

THE SEMINARY'S MINISTRY TO PASTORS: *PRAEPARATIO CONTINUA*

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Introduction

For 150 years Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) has understood that her ministry to the students who spent time on this hill (or at WLS's previous locations) does not end when they are clutching their diplomas in thankful hands while also bearing that new status of *candidatum reverendi ministerii*. Perhaps no one ever expressed that with greater forcefulness than August Pieper.

In no calling is anyone less a master after completing his apprenticeship than in the holy ministry. To be sure, not every candidate believes that; but the conscientious and humble young pastors very soon recognize daily how much they still lack in knowledge and ability for properly carrying out their ministry. The three years of theological study could only offer them that which is most necessary in doctrine and practical skills. Therefore our candidates are never released into the ministry without the earnest admonition to diligently continue their studies. For the faithful pastor, study is not suspended when he enters the ministry; rather, it first properly begins.²

Only about a paragraph later, Pieper adds this:

Specifically the theories of the homiletical and catechetical arts, which cause so much trouble for the beginner, need basic study if one wants to perform somewhat capably in practice. The daily need to care for souls will again and again drive him anew into the study of the individual parts of pastoral theology, so that he becomes clear on how he should act and why just so and not otherwise. In brief, the daily practical demands of the ministry necessitate of themselves basic theoretical study, if one does not want to change from a beginning dabbler into a superficial bungler.³

Perhaps the simplest testimony to how long the faculty of WLS has understood that their synodically-given purpose for preparing a biblically-faithful and well-equipped ministerium extends beyond

¹Since 2010 Professor Gurgel has served as WLS's first director of continuing education while also serving as a professor of homiletics.

²August Pieper, "Scripture Study as the Special Task of the Pastor," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 119.

³*Ibid.*, 120.

graduation day or call day can be found on the spine of this issue of the *Quarterly*. It says Volume 111. For more than a century the faculty has contributed to this journal that is dedicated to providing pastors (and other interested readers) with resources for growth in ministry.

If this current author may be so bold, allow him to coin a new Latin phrase to describe what has been the long-standing emphasis of *WLQ* towards its graduates serving in the public ministry. The term is *praeparatio continua* (ongoing preparation). Many readers of the *Quarterly* may recall a similar term used by Lutheran dogmaticians in regard to conversion. Our fathers used the term *conversio continua* (ongoing conversion). Yes, our Lutheran fathers understood conversion to happen “in an instant and in a moment” as the Spirit brings us from outside the kingdom to within. Yet with the term *conversio continua* our Lutheran fathers were stressing that the same kind of spiritual death and resurrection that took place in the moment of our conversion is to take place every day.

So, in similar fashion, the term *praeparatio continua* could be used to talk about the work of WLS as it focuses on spiritual and professional⁴ growth for pastors beyond graduation. While our purpose at seminary is to prepare men for the pastoral ministry, and while there certainly is a “moment” when we recommend them for ministry (CRM), that *praeparatio* needs to be *continua* since preparation for a task so vital as gospel ministry is never truly done as long as we still bear the blessing of the office of pastor.

As WLS celebrates 150 years of God’s grace under the theme of Heritage & Hope, the goal of this article⁵ is to trace the ebb and flow of how WLS has understood and sought to carry out that challenge of providing encouragement and resources for spiritual and professional growth. *Praeparatio continua*: that’s our heritage. This article also seeks to set before the ministerium how WLS is seeking to envision

⁴This author acknowledges that the term “professional” comes with some potential baggage. The public ministry is far more than a “profession.” It is a divinely instituted calling that comes to human beings from Christ through his church. However, even though public ministry is far more than a “profession,” the term is being used here to remind all of us who serve in the public ministry that the kind of ongoing growth in knowledge, skills, and abilities that is beginning to be an expected part of more and more professions is also rightfully a part of the public ministry. Since at least the middle of the 20th century, continuing professional education (CPE) has become a more and more expected (and often regulated) facet of most professions.

⁵This article is, in a sense, a continuation and updating of a similar article in the *Quarterly* that appeared during the Seminary’s 125th anniversary. That article, “The Seminary’s Ministry to Parish Pastors,” was authored by then Professor Wayne Mueller. That article can be found in Volume 85 Number 2 (Spring 1988).

that work as it moves forward under God's blessing into the future. *Praeparatio continua*: that's our hope.

Part 1: Continuing Education through WLS: A Secondary Purpose or A Critical Continuation of WLS' Sole Purpose?

The seminary itself has not always expressed in the same way its understanding of its synodical mandate to provide continuing education⁶ for its graduates. As the work of WLS's 1978 self-study got underway, here is how the seminary's purpose, and its relationship to ongoing spiritual and professional growth for its graduates, had been expressed.

The very 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. . . .

In addition to this prime purpose the Seminary endeavors in various ways to offer opportunity for theological study and professional growth to those who are already active in the public ministry of its confessional fellowship.⁷

Notice how continuing education is described as something "in addition" to the "very specific purpose" given to the seminary. Continuing education is further distanced from the seminary's purpose by speaking of that main task as "prime" as compared to the other task of offering "theological study and professional growth to those already active" in the ministry.

But a distinct change in emphasis and wording came out of the 1978 self-study. Perhaps reflecting the fact that in the United States more formal continuing professional education had been a growing part of the professions for about 20 years,⁸ there appears to have been

⁶This article will use "continuing education" (CE) as a synonym for "spiritual and professional growth" even though CE also carries some significant baggage in our circles. It has been the experience of this author that when WELS pastors hear a seminary professor speak about CE, the default understanding is often that CE is synonymous with WLS's Summer Quarter. While the more formal elements of CE such as Summer Quarter can be a rich blessing to many a pastor, the opportunities for CE are much broader and richer than just such more formal elements of classes and credits, degrees and diplomas. That narrowing of what is meant by CE is one reason the author of this article prefers to speak of spiritual and professional growth, despite the baggage that this term also carries with it (see note #4).

⁷*A Self-Study of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary* (May, 1978), 89.

⁸Robert M. Cervero, "Building Systems of Continuing Education for the Professions," *A Lifelong Call to Learn: Approaches to Continuing Education for Church Leaders* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 81-82.

a careful rethinking about how to express what WLS does in relation to continuing education. Here is that revision:

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. . . .

In line with this single purpose [emphasis added] 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 its confessional fellowship.⁹

Notice several key changes incorporated into this new wording. Continuing education is no longer described as something “in addition to this prime purpose” (of getting men ready to be pastors) but it is seen as a natural continuation “in line with this single purpose” for WLS’s existence. The seminary’s singular purpose is seen as being seamlessly carried out whether that preparation is being delivered to those who have never served in public ministry or is being brought to those currently serving in public ministry.

Subsequent reviews of WLS’s stated purpose (self-studies conducted in 1993 and 2003) have lost a bit of the clarity of the 1978 wording of the relationship, yet the stated purpose has continued to maintain that WLS has a single purpose that is lived out in two directions. One part of its single purpose is aimed at those training to begin their calling as pastors. The other part is aimed at those already serving as pastors.

The author of this article cannot fault too much the loss of clarity of expression on those two most recent self-studies. In his own writings he has at times added to the confusion by speaking of a dual purpose of WLS. However, that insight expressed by the 1978 Self-Study deserves to be maintained. It is much more in keeping with what WLS has been entrusted to accomplish to state that our single purpose of preparing pastors has two equally critical poles of emphasis. WLS prepares a new generation of theological students so that they are ready to enter our ministerium. But WLS also continues that preparation by assisting those already in that ministerium to grow in gospel ministry. Such a double emphasis of its single mission helps both WLS and those it serves to hold on to the concept of *praeparatio continua*. We are never done preparing for gospel ministry. As August Pieper said, the diploma on the wall does not end our time of preparation. It begins it in earnest.

⁹*Self-Study* (1978), p. 94-95.

Part 2: The First 150 Years of Continuing Education through WLS: From Ahead of the Curve to Behind It?

It is instructive to note that long before continuing professional education began to be an emphasis in other professions in the United States (the 1960's), and long before there was much if any impetus in church bodies for such continuing education for their clergy,¹⁰ WLS professors were regularly and repeatedly urging WLS graduates to continue to grow in their tasks for ministry. The words of August Pieper quoted earlier, and the early appearance of the *Quarterly*, speak volumes on that emphasis. In many ways, our Wauwatosa fathers appear to have been considerably ahead of the curve with their encouragements to what today has become known as "lifelong learning." It can be persuasively argued that they were simply grasping what the Apostle Paul (and other inspired authors) had long ago been saying to public ministers.

It would also be fair to note that most of that continuing education was assumed to take place in the quiet of the pastor's study, or in the circuit, conference, or district gatherings of pastors. Little of the more formal or organized continuing education in evidence today existed in the 1800's or the first half of the 20th century. While professors would be regularly asked to present papers at gatherings of pastors at their circuit, conference, or district meetings (as well as addressing the synod in convention),¹¹ much of what we would consider the more formal aspects of continuing education had not yet developed. These more informal continuing education opportunities provided by WLS professors continue to this day whenever a faculty member is asked to present an essay or a different kind of presentation to a gathering of pastors (as well as gatherings of other called workers and lay leaders).¹²

But a shift from the more sporadic and unplanned informal continuing education to the more formal aspects of continuing education began to appear in 1952 when the first Pastors Institute was held on the campus in Mequon. Each year after that until 2000, when on-

¹⁰In 1960 Dr. Connolly Gamble published *Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister*. It was the first publication in the United States devoted to that topic.

¹¹It is instructive simply to look at the historical context for many of the essays included in the three volumes of *The Wauwatosa Theology*. Again and again the origin of the articles are synod conventions or other regular gatherings of the ministerium.

¹²This author dislikes being "read to" at conferences as much as anyone, and the current pattern of more interactive presentations of topics and issues has the benefit of a far more interesting and participatory learning experience. But if the carefully crafted essay becomes a casualty of the changing process, the loss for the future could be significant. This author would urge the development of essays that are still distributed even if the actual "agenda-time" presentation is carried out in a far more interactive way. It is more work in the short term, but the greater benefit for the future may make that worthwhile.

campus Pastors Institutes were replaced by the annual fall Symposium, area pastors were invited to attend a series of weekly lectures presented by two seminary professors on a current theological issue or challenge facing Lutheran pastors. Such focused presentations by faculty members on a theological topic of interest to pastors continue to this day to be offered off-campus as arranged by circuits or conferences. In 2013, there were eight such Pastors Institutes offered with a total attendance of 380. Many years there have been almost double that number of Pastors Institutes with attendance of hundreds more.

While out of chronological order, it would hardly do to ignore the rich blessing that the annual fall Symposium has become. While the fall on-campus Pastors Institutes often served dozens of pastors from southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois as it met on Monday afternoons for several weeks, the Symposium, held in a more compact format over the course of two days, has attracted hundreds of pastors from all around the country year after year. It is also hard to over-emphasize the blessing of the interaction the Symposium provides between those pastors and our current theological students who are excused from regular classes to attend the Symposium.

The next major step of more formal continuing education at WLS occurred in 1972. Right in the midst of the growing emphasis on continuing professional education that was evolving in the mid-20th century, our seminary launched what became known as Summer Quarter. Pastors were invited to attend on-campus courses for three weeks during June and July. Summer Quarter has been held every year since. What began in 1972 with an enrollment of 41 reached its peak enrollment in 2005 with an attendance of 126.

Over the more than 40 years of Summer Quarter, there have been some significant changes to what has been offered and who has been able to attend:

- Course offerings have shifted from all meeting for three weeks to courses being offered for one, two, or three weeks in both mornings and afternoons.
- While most who attend Summer Quarter do not begin attending with any plan to pursue a degree, over the course of the years three degree programs have developed: the master of sacred theology (STM) for those who already had either a M.Div. or B.Div; the master of arts in religion (MAR) for pastors or others in the public ministry who did not have training in the original biblical languages; and the master of practical theology (MPT), a degree focused completely on the “practical” areas of pastoral work.

- While right from the start there were always a few teacher-trained public ministers in attendance, over the years there developed a more focused effort to invite teachers to take courses as well as, if they wished, to pursue the MAR. In 2004 this invitation was extended to all called teachers (and staff ministers) both male and female.
- As the years have passed, Summer Quarter courses have also, like Pastors Institutes, begun to be offered at satellite locations around the country. Circuits, conferences, and even districts have sponsored a single course (or at times two courses) to enable pastors to attend a course in their area or in conjunction with another scheduled conference or convention.
- Beginning in 2010, Summer Quarter courses began to be offered online, and since the 2011–2012 school year, these online courses aren't offered only in the summer, but also during the fall and spring semesters. This enables pastors looking for opportunities for growth to be able to take a course at almost any time of year. As of the 2012–2013 school year, online enrollment surpassed face-to-face on campus enrollment in CE courses offered by WLS.
- It should also be mentioned that when the 2003 WLS self-study recommended the addition of the two-week Winterim to WLS's regular academic schedule (held between semesters in January), Winterim quite quickly became yet another opportunity for continuing education for pastors.

Before moving on to other forms of continuing education that have been offered by WLS, it is instructive to note that from 1972 to the present, well over 1000 different WLS graduates (or pastors of our confessional fellowship) have taken at least one of these more formal CE courses through WLS. That total takes into account all those who have taken an on-campus course, a satellite course, or an online course.

Following the pattern established by then Professor Wayne Mueller in his article on CE for the 125th anniversary, it is certainly worthwhile briefly to catalog the many additional CE opportunities made possible through the work of WLS. All of these would be on the more informal side of CE:¹³

¹³In his 1988 article, then Professor Mueller expanded his list of examples of WLS's service to pastors to include how professors served the synod at large and individual congregations. It was a decision of this author to stay more narrowly focused on service to pastors in the area of continuing education rather than the more broad categories of service to pastors via service to the synod. Professor Mueller included listings of such things as WLS seminary professors assisting in the production of the revision to the Catechism and hymnal, serving as advisory positions mandated by the synod on

- WLS professors continue to author numerous Bible studies as well as books that provide continuing education opportunities for WLS graduates and many other called workers and lay people throughout the WELS and beyond. Some of these volumes fall more into the area of popular theology such as numerous volumes of the *People's Bible* or *People's Bible Teachings* series, while other books are more professional volumes such as Professor Brug's two-volume commentary on the Psalms or the 150th anniversary *Festschrift* edited by Professor Cherney.
- Professors also are frequent authors of articles in synodical publications such as the *Quarterly*, *Forward in Christ*, *Preach the Word*, and *Worship the Lord*. One professor alone, when asked to list what he had written, noted that the total of such articles (were he to list them all) would be over 100.
- Finally, the seminary library provides continuing education resources in two distinct ways. The library is frequently asked by pastors to provide bibliographic services when they are called on to write essays for pastoral conferences. The library also maintains an ever expanding online essay file that contains hundreds of essays on a multitude of theological topics. Many of those essays have been written by present or former WLS professors.

But now comes a key question: while WLS could at one time be considered to be ahead of the curve as far as providing multiple resources and opportunities for ongoing spiritual and professional growth for its graduates, has WLS been able to keep up with the growth of emphasis in lifelong learning and continuing professional education? Is it possible that even when compared to the “teacher side” of continuing education in our confessional fellowship, the “pastor side” of CE has fallen behind the curve? For example, for those serving in the teaching ministry in WELS, more formalized peer evaluation has long been an annual expectation of ministry and ministry development plans are a growing phenomenon.

It is the conviction of this author that pastoral continuing education in WELS has moved from being ahead of the curve to being a bit behind it. That is being said with more than a bit of a “word of caution.” This author is convinced that there is much more strong spiritual and professional growth going on in the midst of our ministerium than can ever possibly be catalogued or documented. Surveys, interviews, and many conversations WELS pastors in our country and in our mission fields have convinced him of that thankful reality.

multiple synodical boards and commissions, and the preaching and teaching assignments they accept for service in congregations.

But weaknesses, also observed far too regularly, are also evident. Much activity that could rightly be defined as continuing education continues to happen rather sporadically. It's almost as if many in our ministerium believe that serendipity must be the controlling feature of spiritual and professional growth. An individual pastor may regularly attend the pastoral conferences or circuit meetings. He may purchase a book that a friend in ministry or an online or printed review said was valuable. He may even from time to time take a course online or attend an on-campus or satellite course (or pastors institute) held nearby.

But often there appears to be all too little thoughtful and prayerful planning for spiritual and professional growth taking place. A pastor fails to ponder thoroughly his unique set of strengths and weaknesses as well as the unique challenges and opportunities of the current ministry setting to which he has been called. Too often there is little conscious use of the insights and encouragements of mature lay leaders and ministry peers that could help the pastor make a more informed and objective evaluation of where spiritual and professional growth could be most beneficial for the sake of the specific ministry to which he has been called. Yes, God has a way of granting growth to us all in ways beyond our planning, in fact, in ways we would never dream of planning. Our loving heavenly Father often well-disguises his growth plans for us under a cross we would never have chosen for ourselves.

But the fact that our gracious God can and often does bless us beyond our planning does not make planning for growth useless or foolish. The God who knows how to bless us despite our plans or without any plans on our part, also knows how to bring blessing to the thoughtful and prayerful planning for growth that happens all too infrequently in our midst.

If WLS is going to be the best partner it can be for its graduates in pursuing *praeparatio continua*, one way WLS could serve well would be to offer such help in developing ways to do just such thoughtful and prayerful planning in partnership with lay leaders and ministry peers. It is such a desire to be a better partner in *praeparatio continua* that led WLS to launch a new effort in continuing education.

Part 3: Grow in Grace: WLS's Current Effort to Strengthen Pastoral Continuing Education

Recognizing with thanksgiving the continuing education resources and encouragement that have always been a part of WLS's work, but also realizing how much more could be done, in 2010 WLS established *Grow in Grace: the institute for continuing education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary*. Along with establishing *Grow in Grace*, WLS for

the first time set aside a significant percentage of one professor's call to focus on this effort. While every seminary professor before 2010 knew that a generous portion of his ministry was to be devoted to the work of providing solid continuing education resources, presentations, and courses, no professor had ever been given the opportunity to devote at least half of his ministry day after day to strengthening WLS's focus on the *praeparatio continua* of its graduates. That changed in 2010 when some generous grants made it possible for WLS to begin *Grow in Grace* and to allow one of its professors to focus half time into looking for ways to strengthen WLS's CE program. The grants also provided ways to free more time for other professors to develop and teach CE courses.

Here are the vision and mission of *Grow in Grace* as they are currently expressed:

- The vision of *Grow in Grace* is that pastors in fellowship with WELS will find *Grow in Grace* a welcome partner in planning and implementing their pursuit of personal spiritual growth and professional life-long learning.
- The mission of *Grow in Grace* is to advance the cause of the gospel in the 21st century by making ministry-impacting continuing education resources available and accessible and by connecting pastors with partners who will encourage them in their spiritual and professional growth.

Grow in Grace pursues that work under four specific goals.

- **CURRICULAR RESOURCES** Develop and/or deliver affordable ministry impacting curriculum resources in the four theological disciplines offered by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (biblical, historical, systematic, and practical).
- **MENTORING FOR NEW PASTORS AND CONTINUED SUPPORT (PASTOR PARTNERS)** Provide formal and informal collaborative opportunities for called workers to learn from one another, as well as celebrate ministry milestones with their peers.
- **EVALUATING MINISTRY** Develop and/or deliver fresh and relevant resources which a pastor can use to assess his ministry faithfulness and plan for spiritual and professional growth in partnership with lay leaders and ministry peers.
- **ENCOURAGING INFORMAL LEARNING** Develop and/or deliver ministry-impacting informal learning resources that enable individual pastors and/or groups of pastors to carry out spiritual and professional growth.

Here is what is currently being done and what is being planned under God's blessing under each of those four goals.

CURRICULAR RESOURCES Develop and/or deliver affordable ministry-impacting curriculum resources in the four theological disciplines offered by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (biblical, historical, systematic, and practical).

- WLS continues to offer for-credit courses on campus (during Summer Quarter and Winterim), online (fall, spring, and summer semesters), and at satellite locations around the synod.
- With the hope of not only continuing to see online course enrollment grow but also of reinvigorating face-to-face on-campus enrollment, *Grow in Grace* is working with WLS faculty on a thorough revision of WLS's master of sacred theology (STM) degree. The revision of the STM would reduce the number of current CE degrees from three (STM, MPT, and MAR) to one. The best elements of the MPT program would be rolled into the new STM. Martin Luther College (MLC) continues to move ahead with taking over the MAR degree which will enable teachers and staff ministers to pursue additional continuing education course work in the area of theological study. Having the MAR run through MLC also provides credits from an accredited college so that courses can be applied toward maintaining teaching certificates.
- Our seminary professors continue to offer Pastors Institutes by request to circuits, conferences, and districts.
- WLS offers matching grant scholarships that match dollar for dollar whatever a calling body contributes towards the tuition of any for-credit course taken on campus, online, or at a satellite location.

MENTORING FOR NEW PASTORS AND CONTINUED SUPPORT (PASTOR PARTNERS) Provide formal and informal collaborative opportunities for called workers to learn from one another, as well as celebrate ministry milestones with their peers.

- This part of the work of *Grow in Grace* goes by the name *Pastor Partners*. There are two key emphases of *Pastor Partners*. The first is providing mentors/coaches for individual pastors. The other is providing celebrations of ministry retreats that provide opportunities for pastors and their spouses to celebrate key ministry milestones with others marking those same milestones.
 - Here is a brief overview of the history and status of *Grow in Grace's* mentoring initiative:
 - Mentoring has grown from a small pilot project in May 2010 (one mentor working with three graduates) to over 80% of graduates requesting a mentor in 2012 and 2013. It

is the intention to continue to make participation in mentoring optional for WLS graduates. The goal remains to make the initiative such a clear benefit for new pastors (and their families and congregations) that almost every senior would be eager to request a mentor.

- Up to this point mentoring has been supported by some very generous grants from the Antioch II Foundation. The long term goal remains to work towards having congregations that call a graduate provide the financial support for the initiative as they too begin to realize that this is a wise investment in the gospel ministry of their pastor and their congregation.
 - ◻ Once the mentoring initiative is well established, the focus will expand to investigating the blessing of providing trained coaches for experienced pastors. The goal would be to use pastors who have a special measure of the gift of encouragement to be available upon request to serve as trained encouragers to their brothers as they plan for spiritual and professional growth. Two districts of the synod have already begun to move ahead in exploring how to train pastors to serve their brothers in this way.

Here is a brief overview of the progress of *Pastor Partners* in the area of the *Celebrations of Ministry* retreats:

- A retreat for pastors and wives who are celebrating ten years of ministry began in April 2012. The retreat is built around worship, Bible studies, and workshops designed to strengthen joy in ministry for those serving God's people. This retreat was repeated in 2013 and 2014 with the ongoing goal to repeat it each year.
- In 2014 the first *Finishing Well in Grace* retreat was also held. This retreat was designed for pastors (and spouses) who have completed 25 years of ministry.
- The 10-year and 25-year retreats were held at the same time and at the same location (joint worship but otherwise unique agendas).
- The long-term plan is to add two more such retreats:
 - One would be called *Begun in Grace* and would be for pastors (and spouses) who have just completed the mentoring initiative.
 - The other would be called *Completed in Grace* and would focus on pastors (and spouses) who are entering retirement.

EVALUATING MINISTRY Develop and/or deliver fresh and relevant resources which a pastor can use to assess his ministry faithfulness and plan for spiritual and professional growth in partnership with lay leaders and ministry peers.

- Under this goal *Grow in Grace* seeks to deliver essays and accompanying resource packets (workbooks) that can be studied by pastoral circuits (or individual pastors) around our synod. These essays and resources packages are intended to help pastors to study and discuss key areas of spiritual and professional growth and provide them with resources designed to help them pursue such growth under God's blessing.
 - In 2011 the first essay and resource packet was developed (entitled *Ordained for a Life of Growth*). This packet was distributed in May 2011 to all circuit pastors. The circuit pastors were encouraged to study and discuss the essay (and the accompanying planning resources) with the pastors of their circuit. The goal was to help more pastors develop an annual pattern of planning for spiritual and professional growth. In a survey conducted with all WELS circuit pastors, 82% of pastoral circuits reported either having discussed the paper and resources or that they planned to do so.
 - In January 2013 the second essay with accompanying resources was distributed. This package, entitled *Reclaiming Our Christ-Centered Lutheran Devotional Heritage*, sought to help pastors strengthen their personal devotional life of Word and prayer by emphasizing devotional life primarily as a gift of God's grace in which he serves us. A similar survey just completed with circuit pastors revealed almost identical percentage of circuits (83%) studied at least a portion of this second package.
 - The third package is scheduled to be released in April 2014. This will include another essay and accompanying workbook. This package will seek to help pastors analyze how God has uniquely wired them for growth (understanding better their unique strengths and personality as well as grasping their preferred learning styles). The package will also provide ideas for how pastors could make better use of the support of lay leaders and ministry peers in pursuing this growth. The package provides multiple options that a pastor can use to partner with others in developing an annual spiritual and professional growth plan.
- The first two essays and resource packages have also been turned into workshops that can be scheduled by circuits, conferences, or districts.

ENCOURAGING INFORMAL LEARNING Develop and/or deliver ministry impacting informal learning resources that enable individual pastors and/or groups of pastors to carry out spiritual and professional growth.

- As mentioned above in this article, the vast majority of opportunities for spiritual and professional growth have nothing to do with credits and classrooms, degrees or diplomas (the more “formal” side of learning). These more informal growth opportunities appear regularly in pastors’ daily schedules as well as arising as particular challenges of ministry confront them and their congregations. These growth opportunities are also found whenever ministry peers gather for study. Such gatherings range from less structured study groups of 2 or 3 pastors to the more structured gatherings of circuits, conferences, and districts. It is a goal of *Grow in Grace* to help pastors make the most of all such opportunities. Three particular encouragements for such informal learning are presently being pursued.
 - Regularly throughout the year one WELS pastoral circuit becomes the “featured circuit” on the *Grow in Grace* web site. As study plans and meeting agendas are shared, the goal is to develop a clearing house of ideas for how pastoral circuits can pursue spiritual and professional growth.
 - Each week a new book review is posted in PDF and MP3 format on the *Grow in Grace* web site. These book reviews, called *The Shepherd’s Study*, are put together by a group of pastors who have organized themselves so as to produce reviews of books in every area of theological study.
 - Much more could be done to support and encourage informal learning. This remains a task waiting to be claimed by partnering with more pastors out in the field.
- The beauty of many of these more informal resources is that it forges a working partnership between parish pastors and their seminary in delivering such resources to their brothers. For example, a group of about 25 pastors provide the online book reviews for *The Shepherd’s Study*.

It should also be mentioned that the 2013 synod convention appointed a task force to study how best to coordinate and document CE efforts throughout our synod for our pastors and staff ministers. This task force was appointed and began to organize for its assigned task in October of 2013. We pray that God will choose to bless the work of this task force so as to bring even more opportunities to our pastors (and staff ministers) to pursue spiritual and professional growth. God grant that through their work we hear an ever growing sound of iron sharp-

ening iron as *praeparatio continua* is encouraged and supported even more all around our synod.

Conclusion

Why all this fuss and effort at WLS to support the *praeparatio continua* of WELS pastors (and pastors of its confessional fellowship)? God forbid that it would be for the same reason that adult and continuing professional education has become a multi-billion dollar industry in our country—one that even surpasses what is spent on all other levels of education combined.¹⁴ In the business world, *employers* are investing billions into ongoing education with the hope that in a challenging global market such investment impacts positively the company's bottom line. In challenging economic times *employees* are seeing the need for professional growth because they are looking for ways to stand out as invaluable contributors to that bottom line. Perhaps with their eyes on the corner office, those same employees are also hoping to gain greater esteem among their co-workers, not to mention a larger portion of the company's profits showing up in their own paychecks.

So what is our motivation as public ministers of the gospel in pursuing spiritual and professional growth? The answer is right before us if we look in the mirror and if we look out from our pulpits. Our bottom line is different. We pursue *praeparatio continua* because our bottom line in all of this is eternal. The goal of growth in ministry is not the esteem of our peers who will admire us because we are seen to be excelling. Such "who's #1 thinking" has been a powerful temptation to public ministers ever since James and John sought to use mom to get a leg up on the competition.¹⁵ The goal of growth in ministry is not that our paychecks might grow fatter. Seeing godliness as a path to such gain is also not new to the church (Titus 1:11).¹⁶

No, our goal is much longer lasting than either of those two. We pursue spiritual and professional growth so that we might be ever more useful instruments in the Lord's hand, instruments through which he will be at work to accomplish what only his gospel can accomplish: the salvation of eternal souls.¹⁷ That, and that alone, justifies, and empowers *praeparatio continua* for public ministers of the gospel.

¹⁴Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2006), ix.

¹⁵Even though God may, for the sake of the encouragement of our brothers and sisters toward their own growth, allow "everyone [to] see [our] progress" 1 Timothy 4:15.

¹⁶Even though it will always remain true that those "who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17).

¹⁷That salvation, of course, includes both our own and our hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).