sinners” (WLS 04-05 p. 15).

That is the understanding with which those who founded our Seminary setup the curriculum. They knew how important it was for a pastor to be able to step back and look at God's Word in the original languages, not having to rely on anyone else's translation.

Isagogics courses are also offered at the Seminary in every year though not necessary with a whole semester being devoted to them. What follows is the reason why we have Isagogics courses at the Seminary. "Here the emphasis is on becoming acquainted with the content and line of thought of the biblical books. The courses also cover what is known about the inspired writers and the time and circumstances of writing" (WLS 04-05 p.16). Those books of the Bible are read through in English because they are not able to be touched on exegetically throughout the years of college or Seminary. This is done so that a Pastor will be able to begin his ministry with at least a small grasp on each of the books of the Bible.

Historical Theology is also still a big part of a senior Seminarian's training. The purpose of this being trained in Church History is stated very clearly in the WLS Catalog 2004-2005.

"At the seminary our students are guided to see how the erroneous thoughts and sinful actions of men have been constantly at work in corrupting God's message of law and gospel and thus in hindering the building of Christ's church. At the same time it becomes evident how God in his might and mercy has ever raised up, and is still raising up, staunch confessors to expose human error and to restore and preserve the pure proclamation of his saving Word" (WLS 04-05 p. 17).

This history, which is studied, acts as a cautionary tale to those who might consider straying from the true teachings of God's Word. But it also serves as reassurance that God really is in control and he will do what needs to be done in

order to protect his church. In essence through studying Church History, whether Early, Middle or Modern, we get to see in a factual way how God is keeping his promise to protect his believers and spread his Word.

Back in the 1930's the Systematic Theology section of the curriculum consisted of only Dogmatics and that is still true today. A good summary of this course is given in these words.

“The various teachings of the Bible are presented and discussed. These courses help the student gain a thorough knowledge of the whole will of God for Christians faith and life. The doctrines of the Lutheran Church as set forth in the Lutheran Confessions are examined in the light of Scriptures to strengthen the student's conviction that they are in fact drawn from the Bible” (WLS 04-05 p. 18).

This course gets into some of the most difficult to understand doctrines in Christianity. However it is necessary to do this so that when a graduate heads out from the Seminary he may be at least moderately equipped to handle the challenges he will face, because he has been rooted in the Scriptures.

Throughout these past 75 years, not much has changed in those classes designed to teach the seniors at WLS about God's Word. It would seem that the biggest change over the years that has occurred in this particular facet of study is that the classes are no longer combined. Due to God's blessing of an increased enrollment, the Seminary saw fit to call many more professors than it originally had. This has allowed the different levels of classes, juniors through seniors, to be held separately. In some cases when the classes here at the Seminary are exceptionally large, they are divided into two or three sections, for certain periods. In some cases this division is permanent, so that the size of the class is a bit more manageable.

Indeed those who founded our Seminary made good choices in how they wanted to teach the students God's Word. Because of these good choices not much has had to change in this area. However as we said before there are two areas of study here at the Seminary. The first was the students learning what God says to them and to his people. The second is the students learn how to share that knowledge with other people. In order to accomplish this goal, those who began the Seminary created the area of study called "Practical Theology."

Practical Theology consisted of a number of different areas back in the 1930's. They were Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, Catechetics and Liturgics. In homiletics during their middler year students were required to write a sermon in German, now in the senior were required to write one sermon in English and deliver it to the entire student body. Then the students and a designated professor would offer helpful criticism.

In Pastoral Theology it is described in the catalog from 1930 as: "A thorough discussion of the requirements for pastoral work, of all the features of church activity, and of the relations of the pastor to his parish and to the Church at large" (WLS 30-31 p. 9).

Pastoral Theology was then followed up with Catechetics in which each senior would have to write "two catechizations of on subjects assigned to him, one from the Catechism, the other from Bible History, one to be held in German the other in English" (WLS 30-31 p. 9). Then because they did not have many grade schools around that were immediately accessible to them, the seniors would present their lessons to the juniors.

In order that the pastor has a grasp of what is involved in a church service and why it is there the course of Liturgics was offered. The study of Liturgics was defined as

the studying of the “history of the forms of service in the Christian church and a critical examination of their value” (WLS 30-31 p. 10). This was a class that met five times a week so that the students could get an understanding of where their service comes from.

These were the different areas in which the students studied in order to grasp how to teach God’s Word to the people. Unlike how the teaching of God’s Word to the Seminarians has not changed much over the years, this part of the education has evolved in certain ways. With the advances in transportation it became easier to go to the surrounding areas. And with changes in society it became necessary for the Seminarians to have a better grasp of how to share God’s Word with God’s people.

These changes affected the Practical Theology part of the education. For example, by observing the trends of the country and seeing that there were not too many people anymore who only understood German and I am sure also aided by the fact that there was just a world war involving Germany, In the school year of 1954-55 it was no longer required for a student to prepare and preach a sermon in German. It was simply stated that if a student had sufficient knowledge of German, then they should try writing several sermons in German. The times were changing. It was recognized that the ability to preach in German was not going to be something that every Lutheran pastor would need in order to carry out his ministry, so the requirements of preaching in German changed from “must be able to” to “may, if they choose.” This phrase that the student may write a sermon in German was kept in the catalog right up until the 77-78 school year. At that time it was left out completely for the instructors at seminary saw that this was a skill, which was for the most part unnecessary now. Other changes in Homiletics happened later. In the 2003-2004 school year it was no longer the case that a senior

would write two sermons, preaching one of them in front of the class. Now the seniors were to write two sermons, preaching one of them, an Old Testament sermon, in a congregation. The student then videotapes this sermon and gives it to his instructor for the instructor to review it. Along with sermon preaching in the same 03-04 school year Christian worship was added into the Homiletics class.

In regards to Pastoral Theology it was never exactly defined what was included in that area of study before the 1960's. However in the catalog for the 1960-61 school year it was now said that the seniors would be studying, "Congregation, Counseling Discipline and liturgics." Except for the liturgics, which has been handed off to the Homiletics department, this has remained the same up until the present.

Today, for the seniors a considerable amount of emphasis is given to counseling. Since in the past number of years our society has become very litigious, a pastor must be very careful when counseling someone, so that he does not over step his bounds or be seen in any situation that could seem to be inappropriate. Because this is such a pervasive problem it is receiving a good deal of attention in the Pastoral Theology department.

Then we have Christian Education in which seniors work to get an understanding on how to develop and administer comprehensive education programs to the congregation. This class focuses on different ways of teaching the adults, teens and children. This gives the beginning pastor a jumping off point on how to handle the education of his members, which he will be in charge of.

However, by far the most recent development at the Seminary was the starting of the Winterim in the '04-'05 school year. Having switched back to semesters the

Seminary then took the 3 weeks that follow Christmas break and turned them into a Winterim period in which students and pastors, who wish to come back, can study different areas which are not often focused on in Seminary classes. These areas range from alternative styles of preaching and counseling to ancient languages. These classes are meant to expand the horizons of those who take the courses.

From even before Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary took up residence in Mequon Wisconsin it was the intentions of those who founded it and the Synod around them to train men for the full time ministry. During the 75 years that followed at the Mequon Seminary there has been very little that has changed in the way of classes over all. God's Word is still at the heart of every class and any changes that have been made over the years have been done so that the men that come out of this place may preach and teach the pure Word of God to the people in a clear and understandable way, the way God wanted it shared.

Bibliography

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalogs

The years in which the Seminary Catalog was published

2004-2005	1961-1962
2003-2004	1960-1961
2002-2003	1959-1960
2001-2002	1958-1959
2000-2001	1956-1957
1999-2000	1954-1955
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