

The Seminary Curriculum: The Rest of the Curriculum

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[This article concludes the series, "The Seminary Curriculum." Previous articles in the series appeared in the Fall 1989, Winter, Summer, and Fall 1990 and Summer 1991 issues of the *Quarterly*.]

All schools have a curriculum outlining the regular succession of courses which the school offers and suggesting or requiring the sequence in which those courses are to be taken. Such a curriculum can be either an informal understanding between teachers and students or a formal, printed bulletin or catalog spelling out the details. Completion of the prescribed courses fulfills the school's requirements and leads to the student's graduation. Graduation qualifies him for promotion to the next level of learning or earns him a recommendation for employment in the area of his expertise.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has a curriculum, formally spelled out in its Catalog. Since the 1970-71 issue the cover of the Catalog with its by-now traditional four symbols indicates the scope of the school's formal curriculum. The inside front cover offers this explanation:

The four symbols depict the four divisions of instruction at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The SCROLL represents Biblical Theology, the careful study of the Bible and what it says. THE CHURCH BUILT ON A ROCK represents Historical Theology, the review of the struggles and triumphs of the Gospel in the visible Church throughout the New Testament era. The BOOK OF LOCI, or dogmatical formulations, represents Systematic Theology, the discipline of organizing and clearly presenting the teachings of God in the Bible. The CROSS and SHEPHERD'S CROOK represent Practical Theology, a thorough training in the skills needed for today's ministry.

Nine pages (pp 22-30 in the 1990-91 *Catalog*) list and describe the various courses offered in these four areas of instruction. As regular readers of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* are aware, the *Quarterly* has published a series of six articles giving additional information on the content and methodology employed in the presentation of these courses.

But the formal, published academic curriculum of a school is supported and undergirded by a set of assumptions which, though perhaps less tangible and perhaps less formally stated, nevertheless do a great deal to determine the character of the school and the nature of its instruction. In short, there are other factors which influence a school's spirit and atmosphere almost as much as the specific courses being offered. It is some of those other elements, the "rest of the curriculum," that we wish to touch on in this closing installment of the *Quarterly's* series on Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's curriculum.

A confessional seminary

The very first paragraph of the Catalog opens with the statement:

The specific purpose of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is to offer theological training for men who desire to enter the public ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod or of churches within its confessional fellowship. It is not established or maintained to serve merely or in part as a school of religion furnishing opportunity to anyone for specialized study in various fields of theology (p 3).

It could come as something of a shock to hear that Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is not a school of religion. That does not mean that it is not teaching religion. The point is rather that the seminary does not exist to provide the opportunity for individuals of various persuasions to use the school as a training center for work in their denomination. Nor, for that matter, does it allow confessional Lutherans on their own volition to pick and choose courses that would equip them for service in the area of their own choosing. No, rather, "The specific purpose of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is to offer theological training for men who desire to enter the public ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod."

There is a great deal of history underlying that conscious and intentional choice of purpose. One of the weightiest considerations that in 1849 drew three Milwaukee area congregations together with thoughts of forming a synod was the desperate need for a reliable way to train parish pastors. It is therefore not surprising that early on (1863) this fledgling synod founded a seminary. But it soon became evident that men capable of doing seminary work could not be recruited directly out of the parishes. There needed to be some kind of pre-seminary training to provide the prerequisites for doing solid theological study. Hence, Northwestern College was founded in 1865.

Efforts to have this pre-seminary school provide theological students sputtered, however, as long as Northwestern entertained the hope of being a standard American college, or even a "university," bent on offering general education to all comers. It was only when Northwestern, through a change in language and curriculum, became serious about providing a steady supply of students capable of doing Seminary work that the synod wholeheartedly supported the college with its young men and money.

To be sure, we are currently living in a time of financial difficulties in our synod, and that has resulted in some budget stringencies at the schools. But that dare not blind us to the fact that the congregations of our synod continue to provide major support. Granted that the recent drop in enrollment, down to 110 on-campus seminarians this year, has dramatically increased the per student cost at the seminary, yet according to the most recent figures released in October of 1991 the cost of educating a seminarian at Mequon is \$11,519 per year. Of that amount the seminarian is asked to pay \$4,630 for tuition, room, and board. In other words, the synod is subsidizing the Seminary student at an average amount of \$6,889 per year.¹ The congregations of WELS are heavily subsidizing the seminary program. They have a right to expect the seminary to be totally dedicated to preparing pastors for them.

Enrollment policy

The fact that confessionally-minded parish pastors are to be the outcome of the training program strongly influences what type of enrollees are expected and sought by the seminary. While the seminary is certainly a place where "learners" will grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Word, it would be inconsistent with the seminary's stated purpose if it were to admit students who bring a wide variety of religious convictions with the intention of tolerating such diversity in its graduates, or with the naive hope that all such variety and diversity will be brought into conformity during the four years of study. Rather, with virtually all of the first year students coming through Northwestern College, it is reasonable and practical to assume that there will be the desired unity in theological outlook among our seminarians, and that this outlook will reflect itself in mature and sanctified conduct. The Catalog says simply:

In accordance with the words of the Apostle Paul in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, the fundamental requirement for admission to the Seminary is an unimpeachable Christian character (p 13).

¹ The subsidy per student at our two worker-training colleges is \$3,615. At the synodical prep schools the annual subsidy per student is \$3,361.

Regarding the academic proficiency expected of enrollees at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the Catalog under the paragraph entitled "Entrance Requirements" states:

Academically the applicant should have completed a four-year college course, such as that offered by the Synod at its Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, which places a heavy emphasis on history and modern and classical languages. A good working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is a prerequisite for work in the courses in Biblical Interpretation (p 13).

The continuing benefits of our forefathers' decision to limit Northwestern College's role to that of a single-purpose school preparing men for seminary training and parish work thereafter is still very much in evidence. Fully 90 percent of our enrollees are men who have earned a BA degree at Northwestern. The other some 10 percent are either second-career men or students who come to us under special circumstances. Generally, the second-career men have earned a degree in some specialty field before deciding to prepare for parish ministry. The opportunity to gain the necessary preseminary courses, particularly in religion and the biblical languages, is now available on the NWC campus alongside the "regular" track. This replaces the preseminary program previously offered through Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. As with the former "Bethany Program," so those who now complete the "Seminary Certification Program" on the Watertown campus come to us well qualified to work with the Word in the original Greek and Hebrew languages. That is vital for successful work at a seminary which states as its objective:

Reverent, thorough, and scholarly study of the Holy Scriptures and a clear apprehension and faithful application of its contents, especially of its basic messages of Law and Gospel, are considered fundamental in realizing the Seminary's practical purpose of training and equipping men for the practical tasks of the public ministry (p 3).

A practical seminary

The adjective "practical," used twice in the quotation above, could seem to suggest that WLS is inclined toward a method of training that advocates a "how-to" approach at the expense of a thorough comprehension of the theoretical and academic aspects of the curriculum. It could sound as though the acquisition of skills ranks ahead of gaining knowledge and course content. Such a dichotomy is by no means intended or practiced.

The point is rather that whatever has been learned in a theoretical or abstract way needs now to be put into use. It needs to be integrated as preparation for life and work in the parish. That parish emphasis has far-reaching implications for the choice of courses that are included in the curriculum and for the way in which course material is handled.

It is not enough that isagogical or exegetical studies of Scripture deepen the knowledge and personal understanding of the seminarian. That knowledge needs to be shared. It needs to become the content which is effectively communicated by means of teaching methods imparted in the education courses. It needs to be the content that is dearly and winsomely proclaimed using the sermonizing skills acquired in the homiletics courses. The touchstone in these and in all the other courses is: What will be needed for accomplishing the practical tasks of the parish ministry?

That emphasis on parish service also explains another distinctive feature of the seminary curriculum, and that is the notable lack of electives. With the former "A-V and Computer Use" elective now absorbed into the senior education course, there are a scant three or four choices: a German elective; an Aramaic elective; two missiology quarters.

An average of 21 or 22 class hours per week are devoted to required courses—required because they are deemed necessary preparation for doing the varied practical tasks of the parish ministry. Such allocation of the student's class time rules out the possibility of us specializing in a particular area, such as administration or counseling, evangelism, or mercy ministry. In the nature of the case, he becomes a "generalist" trained in the various skills commonly needed in a parish setting.

Admittedly, that is not the only way a curriculum could be contracted, and as a matter of accuracy it should be stated that from time to time a voice is raised asking whether some degree of specialization might not be desirable or even necessary. By general consensus of the synod such a change in the curriculum could, of course, be made, but it should be noted that the current curricular structure reflects the historically mandated goal of training and equipping all of our seminarians for the practical tasks of the parish ministry.

The emphasis on broad parish experience is also the rationale for requiring a vicarship of each seminarian as the third year of his ministerial training program. The urgency felt in having each seminarian receive the benefit of a parish vicarship experience is unmistakably clear when the Catalog states:

After completing the Middler year, all students are obligated to a full year of training as vicars in a congregation. This training is part of the Seminary curriculum and is administered under the supervision of the local pastor in collaboration with the Seminary. Exceptions on the basis of valid grounds can be made only by joint resolution of the faculty and the Seminary Board of Control (p 30).

To my recollection, in the 16 years I have been on the seminary faculty there has been only one exception. That was in the case of a second-career man who had considerable parish experience by virtue of having previously served as a Lutheran elementary school teacher.

Changing emphases

There is a perception afoot that nothing ever changes at the seminary. If that idea has any validity at all, hopefully it is true in regard to the seminary's stand on doctrine. As such, the remark would constitute a fine compliment. It is a bit more difficult to take the remark as a compliment, however, if it is made with the implication that because things supposedly never change, the seminary and its program of ministerial training are out of date and hence out of touch. The areas in which there seems most often to be a hint of such thinking are in the matter of outreach and perhaps also counseling.

We shall address the latter item first. There can be no doubt that conditions in the parish are changing rapidly. The parish today is far different from what it was five years ago—and vastly different from what it was when the more senior members of the faculty left full-time service in a congregation. In an attempt to offset that disadvantage, there is presently a concerted effort being made to provide sabbaticals for faculty members to allow them on something of a rotating pattern temporarily to return to the parish for a "refresher course," sort of a vicarship one might say. Details involving money and manpower need to be worked out, but the idea is very much alive.

The changing scene in the congregation with which our parishioners must cope has them in increasing numbers looking to their pastors for help and guidance. Counseling looms larger and larger on the busy pastor's daily agenda. The seminary's pastoral theology courses have for some time tried to address themselves to that phenomenon. In an attempt to provide even more pointed help and guidance in that area, the most recent call issued to fill a vacancy in the pastoral theology department stipulated that the person called should have rich

parish experience in counseling and should be willing to do some formal course work in that area after accepting the call. Those conditions have been met in the person of Professor Alan Siggelkow, who came to us after 21 years in the parish and who currently is pursuing a counseling-related degree program.

Regarding the matter of outreach, it is doubtful that there ever was a time when the seminary did not feel that outreach and sharing the gospel with those who did not as yet have it was not the church's number one priority. To be sure, for a considerable part of the seminary's history it was likelier for its graduates to be assigned to an existing congregation than to have the opportunity to open a new one. Granted also that a considerable number of faculty members served large congregations, that the congregations of our local Metro North Conference tend to be older, mature congregations, and that in the nature of the case most of our vicars still are called by the larger established congregations of our synod. But that does not offset the fact that there have always been on the faculty men who previously served new missions or young congregations, and other men who avidly sought to bring prospects into the established older congregations they served. A commitment to outreach on the home front was decidedly in evidence when the faculty and board concurred in 1984 that the man to be called to the pastoral theology department at that time should have as a major part of his assignment the task of formally incorporating an evangelism training component into the seminary's program. That task has since that time been capably filled by Professor David Valleskey.

Add to those considerations the fact that in the mandatory vicarship year supervising pastors are urged to give their vicars an opportunity for hands-on evangelism; that the seminary annually makes available about a dozen "summer vicarships," which on a volunteer basis give seminarians an opportunity to do outreach and evangelism work; and that about half of our seniors have a regular working connection with some local congregation, many of which require evangelism work. I trust it will be evident that Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is earnestly committed to broadening the church's base by equipping its graduates to work actively and effectively at bringing the gospel to those who have not yet been brought to faith in their Savior.

That zeal to save souls extends also to those without Christ who live outside the range of our local congregations. In 1978 there were substantive discussions in the faculty as to whether a formal "chair of missions" should be established. The eventual decision they reached was not to do so. The rationale for it was not that missions were unimportant, but rather that delegating this area to one man might lessen the emphasis on foreign missions which rightly belongs also in other course materials. Thus, with the resolve that each faculty member should urge missions wherever that emphasis legitimately fits into his course work, the faculty urged the board not to create a chair of missions but instead to consider seriously the possibility of calling a foreign missionary to serve on the faculty in the conventional disciplines. Professor Ernst H. Wendland, veteran missionary to Central Africa, was called. Officially he taught Old Testament isagogics and homiletics, but he exuded mission zeal wherever he went. Not surprisingly, upon his retirement the board called another missionary, this one a veteran of 17 years of mission work in Japan, Prof. Harold Johne.

Mission emphasis across the curriculum, missionaries on furlough speaking to the seminary family, mission contributions in chapel, the annual two-day student produced Epiphany Mission Seminar—all of these testify to the fact that the plight of those without Christ weighs heavily on the seminary's heart, students and faculty alike.

Continuing education

With the recent attention given to continuing education for pastors in the correspondence and the questionnaire you may have received, in committee and circuit meetings you may have attended, it might seem that this item should have been included under the previous section of "Changing Emphases." The fact of the matter is, however, that continuing education is not really a recent innovation at all. The Quarterly you are

reading was established primarily as a professional magazine for WELS pastors—continuing education, if you will—and it has been published without interruption since 1904.

The Fall Pastors Institute, an annual series of lectures given on the Mequon campus on five Monday afternoons in September and October, has been presented for nearly four decades. In recent years, and again this past fall (1991), two series, with a pair of lectures given each Monday afternoon, were presented. Average weekly attendance was about 50.

Since 1972 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has annually offered "a summer quarter of graduate and supplementary study" in an attempt to broaden its efforts to serve the Synod's ministry. In accordance with the stated purpose of the Seminary, summer quarter enrollment is restricted to men within our confessional fellowship" (Catalog, p 31). Regularly, nine courses and two workshops are offered. These credit courses may be taken in fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Sacred Theology degree or a Master of Arts in Religion degree. In recent years participants in this program have numbered in the 70s.

The most recent emphasis on continuing education for pastors is the program which is being administered through the Conference of Presidents in response to the synod's call for spiritual renewal. Faculty members served on the initial study committee, and they continue to be involved as the program progresses toward formal implementation. Course materials are being selected and the seminary library stands ready to serve as the repository for these materials which are to be made available to pastors, working singly or in groups, for credit or simply for personal enrichment and increased professional skill. We wish the program well, committed as we are to preparing and training men for the important work of the parish ministry. Doing so, after all, is nothing else than being consistent with the seminary's single purpose, of which the Catalog says, "In line with this single purpose of training men for the public ministry the Seminary also endeavors in various ways to offer opportunity for theological and professional growth to those who already are active in the public ministry of this confessional fellowship" (p 3).

Conclusion

Speaking for all of the faculty members at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, it has been a distinct privilege and a pleasure to be part of the program which prepares a qualified ministerium for parish service. We look forward to serving in whatever ways, new or traditional, the Lord may see fit to grant us in the years ahead. To him alone be the glory.