

THE UNENDING PURSUIT OF GROWTH IN GOSPEL
PREACHING: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR
CONTINUING EDUCATION IN PREACHING
FOR PASTORS OF THE WISCONSIN
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

by

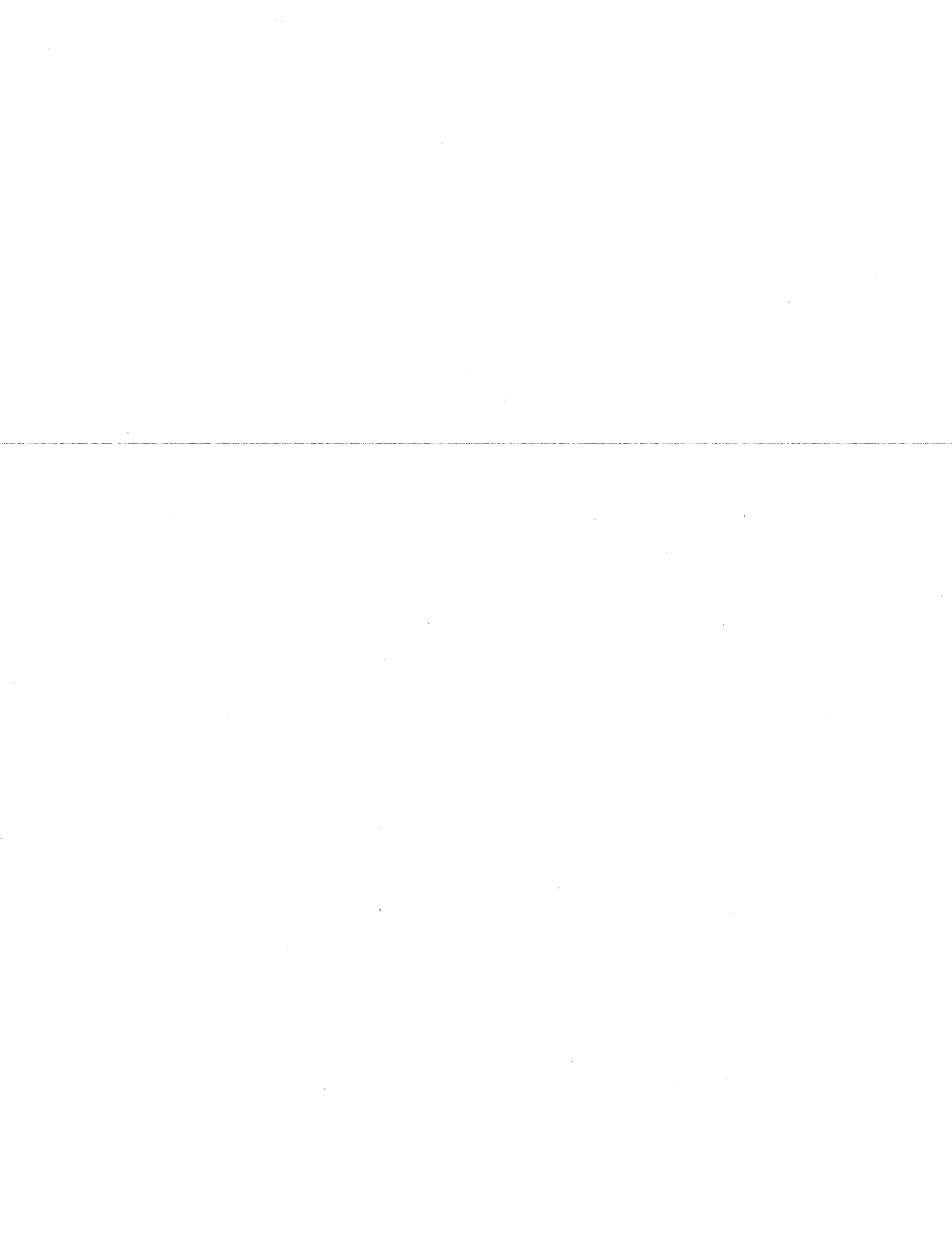
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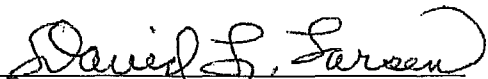
A MAJOR PROJECT

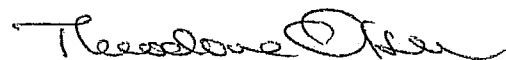
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ABSTRACT

Good preaching has always been vital to the health of Christ's church. In order to strengthen preaching, this project designed a comprehensive program in continuing education in preaching for pastors of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

To assist in designing an educationally sound program, this project has drawn on the insights of continuing professional education in the United States, all the while evaluating those insights through the lens of Scripture.

The research focused on designing a program that meets the unique needs of preaching in the WELS in the 21st century. The research included a survey of active parish pastors; interviews with pastors, church administrators, and homiletics professors; and a Delphi group of congregational members, both men and women. Based on that research, ten key issues for growth in preaching were identified as the central focus of the plan.

The core of the comprehensive program will be delivered through twelve issues of the bimonthly Preach the Word newsletter that is received by all WELS pastors. The newsletters will be supplemented by online resources found on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary web site as well as by in-person and online courses and workshops delivered through the seminary's continuing education program.

In keeping with the confidentiality promised to all who were interviewed for this project, all quotations included from those interviews are anonymous. Therefore, the reader will find no parenthetical references in the body of the project or any listing of the interviews

in the reference list. When such quotations are used, any pertinent information that can be shared (identifying, for example, whether the one interviewed was a pastor, professor, church administrator, or lay person) is incorporated into the text surrounding the quotation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CE	Continuing Education
CECW	Continuing Education for Called Workers
CEU	Continuing Education Unit
COP	Conference of Presidents
CPE	Continuing Professional Education
C/W	Commission on Worship
LCMS	Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
MCE	Mandatory Continuing Education
SACEM	Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry
WELS	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
WLQ	Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly
WLS	Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

CHAPTER 1

THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

As the Scottish reformer John Knox preached his first sermon, the awesomeness of being God's spokesman so overwhelmed him that he could not finish his sermon. Several elders had to help him from the pulpit. While there is something to be said with making it to the "Amen!" of our message, a healthy dose of what overwhelmed Knox is a blessing for all who deign to stand before God's people as God's representatives. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa 66:2, unless otherwise noted, all Scripture taken from the NIV). If God would have every one of his children tremble at his Word, how much more would he have us tremble who not only handle the Word for our own hearts, but seek to apply it to the hearts of others? From our mouths God's people expect to hear the very words of God! Not one of us sinful jars of clay is in the least sufficient for this task (2 Cor 2:16).

But that is only half the picture, because God equips where he calls. "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa 52:7). All who have been called into the public ministry have the most beautiful feet in Zion. The feet that carry us before God's people do so in order that we might share the very same gospel that has healed us. In a world torn by personal and corporate discord—discord that reflects a broken relationship with its Creator—we announce peace. To people torn by the

never-ending bad news that announces the results of something far worse than a spiritual Murphy's Law,¹ God's own curse over sin, we proclaim good news. To sinners wrestling with what often seems like one defeat after another, we announce that our God already now reigns—not sin or sorrow or sadness or death or hell—and we will reign with him forever because of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Such is the fearful yet wondrous privilege of preaching. God uses frail and feeble jars of clay (2 Cor 4:7) to accomplish his saving purpose in human hearts. So has he ordained it. "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21).

In the broadest sense, certainly there are many ways in which this preaching of the gospel takes place. More often than we will ever be able to count, the saving truth of God is proclaimed from friend to friend in the quiet of a home or the noise of an office. But when we hear the word *preaching*, there is little doubt that one particular event comes to mind first of all: the public proclamation of God's law and gospel in the midst of the worshipping Christian community. And there is good reason that this is what we think of when we hear of *preaching*. Ever since Jesus preached his sermon in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1), those he has called to public ministry have preached in his name in the midst of those who would be called by God's name.

¹ Murphy's Law is the belief that if something can go wrong, it will.

The Importance of Good Preaching

Throughout the centuries of the Christian Church, no other form of sharing of the Word has reached so many of God's people so often as the Word proclaimed in worship by their called shepherd. It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of the formal preaching of the gospel within Christianity. Philip Melanchthon was not exaggerating when he wrote in Article XXIV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, "There is nothing that attaches people to the church as does good preaching" (*Triglot Concordia* 1921, 401).

Many before and after have echoed those sentiments. One of the founders of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and its first seminary president, C. F. W. Walther, wrote, "Among the various functions and official acts of a servant of the Church the most important of all, my friends, is preaching" (Walther 1929, 247). David Larsen states this same conviction as to the importance of the public preaching of the Word: "When preaching has been strong in the Christian church, the church has been strong; when preaching has been weak; the church has been weak. Preaching is by no means the only factor, but it is an obvious and a critical one" (Larsen 1998, 847). Again and again even those new to the faith testify that what drew them back to a church was the power of the Word clearly and boldly proclaimed (Rainer 2008, 56).

We would expect this conviction about the importance of preaching to be voiced by those who share (as do I) the parallel conviction that every word of Scripture is the breath of God's Spirit, since the authors were "men [who] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). That there is power in preaching should not surprise anyone who believes that these "Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35). When we correctly handle

that errorless Word of God's truth (2 Tim 2:15) by communicating faithfully its Christ-centered message (John 5:39), we are unleashing the very power of God on the hearts of men.

Since preaching has such an exalted place in God's plan, a fitting response from any Christian preacher is to pray and strive throughout his ministry to be ever more faithful and capable in his proclaiming of the gospel. With Timothy, this too is a place in which we want to take Paul's encouragement to heart and show our progress (1 Tim 4:15).

But how to do that? How does a pastor get beyond an easily distorted evaluation of his own preaching? How does he solicit helpful feedback from the sheep he serves so that he has something more to go on than the sincere or perfunctory "Nice sermon, Pastor!" spoken at the church door?² How can he make the most of brothers in the pastoral ministry who share this common task and common concern? And once he has obtained as accurate a picture as possible of his preaching strengths and weaknesses, what tools and resources are available to assist him to continue to grow in his strengths and to eliminate his weaknesses as much as possible?

It is the goal of this project to assemble a rich variety of tools that can enable a pastor to gain solid feedback on his preaching from multiple sources and that also supply him with multiple options for continuing to pursue ever-better preaching of the gospel. Only the

²The wording here is not carelessly nor ignorantly masculine. While our church body is convinced of the absolute equality of men and women called in Christ as renewed creatures in the image of their Creator (Gal 3:26-29), we are also convinced that God has unique callings for women and men for how we interact with each other. We believe that the authoritative teaching and proclamation of the Word in mixed groups of men and women has been entrusted to mature and spiritually gifted men (1 Tim 2). We are by confession complementarian, not egalitarian.

gospel can teach him the importance of this task. Only the gospel can empower him to commence and continue on that path with both courage and confidence.

This Project's Relationship to My Ministry

From July 1986, when I was ordained into the pastoral ministry at Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, until December 1998 (when I accepted a call out of the parish ministry), the question of pursuing ever-better preaching of the gospel was before me as one who filled the pulpit almost every Sunday (at Gethsemane) or every other Sunday (beginning in August 1992 as one of two associate pastors at David's Star Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jackson, Wisconsin). Sunday by Sunday I knew the joy of serving as one of God's spokesmen, but I also knew the anguish of the often all-too-wide chasm between the breathtaking and soaring vista of the text and the all-too-plodding and pedantic sermon I had just preached. It has been one of the key goals of my ministry to close that gap as much as God's grace might enable me.

But the reason for that goal shifted considerably as 1998 drew to a close and 1999 began. I received and accepted a call to teach at my alma mater, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) in Mequon, Wisconsin. While I also taught in systematic theology and Christian education, one of my assigned tasks was to shepherd budding homileticians through their first sermons. While I have still continued to preach once a month as a pulpit assistant ever since, narrowing the gap between the beauty of the text and the beauty of the sermon was suddenly much more than a personal ministry journey. Now it was my calling to help others studying for the ministry to learn to recognize that gap and to begin a lifelong journey of ministry in seeking to close it. And since our seminary has a two-fold purpose

for existing—providing undergraduate education for our MDiv students as well as continuing education for pastors (and other called workers in the field)—more and more I was coming into contact with men standing up in pulpits in all fifty states and multiple foreign countries. The quest for always-better preaching had gained a new intensity and a broader focus. Often I have the sense that literally hundreds of thousands of souls I have never met are depending on the success of this quest.³

Even after this doctor of ministry pursuit had begun and a focus of this project was selected, God’s guiding hand has been evident in continuing to give me new reason to focus on this task and refine it. Four years ago, my colleagues in the worship department at WLS elected me to serve as department chairman. Now I had the growing sense of responsibility for all the preaching instruction being carried out on our campus for our students and off-campus for our pastors.

But another subtle shift began just two years ago. My initial desire had been to pursue the doctor of ministry degree with a focus on being a better preaching educator for our MDiv students. But more and more it has become evident that the greatest challenge lay not before graduation but after. More and more there was a dawning realization that no matter how well we instruct our students during their four years before graduation, the real key would be in how they continue to grow after they enter full-time service and gain significant experience in preaching to souls entrusted to their care. That growing conviction was encouraged

³The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has just under 400,000 men, women, and children who call this church body their own. Roughly another 100,000 belong to sister church bodies around the world. We are the only WELS seminary in this country and the flagship for seven smaller sister seminaries scattered around the world.

still further two years ago when I became chairman of WLS' continuing education committee. That committee seeks to direct and improve our entire program of continuing professional education for pastors and other called workers in the field.

At almost the same time, our national church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), was seeking to renew a moribund effort to encourage all our called workers to grow in their ministries. For years there had been no meetings of our synod's Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee (CECW). Last year, our synod's first vice president met with our seminary president and me to begin to explore what could be done to restore and expand the work previously accomplished by the CECW.⁴ A second meeting has already taken place, but the full picture of what this might entail for my ministry is not yet clear. However, it is quite clear that on the horizon there may be an expanded role in encouraging all called workers of our synod to pursue growth in their ministries. This project's focus on growth in preaching may simply become a template from which to grow in applying lessons learned to every area of public ministry.

Then, as this project was moving toward the end of its research phase, there came a final opportunity. In 1997 our church body assembled an ad hoc committee that took the name Preach the Word. Its sole focus was to encourage growth in preaching for our pastors. The work of this committee became my first taste of working on the task of better preaching for a wider audience than just my pulpit. One of the fruits of that committee was a bi-monthly

⁴ A fuller description of the history of continuing education in the WELS, and at WLS, will be the focus of the final part of chapter 2. This chapter simply relates a bit of my small relationship to that effort.

four-page preaching newsletter that is received by every pastor in the WELS. It is entitled *Preach the Word*. The managing editor of the newsletter is the full-time administrator of the WELS' Commission on Worship (C/W). Year by year another pastor or professor is asked to serve as editor of this newsletter. Just six months ago, I was asked to serve as editor for this coming year. While I declined that request in order to focus on finishing this major project, it was agreed that I would serve for two years (and possibly longer) beginning in the fall of 2011. Now the Lord had seen fit to provide a widely read platform to take the learning I've been pursuing and share it with the approximately 1,550 active pastors of our synod. It would hardly be saying too much to maintain that this final project has been tailor-made for my ministry by multiple events I could never have foreseen just a few years ago.

Limitations of This Project

As may already be clear from the relationship of this project to my ministry, the initial limitation of this project is that it focused on providing resources that match the continuing education needs in preaching for pastors of the WELS. While it is certainly the hope of this author that knowledge gained and insights shared in this project can prove beneficial beyond our small church body, the unique history of our church body and the homogeneous nature of our ministerium's training (almost 100 percent of our synod's pastors are graduates of WLS) allowed the project to focus on making the most of common blessings and overcoming some common weaknesses of those who share almost the exact same pre-ministerial training.

But seeking input from even just 1,550 pastors goes well beyond what any singular major project could accomplish. Therefore this project focused on finding out the growth needs in preaching of three particular groups within the WELS ministerium. The research, to be described

in detail in later chapters, focused on graduates of our seminary who have been out in the ministry for five, fifteen, and twenty-five years. Random sampling (33 percent of each sub-group) of these three years of graduates in interviews and surveys supplied the majority of input from the field.

There is also one further area of limitation to be considered. This next limitation can perhaps most simply be understood when it is compared to the five functions of adult learning program directors as delineated by adult learning pioneer Malcolm Knowles. Here are the five functions he outlines:

1. Diagnostic function: “assessing the individual institutional, and societal needs for adult learning relevant to their organizational setting”;
2. Organizational function: “establishing and managing an organizational structure for the effective development and operation of an adult-education program”;
3. Planning function: “formulating objectives to meet the assessed needs and designing a program of activities to achieve those objectives”;
4. Administrative function: “instituting and supervising those procedures required for the effective operation of a program, including recruiting and training leaders and teachers, managing facilities and administrative processes, recruiting students, financing, and interpreting”; and
5. Evaluative function: “assessing the effectiveness of the program.”
(Knowles 1980, 26-27)

This project focused primarily on items 1 and 3. The purpose of the research was to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of preaching in the WELS. Once that was identified, then the rest of the project was planning the best ways to address those needs. The conclusion of the project has some evaluative work already accomplished since two focus groups analyzed the alpha version of the plan, but most of the evaluation will occur in the years that follow the conclusion of this project. Work following this project also would fit items 2 and 4 from

Knowles' list. While some specific organization and administrative ideas for my synod and seminary are mentioned, such ideas are a helpful by-product, not the focus of this research. Now that this project is completed, however, such issues will become crucial lest the whole plan come crashing down because of a failure of our synod or seminary to be organized in ways to administer the plan wisely.

Project Goals and Objectives

Project purpose: Put together a comprehensive plan for continuing education in preaching for pastors of the WELS.

- I. Goal 1: Determine the most significant challenges in preaching as perceived by WELS pastors.
 - A. Objective 1a: In order to begin to understand better the blessings and challenges of preaching in the WELS today, I will conduct interviews with parish pastors and other leaders in our synod who have an impact on preaching in our midst.
 - B. Objective 1b: I will also conduct a broad random survey of WELS pastors from three cohorts: those who have been serving in the parish five, fifteen, and twenty-five years. This will help confirm or correct the findings of the in-person interviews.
- II. Examine how spiritually mature WELS lay people (men and women) define good preaching.
 - A. Objective 2: I will identify thirty spiritually mature lay people and conduct Delphi method research with them to develop a prioritized list of how lay people perceive the blessings and challenges of preaching in the WELS today.

- III. Investigate what other seminaries and denominations have done in developing and delivering materials and in encouraging continuing education in preaching for their alumni or pastors.
 - A. Objective 3a: I will select two seminaries and study their continuing education program in preaching through in-person visits to the campus, interviews with key informants, and examination of key documents.
 - B. Objective 3b: I will do telephone or in-person interviews with one or two key leaders from each of the two denominations with which the seminaries (3a) are affiliated in order to determine plans and resources they have developed for continuing education in preaching for their pastors.
- IV. Look into what resources for continuing education in preaching and delivery systems for that education already exist within the WELS.
 - A. Objective 4: During the interviews referenced in 1a above, I will determine what has been produced or is being used in our midst for continuing education in preaching.
- V. Determine the different ways WELS pastors are already pursuing continuing education in preaching.
 - A. Objective 5: In the interviews (1a above) and questionnaire (1b above), specific questions will be asked to discover resources and learning strategies pastors are already using to improve their preaching.
- VI. Identify the best delivery methods for providing continuing education in preaching to WELS pastors.

- A. Objective 6a: In the interviews (1a) and questionnaire (1b), specific questions will be included that seek to discover pastors' preferred methods of having various forms of continuing education delivered to them. Particular attention will be paid to the use of technology.
 - B. Objective 6b: In visits to seminaries and denominational headquarters referenced above, I will ask specific questions about educational delivery methods. Particular attention will be paid to the use of technology.
-

VII. Develop the comprehensive plan and conduct an alpha evaluation of that plan.

- A. Objective 7a: On the basis of the reading and research done for this project, I will develop a first draft of a comprehensive plan for continuing education in preaching for WELS pastors.
- B. Objective 7b: I will gather two focus groups to conduct the alpha evaluation of the comprehensive plan.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

In order to design a program that would be a blessing to WELS preachers, this project needed to be both theologically faithful and educationally sound. It is to those two areas that we turn to give perspective to the project.

The Theological Rationale: The Need for Continuing Growth in Preaching

I begin this section by giving thanks to God for the clear confession of my church body when it comes to the inherent power of the Word of God—in particular, the inherent power of the means of grace: the gospel in Word and sacraments.¹ While our hearts will always struggle to grasp and apply this truth consistently for ourselves and for our ministries, we are convinced that the Holy Spirit always works in and through God’s Word as it communicates its two-fold message of law and gospel. We are fully convinced that the inspired author of

¹I am aware that speaking of the means of grace as “the gospel in Word and sacraments” may lead many to wonder if Lutherans have abandoned the Reformation pillar of *sola Scriptura*. However, we are convinced that there is no contradiction since the heart of the sacraments is the same proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen as shared in teaching or preaching. The only difference between the gospel in the Word and the gospel in the sacraments is that in the sacraments God himself has allowed us to taste and see how good he is (Ps 34:8) in a unique way by attaching his saving promise to a visible, earthly element. The power of the sacraments is not some irresistible, mechanistic or magical *opus operatum* as Rome claims. It is the same power of the Spirit who works through the gospel to win hearts as it is preached and taught. Perhaps it will also be helpful to point out that the Word itself establishes these gifts of baptism and Lord’s Supper. We are convinced we abandon *sola Scriptura* if we did *not* maintain what Scripture teaches about the sacraments.

the book of Hebrews was speaking simple truth when he declared: “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12). That is why Jesus could make the point-blank statement he did: “The words I have spoken to you are [S]pirit and they are life” (John 6:63, NIV footnote translation). That is why Jesus can assure even every human being who takes his Word into his or her mouth, “Whoever listens to you, listens to me” (Luke 10:16). If anyone is brought to recognize and confess his or her sin, we know it is the hammer of God’s law that won that battle (Jer 23:29). If anyone confesses that Jesus Christ is his or her Lord (Savior) who has redeemed him or her by his life, death, and resurrection, we give thanks that this happens only by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). It is always because of God’s powerful activity through his saving Word—whether in spoken language only or combined with earthly visible symbol in the sacraments—that anyone through repentance and faith is “in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:26-31).

Such confidence in the power of the Word and, in particular, in the power of the gospel, is absolutely critical for preaching! Only such assurance of the power of God’s inspired Word can give the kind of confidence by which the preacher can stand before God’s people without apology. “A high view of scriptural authority leads to and sustains a high view of preaching. What we believe about the Bible and its authority will shape our view of preaching” (Larsen 1998, 847).

But right here there is always danger that the preacher draws a faulty conclusion. If all the power of changing human hearts depends on the inherent power of God’s law and gospel, doesn’t that make striving for growth in preaching almost useless? Not at all! No

more than it renders our working for our daily bread useless when we confess that the Lord opens “his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing” (Ps 145:16). Yes, without God’s blessing on our endeavors, all our labor for daily bread in this life is meaningless and in vain. “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves” (Ps 127:2). God wants us to live in confident trust in his gracious providing of all things we need. Yet we also know that we are tempting God whenever trust in God’s providing hand turns into laziness. Then there is another message Scripture has for us. “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man” (Prov 6:10-11).

It is a blessing of God’s grace that he typically chooses to dispense his blessings not apart from us and our labors, but with and through us—all still depending on him. Martin Luther was fond of calling this partnership with God the privilege of serving as God’s masks. It is God who puts the food on the table for our children, but he allows us as fathers and mothers to labor and work as his visible tools through which that food arrives on the table. While God can, wherever he wishes, allow one boy’s five loaves to feed more than five thousand men, at our house it is much more than five thousand hours of work each year by father and mother that God uses to provide food for five boys. Both ways are God’s grace in action. But it is the latter, not the former, that is his typical way of providing his blessings, thereby hiding himself behind human masks. So God honors us to be his co-workers, while everything still remains gift and grace.

So it is with the wondrous working of the Word of God. God has not promised that he will communicate his saving truth by direct communication from his heart to human

hearts—by some kind of divine Vulcan mind meld or special unintelligible language that would remain an utter mystery to all but the initiated. Instead, God has chosen to communicate his saving message in the same way all other messages are delivered in this life: by the medium of spoken and symbolic communication whose meaning is plain and evident (even though human nature rejects God’s message as foolishness—1 Cor 2:14). It was the blasphemous arrogance of rebellious Israel that suggested that God had come to them in meaningless syllables (Isa 28:10). In fact, it would be God’s judgment when he would remove from their midst his clear communication in spoken human words and replace it with the unintelligible foreign tongue of invaders sent by him.

Of course, there is one powerful exception when comparing God’s communication with the communication of any other message to human beings. God’s communication always comes with that power of the Holy Spirit to crush and to save, to convict of sin and convince of eternal life. That’s why Paul could say of the message that reached the Thessalonians (and us), “The gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:5).

In the locus on the doctrine of the Word, the systematic theology course notes that I am also privileged to teach at WLS make this simple and yet profound observation: “The mode of operation of the Word is both supernatural and psychological.” By *psychological* it is meant simply that the Word comes to us as any other human communication as it makes its appeal to intellect, emotion, and will. To use the categories of ancient rhetoric, like any other form of communication, the Word seeks to inform, delight, and persuade. But at the very same

time that this psychological mode of operation is at work, the supernatural power of the Spirit is always at work.

What is the implication of this for preaching and for the importance of growing in our preaching skills? To ignore growing in good communication skills—perhaps even to use the inherent power of the means of grace as an excuse for doing so—is to ignore a key element of how God has chosen to communicate his saving truth. While the working of the Word is much, much more than mere clear and persuasive communication, it should not be less. Commenting on the meaning of the previous quotation from the WLS systematics notes, a former WLS systematics and homiletics professor writes: “We depend on the supernatural way in which the Word works to accomplish the miracle of God’s grace in the heart. We depend on the psychological way in which the Word works to get our hearts on the same wave length and to get them involved emotionally” (Gerlach 1994, 287). Dale Meyer, president of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, puts it this way:

Through the means of grace, God “gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (Augsburg Confession, V). “Hear the gospel” assumes that the listeners understand what they hear. If real dialogue is not happening in the sermon and if the preacher is not using good rhetoric (vocabulary, figures of thought and speech, arguments, and illustrations that are readily understood and prompt the audience to participate in the dialogue through their engaged thoughts), then even an otherwise well-prepared sermon may not communicate.

So there are two powers at work in an effective sermon: persuasive power and divine power, rhetoric and Word. We use the first to make room for the second, that God’s Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edification of Christ’s holy people. (Meyer 2001, 18-19)

Therefore, as in so many other areas of life, in God’s gracious plan his activity does not make our activity useless or meaningless. Instead, God so exalts us whom he created

and re-created in his image that we are intimately involved in his divine saving activity. In *Preaching* Fred Craddock expresses that conviction that God has not left us out of the equation in how he works through preaching. “On the practical level, the task of preaching cannot be divided into the Spirit’s work and our work. That is, believing in the Spirit does not cut our work in half. God’s activity in the world does not reduce ours one iota. Any doctrine of the Holy Spirit that relieves me of my work and its responsibility is plainly false” (Craddock 1990, 30). Bryan Chapell also urges us to keep our balance by recognizing what is going on in every preaching event.

No amount of homiletical skill will substitute for the Spirit’s work. The ultimate measure of a sermon’s success is not whether it had a great introduction, a powerful conclusion, or smooth transitions but whether it communicated transforming truths. Sermons succeed only when the Holy Spirit works beyond human craft to perform his purposes. Only the most arrogant servant, however, will impose on the Master’s goodness by anticipating blessing for shoddy work. We serve best when we not only depend on the Holy Spirit to empower our words but also craft them so as to honor him. (Chapell 2005, 265)

What this twofold working of the Word presents us with is the never-ending challenge of remaining balanced in the way we approach the task of preaching and our growth as preachers. As with every facet of biblical doctrine, truth is a narrow beam. On either side of that narrow beam lurks error and its accompanying dangers. To the “left” of the truth of the wondrous two-fold working of the Word is presuming upon the work of the Spirit in the Word—using the truth of the inherent power of the means of grace as a cover-up for the evil of our ignorance, laziness, or apathy (Gal 5:13). To the “right” lies the human arrogance that takes the credit for changing hearts away from the Spirit as trust in eloquence trumps confidence in God.

Throughout the history of preaching in the Christian Church, the pendulum has swung between discounting the importance of good communication and denying (at least in practice) that the real power is the Spirit's. This debate has raged in the Christian Church ever since "Augustine baptized Aristotle's rhetorical approach through Cicero into the Christian Church" (Larsen 1998, 92). Back and forth the pendulum has swung between emphasis on content (which can lead to seeing only the supernatural working of the Spirit) and emphasis on style (which can lead to only seeing the psychological working of human language). The current metamorphosis of this debate is heard between the proponents of the new homiletic (where the temptation is imbalance in the direction of style) and those who staunchly defend the strengths of the old homiletic (where the temptation is imbalance in the direction of content).

First, let's probe a bit more deeply what happens when we forget or downplay the importance of good communication skills. The promise of the inherent power of the means of grace is meant to give us confidence as we prepare to do our work, and it is meant to comfort us when we have done all we can to present God's truth in as clear and winsome a way as possible. However, it was never meant to give us reason to grow careless in striving to grow in being communicators of the Word. In *Preaching* Fred Craddock warns of that temptation to abuse a glorious truth of God's Word.

There may be someone reading this book who is persuaded that sermon crafting is a concession to human sin in that the preacher is trying to lure and tease the listeners' resistant ears, and therefore is an exercise in unbelief in that the preacher is not trusting the power of God. The twin convictions that a message of burning significance will, without art or skill, cut its own path to the hearer's heart, and that the Holy Spirit, without human contrivance, opens the listener's ear, are widely and firmly embraced. And not without reason. There is enough truth in both of them to give pause and correction to any who become enamored with their own artistry. However, there is enough deception in both of them to alert

any preacher to the danger of allowing healthy convictions to replace healthy work habits. (Craddock 1990, 153-4)

One of my co-workers in the worship department at WLS commented on the issue this way: “You have all these cattle on a thousand hills to use, and you are satisfied with cotton candy.” Skills of communication lay dormant and undeveloped, and we may even convince ourselves this means we are being faithful to the doctrine of the inherent power of the means of grace.

Some would defend such despising of communication skill by quoting from Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Doesn’t this passage stand as a clarion call to repentance for any who would emphasize anything of art or style or rhetorical skill in preaching?

When taken out of context as if this verse existed in utter isolation, it could be understood that way. But such atomistic use of Scripture does a disservice to the Word of God and badly distorts Paul’s point. If Paul is speaking an absolute “No!” to any use of rhetorical skill and artistry in communicating the gospel, then his own words in 1 Corinthians often violate his own principle. Note for instance the skillful use of rhetorical questions in chapter 1 leading up to his argument. Pay attention in Chapter 2 to his intricate line of thought that skillfully alters the definition of the word *wisdom* from what the Corinthians had made of it to how God defines it. Or continue to turn the pages of 1 Corinthians until you come to chapter 13, and there marvel at the beautiful language that the Spirit has Paul use as he writes his powerful paean to Christ-like love lived out in the midst of an unloving world. If all rhetorical skill is essentially hostile to the message of Christ crucified, then Paul has done something no

Spirit-inspired writer can: he has erred by a subtle denial of the power of the gospel. Instead, the beauty of Paul's own inspired writing begins to give the lie to using 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 as a "case closed" argument against all artistry in preaching.

What is more, using 1 Corinthians 2 to deny all use of communication art and skill fails another test of true grammatical/historical exegesis of Scripture. It fails to account for the context in which the words were written. Paul is not ruling out all use of beauty in communicating the gospel as if, as Augustine also argues, only error is allowed to be adorned by beautiful and compelling argument (Augustine 1956, 575). What Paul is arguing against is the type of empty sophistry so popular in Corinth in Paul's day that paraded words merely for the sake of wowing the audience with the skill of the speaker, thus filling the speaker's pocket with coins and his ego with praise.

Reading [1 Cor 2] as a renunciation of rhetoric doesn't fit. Paul was a master orator and his epistles reveal his expertise in that religiously neutral craft. Paul was reacting not to the genuine and beneficial rhetorical skill that every preacher must master. He was specifically criticizing the set speeches of what is called the Second Sophistic, a time when oratory was largely meaningless because the Roman Empire controlled all. Traveling orators hawked their skills, promoted their wisdom and schools of philosophy, and entertained the crowds, much as we let ourselves be entertained by the manipulations of television. ... Paul's preaching sought to root faith in the power of God rather than in anything human. "Don't lump me with itinerant sophists," he was saying. (Meyer 2001, 20)

All of Scripture, as it flows without error from inspired authors "as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21), gives overwhelming divine testimony that the skillful use of communication techniques can coexist side by side with confidence in the power of the Word. From the memory aiding outline of an acrostic psalm to the intricate logic of a skillfully worded chiasm, from the awesome pictures of John's Revelation to our Lord's own powerful use of parables to teach the crowds, the evidence mounts that communication skill

is a gift of God to be used wisely as a servant of the gospel. By dressing our sermons in plain clothes, we harm the very communication of the powerful Word we think we are defending.

Indeed, whether from misguided zeal to defend the power of the Word, or from laziness and apathy, the result of neglecting growth in communication skill can be devastating to pulpit communication. The havoc wreaked by such failure to grow in preaching is similar to what happens when we fail to grow in our ministry in general.

I impart the following basic philosophy of continuing education to every congregation I serve: Continuing education is not a perk of the ministry profession, it is basic nourishment for the health and integrity of mind and soul. Integrated minds and souls are prepared to face new perspectives and challenges. New perspectives and challenges lead to new life for both minister and congregation. And new life is God's will for us; the alternative is death and decay. This sounds hyperbolic, but almost without exception when I have met with a colleague who has long refused or been denied continuing education I have been reminded of Ezekiel's valley of bones. For lo, they were very dry. (Purdum 1999, 277)

A former WLS president, August Pieper (1857-1946), adds his own warning about what happens when we fail to grow in all skills in the ministry, but in particular in the communication skills so critical to preaching.

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.² 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. ...

²WLS did not add a fourth internship (vicar) year until after Pieper's lifetime.

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. (Pieper 1997, 119-20)

Such is the danger of failing to acknowledge the importance of communicating well God's truth, but now we must guard ourselves in the other direction. To the degree that I become convinced that growth in ministry skills in general, and growth in communication skills in particular, are important, to that degree the danger grows that I will lean over too far in the opposite direction. It is not a long trip from a healthy appreciation of the psychological working of the Word to an arrogant overconfidence in what part human communication skills can play in the advance of Christ's kingdom. How easily we can begin to convince ourselves that perhaps it does all depend on us to win hearts for the gospel. I write this knowing that at present the greater danger for those in a confessional Lutheran church body lies in the previously referenced direction, but the winds of a postmodern world (enamored with sound-byte style more than depth of message) are powerful. What is more, the arrogance of the sinful nature within us all will always make overconfidence in human communication skills an ever-present danger. Bryan Chapell in *Christ-Centered Preaching* gives us a barometer to use to check how far this arrogant smugness has invaded our thinking. He urges us to check what part prayer is playing in our sermon work. To the degree that prayer is shunted to the background in the preacher's "to do" list during sermon preparation, to that degree we may be overestimating the importance of our role as compared to the Spirit's role in preaching (Chapell 2005, 33).

In other words, if the pastor overemphasizes the importance of communication skill, there is lurking very close by the Scylla and Charybdis of pride or despair. On the side of pride is the false Messianism that believes the church (and our sermonizing) stands or falls by the efforts of the preacher. This is the especially powerful temptation for those new to ministry, who can easily confuse their zeal and energy with God's grace.

To put it another way, [the zealous young pastor] is forgetting that there is only one means of grace—the gospel in Word and sacrament—and there is only one Savior of the world. The pastor is not the means of grace; he is the trumpet, not the tune. It is the sound of the gospel that converts and preserves faith. As important as the trumpet is, it is the tune of the gospel that accomplishes everything. He is not a second messiah either, as though it were his responsibility to save the world by his efforts, his eloquence, his personality, his charisma. There is but one Redeemer of the world, one Savior of each individual whom God has elected. (Deutschlander 2008, 203)

It is a sobering reality how easily the zeal and energy of the pastor that first seeks to work to the glory of God can morph into self-centered pride. Douglas Brouwer asks the question that is far more challenging than it may first appear: “How do I develop the gifts for ministry God has given me? How do I do all of this without giving in to my own naked ambition to the standards of success that other people set for me?” (Brouwer 1999, 32).

When my attention shifts to myself, those days of pride, however, can quickly be followed by days of despair and even depression. If it all does depend on us and our skill to win and persuade hearts, what must be our conclusion when it all seems to be crumbling down around us as stubborn rejection of or resistance to the gospel rears its ugly head? How small is the distance between our own personal Mt. Carmel experience and the dejection that springs from a response to the message that wasn't quite what we expected (the thank-you note that ends, “Sincerely, Jezebel”). If so much depends on us, and our words appear to have

fallen to the ground, we can very quickly find ourselves under a crowded broom tree that Elijah thought was reserved exclusively for him (1 Kgs 19).

Whenever our focus is on self and our abilities, Satan gleefully makes the most of the opportunity to slap us like a Ping-Pong ball back and forth between pride and despair. It is then that we need to run back to the Word. We need to hear the great apostle remind us, “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Cor 3:5-7). We need to sit at Jesus’ feet and marvel again at the power of the seed. “Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head” (Mark 4:27-28). Yes, God allows us to plant and water. And for that awesome privilege we give him thanks. But we must not take our eye off the fact that the real power is in the seed of the Word and the power of the Spirit in it!

So where does this leave us in regard to growth in preaching? It leaves us prayerfully pleading with God to help us rest squarely in the middle—using our God-given gifts to the fullest and resting all our confidence in the power of the Spirit. We do that even though we can never fully understand exactly how the simultaneous two-fold working of the Word accomplishes what it does. “The wind [still] blows wherever it pleases” (John 6:8). And so we preach with the gospel-worked confidence in the awesome power of the Spirit in the Word—without neglecting to pour out every effort to proclaim that beautifully. And so we preach with a grace-inspired zeal that takes every God-given communication skill he has

given us as we seek to return to God two for one for whatever gifts he has given us (Matt 25:20)—without losing sight of the real power of God’s grace in the gospel.

Fred Craddock in *As One without Authority* urges us to make finding this middle ground the unending quest of our preaching ministry.³

Preaching embraces the tension between an understanding of itself as a content that is given and yet as an activity that is learned. “Preaching” can be properly defined as both “that which is preached” and “the act of presenting the gospel.” The first definition underscores the fact that the message is given to the preacher and to the church. Such a definition reminds the minister that preaching is a gift and moves him into the posture of a grateful recipient. And yet the second definition can be neglected only at the risk of the demise of the pulpit. This understanding of preaching reminds the minister of his task as communicator, as one called to articulate with interest, persuasion, and clarity. The givenness of the content of his communication does not diminish but heightens his obligation to prepare thoroughly, mastering as fully as possible the media by which he will publish the Good News. It is because of the gifts of Brahms and Mozart that the most accomplished pianist is not ashamed to practice scales. Let a preacher focus solely upon the givenness of the content, and we have a gospel that is forever theoretical and potential because it remains locked within inarticulate lips and hidden in confused speech. And yet let him center upon preaching as a learned act, and the measure of his mastery of speech arts will be the measure of his arrogance. Although he cannot resolve them, neither will the minister relinquish either pole of his affirmation, “I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God” (1 Cor. 15:10). (Craddock 2001, 87)

³ Repeated quotations in this project report from Fred Craddock’s writings could leave a misunderstanding in the mind of the reader. As much as I enjoy reading Fred Craddock for his keen insights on the art of preaching, so much also am I troubled by his low view of Scripture. At the same time, it is my observation that at least some of Craddock’s later writings reveal a moderately greater conviction in regard to the reliability of Scripture and a willingness to speak it with authority (see a particularly interesting interview with Craddock in the May-June 2003 edition of the magazine *Preaching*). The early Craddock was on a crusade to break down the prison walls of the old homiletic behind which, he believed, languished too many preachers chained to a methodology that no longer communicated to hearers. As is often the case with crusades, the storming of the Bastille of the old homiletic went more than a bit too far.

Here is how I would word this balancing act as someone speaking from within a confessional Lutheran church body. As mentioned earlier, as Lutherans we thank God for the clear teaching on the inherent power of the means. We are convinced that all growth in faith and power for sanctified living comes only by the power of the Spirit in the gospel. Our knowledge, skills, and abilities cannot in themselves convert an unbeliever or strengthen a single child of God.

But right there we must be careful that we don't draw the unbiblical conclusion that would actually make us quite imbalanced in our theology and approach to ministry. The analogy that I believe can be very helpful in speaking to Confessional Lutherans is one drawn from the Apostles' Creed. We want a full three-article approach to ministry. The heart of our ministry is the gospel of Jesus Christ confessed in the creed's Second Article. Lutherans strive to match Scripture in being Christocentric (John 5:39). When it comes to what makes the difference between damnation and salvation, with Paul we strive to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

What is more, our ultimate confidence as we proclaim that gospel is in the truths of the creed's Third Article. We believe the gospel in Word and sacraments always carry with it the Spirit's power to convert and empower. Real church growth internally and externally is always and solely accomplished by the Spirit through the gospel.

But we dare not, in our zeal to be Christocentric (Second Article) and confident in the power of the means (Third Article) ignore the First Article. There too we find a whole host of gifts of God to be summoned for service to the gospel. As Luther so wonderfully summarized that article in the Small Catechism, "I believe that God created me and all that

exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, *my mind and all my abilities*. ... For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him.” First Article blessings are given precisely for us to use them to the honor and glory of our God. Nowhere can that be done more gloriously than when those gifts are used to the fullest in the direct service of the gospel. Perhaps nowhere can these gifts be pressed into the cause of the kingdom more beneficially than in the proclamation of God’s truth from the pulpit.

To sum it all up: we use First Article gifts, to proclaim Second Article truths, with Third Article confidence.⁴ The gospel and the means of grace, the Second and Third Articles, stand in magisterial position within the church. The gifts of the First Article stand in a ministerial position to the gospel and the means. Whatever those gifts may be that God has given us, they are to be used to the fullest to make sure the gospel gets out and is heard.

As Lutherans are fond of asking: “What does this mean?” For instance, when it comes to proclaiming Christ from the pulpit, we know that what we are doing is much more than exercising good communication skills (First Article). As we proclaim the gospel (Second Article), we are unleashing the power of the Spirit (Third Article) on the hearts of our hearers. But, as mentioned before, while proclaiming the gospel is much more than good communication, it is certainly not intended to be less. God has chosen to communicate his

⁴ To the best of my knowledge, this statement is original. I have not found elsewhere this combination of the twofold working of the Word with how it relates to the articles of the Creed. Already in 2007 I began to use it in my teaching on and off campus, and I have seen eyes light up with a new grasp of this truth. However, allow me also to overcome one potential misunderstanding pointed out by a fellow WLS professor who heard me use this phrase. I am *not* saying that all we proclaim from the pulpit are Second Article truths (as if truths about the First Article or Third Article are not legitimate pulpit fare). I am only emphasizing the Christocentric nature of Lutheran preaching.

saving truth in the same outward form as any other human communication comes to us. So with Paul we work hard to set “forth the truth plainly ... to every man’s conscience” (2 Cor 4:2). We work hard to imitate Jesus in how he summoned the simplest truths of nature or current events (Luke 13:4) to illuminate gospel truth. With Paul we study the Athenians to try to understand what this “spiritual” age is all about and what language we can use that will not be distorted or misunderstood.⁵ We ignore how messages are wisely transmitted from person to person in any culture to the hindrance of the gospel. Just as we harm the gospel if our confidence in changing hearts is our charisma and power of persuasion (shifting our confidence from Third Article to First Article), so we end up causing distortions to the gospel if we truncate our theology and ignore the importance of God-given First Article gifts. To distort John Milton: those gifts also serve that only stand and wait on the gospel. We are, after all, the spiritual children of a man who walked marketplaces around Wittenberg so as to translate the Bible into a language his dear German people would easily grasp.

We do well and act wisely when we seek to take these First Article gifts and fan them into flame (2 Tim 1:6) in gospel service to God’s glory. As Professor James Tiefel remarked in an opening service for WLS, “There is room on this campus for a variety of gifts,

⁵ Just as studying the psychological make-up of human beings gives us insights on how good communication works, so also insights from disciplines such as sociology can give us a clearer vision of the culture and understandings (or misunderstandings) of our hearers. Such use of the social sciences is part of the broad spectrum of First Article gifts that can be pressed into gospel service. Of course, as much as we can learn from the social sciences when it comes to *how* people think or act, we also recognize that many of the conclusions social scientists draw about *why* people think or act as they do, and the prescriptions written to solve humanity’s dilemmas, often only mask humanity’s real need (sin) while ignoring God’s real answer (Jesus). Here we must be especially vigilant to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5).

but there is not much room for a variety of effort” (Tiefel 1988, 243). There is indeed room in the ministry for many and varied sets of First Article gifts. Christ has distributed gifts according to his wisdom in the multifaceted beauty of his giving (1 Pet 4:10). But there is no room in the public ministry for a variety of effort. Gifts received are to be fanned into flame for zealous use. And nowhere is that more important than in the pulpit. That is the theological basis for this whole project of striving for excellence in preaching!

*The Educational Rationale: Insights from Studies
in Adult and Continuing Professional Education*

When it comes to making the most of our mind and all our abilities (First Article gifts), there is often much we can learn beyond the realm of theology—although (as mentioned in the footnote above) never without taking “captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). As in so many areas of the things of this life, Jesus reminds us in his parable of the shrewd manager that “the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light” (Luke 16:8). In the multibillion-dollar industry that adult and continuing professional education (CPE) have become in the United States, there is no shortage of motivation in what this world values for scholars to probe and develop many helpful insights in educating adults, and in particular helping those in professions to improve the way they serve the public. While the glory of our saving God and the salvation of eternal souls give us a much higher purpose for growth in preaching, the church can still learn much from what is going on in the world of adult education and CPE.

*A Brief History of Adult and Continuing Professional
Education in the United States*

Adult education and CPE are still very much in a time of sorting out in our country. Adult education is the broader of the two fields, dealing with many different kinds of learning experiences for adults. CPE is the narrower field, focusing on helping adults who have completed pre-service training for various professions to continue to grow through the gaining and application of knowledge and skills in their chosen profession.

The push for adult education and CPE did not gain any real momentum in our country until the second half of the 20th century. Robert Cervero succinctly summarizes that history for us.

Beginning in the 1960s, we began to see embryonic evidence for systems of continuing education. Perhaps the first clear signal of this new view was the publication in 1962 of a conceptual scheme for the lifelong education of physicians (Dryer 1962). The 1970s saw the beginning of what is now a widespread use of continuing education as a basis for relicensure and recertification (Cervero and Azzaretto 1990). By the 1980s organized and comprehensive programs of continuing education were developed in engineering, accounting, law, medicine, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, social work, librarianship, architecture, nursing home administration, nursing, management, public school education, and many other professions (Cervero 1988). During that decade, many professions developed their systems of accreditation for providers of continuing education (Kenny 1985). (Cervero 2000, 81)

Yet while it is true that an organized CPE movement in our country is in its infancy, it is also accurate to say that many of the emphases of adult education and CPE are echoes of far older ways of viewing learning in adulthood.

CPE is not a new concept. Ongoing education for professional practitioners at one time was provided through apprenticeships and guild systems of the middle ages, and it was an informal adjunct of professional practice into modern times. It first was given a name, *continuing professional education*, and recognized as a component of adult education in the 1960s. At that time, expanding technology, rapidly growing knowledge bases, changes within professions,

and the emergence of new professions clarified the need for more and more structured education of professional practitioners throughout their careers (Houle 1980; Shuchman 1981). Also during this time, “the public perception of professional responsibility, accountability, and service” (Azzaretto 1990, p. 25) was called into question by government agencies, consumers, and the professions themselves, further prompting a focus on CPE. (Wilson and Hayes 2000, 375)

Cervero also points out that, in many ways, the situation of CPE at the beginning of the 21st century is very similar to where pre-graduate professional education found itself at the beginning of the 20th century.

By way of analogy, at the end of this century continuing education is in the same state of development as pre-service education was at the beginning of this century. Medical education serves a useful point of comparison. In his 1910 report on medical schools in Canada and the United States, Abraham Flexner (1910) found that only sixteen of 155 schools expected that their incoming students would have any previous college education, and he recommended closing the schools that did not. It is unlikely that anyone in 1910 would have predicted the structure of medical education today. Likewise, systems of continuing education will grow through this transitional period to achieve an equivalent coherence, size, and stature as the pre-service stage of professional education. Indeed, the leaders of most professions would probably agree that what we hardly dare prophesy today will be seen by later generations as efforts to achieve a manifest necessity (Houle 1980, p. 302). While these systems of continuing education are in transition (Young 1998) there are many choices that must be made. (Cervero 2000, 82)

The history of continuing professional education for clergy is also relatively short. “The publication in 1960 of Dr. Connolly Gamble’s *Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister* provided the spark that began the movement” (Rouch 2000, 19). The first professional organization formed to encourage professional growth among clergy on a wider scale was the Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry (SACEM). It was formed in 1967 (Rouch 2000, 21).

However, if much of CPE in our country is in its infancy, it would seem fair to say that CPE for clergy in most denominations appears still to be struggling to be born. While

there have been some exceptions such as SACEM and the Institute for Clergy Excellence, pastors appear to be lagging behind many other professions in establishing standards and promoting methods for promoting real professional growth. This is all the more striking (and disappointing) when one considers that no profession has a greater and more lasting reason to pursue continuing education so vigorously.

Gospel ministry is more than a profession. It is a sacred calling. At the same time, in the best sense of the word, the ministry is a profession. High standards, concern for growth among colleagues, and a service motif are all important ingredients of the ministry. Other professions insist on regular and purposeful continuing education to assure consistent, quality practice. If physicians, lawyers, accountants, and engineers are asked to grow in competence, should not ministers also do their best to present themselves to God “as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed”? Professional development as a concept helps us to target effective ministry as the purpose for our personal and professional growth. (Carter 1986, 25-26)

Yet despite the newness of the CPE movement, and despite the fact that it is still struggling to find a clear and effective path for real growth for the professions, the movement has attracted the most sincere complement a materialistic culture knows how to give. It has attracted billions of dollars. “A multibillion-dollar enterprise has arisen in response to adult learning interests—an enterprise that spends more dollars than elementary school, high schools, and postsecondary schools combined” (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2006, ix).

*Insights to Gain from Adult and Continuing Professional
Education in the United States*

Surveying the field of adult education and CPE is like overseeing a complex battlefield in which no one is wearing clearly defined uniforms so as to identify the different combatants. Multiple competing theories abound, with new theories morphing by assembling

bits and pieces from previously competing theories, thereby creating new philosophical alliances—while some old theories once well received suddenly are left wounded on the field by claims of newer research. And behind the theories lie competing worldviews, adding another level of complexity. Fighting for hegemony on the field of battle is everything from the more modernistic and optimistic humanist who sees unlimited potential for good in the individual's quest for self-actualization to the more postmodern and pessimistic deconstructivist who doubts that the individual even matters and who sees the field of education littered with power structures in need of being challenged and/or dismantled. "But just as there is no single theory that explains human learning in general, no single theory of adult learning has emerged to unify the field. Rather, there are a number of theories, models, and frameworks, each of which attempts to capture some aspect of adult learning" (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 103). In the midst of such a confusing melee, a thorough survey and analysis of the whole field of adult education and CPE would be far beyond the scope of this doctoral project and even more significantly beyond this author's expertise.

But what is possible, after surveying the field, is a "plunder the Egyptians" approach that seeks to assemble significant bits and pieces of insights that could aid in planning an educationally sound program to help pastors grow in preaching. To that end, Malcolm Knowles supplies what to me appears to be a helpful framework on which to organize what can be useful for this project from the fields of adult education and CPE. While many have argued with Knowles about perceived weaknesses and deficiencies in his approach to adult learning, few would argue too vocally with the four emphases driving adult education that Knowles identifies. Those four emphases are: (1) a new conception of the purpose

of education, (2) a shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, (3) the promotion of lifelong learning, and (4) the use of new delivery systems (Knowles 1980, 18-20). The rest of this portion of chapter 2 will use this four-fold division to organize a listing of insights to be gained for my project from adult education and CPE.

*Insights to Be Gained from Redefining
Education's Purpose*

Is the essential purpose of education providing the learner all the information he or she needs to know, or is it providing the learner with the tools, skills, and motivation needed to continue the process of learning well beyond school years?⁶ Adult education and CPE are moving from the former conception of education to the latter.

The problem is that education is not yet perceived as a lifelong process, so that we are still taught in our youth only what we ought to know then and not how to keep finding out. One mission of the adult educator, then, can be stated positively as helping individuals to develop the attitude that learning *is* a lifelong process and to acquire the skills of self-directed learning. (Knowles 1980, 28)

The concept of lifelong learning will be dealt with later. Here the issue is the concept that education's primary focus is developing self-directed learners who have the skill and ability and confidence to gain what they need to know.

What appears to be the primary moving force behind that shift toward self-directed learning? Most are convinced it is the rapid change of society and expansion of knowledge

⁶ I recognize the danger of a false dichotomy that can be—and in a postmodern, deconstructivist world often is—at work here. Even in the midst of a rapidly changing world, a broad base of “information” that students learn to master is not an enemy of true learning. That is why our pre-ministerial college provides our incoming students with a broad bachelor of arts degree before enrollment at the seminary.

(especially in scientific and technical knowledge). This rapid societal change and explosion of information makes much of what was learned in school outdated already before the ink is dry on the semester exam.

Up to the early part of the twentieth century the time-span of major cultural change (e.g., massive inputs of new knowledge, technological innovation, vocational displacement, population mobility, change in political and economic systems, etc.) extended over several generations, whereas in the twentieth century several cultural revolutions have already occurred and the pace is accelerating. Under this new condition, knowledge gained at any point in time is largely obsolete within a matter of years; and skills that made people productive in their twenties become out-of-date in their thirties. So it is no longer functional to define education as the process of transmitting what is known; it must now be defined as a lifelong process of continuing inquiry. And so the most important learning of all—for both children and adults—is learning how to learn, the skills of self-directed inquiry. (Knowles 1980, 41)

When you consider that Knowles wrote those words in 1980 when the digital age was only in its gestational stages, you realize that some elements of his argument have grown stronger in the almost three decades since he penned those words. Consider these three eye-opening statements from Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner.

Because skills learned in preparation for a job or career cannot keep pace with the demands of the world of work, the ability to learn becomes a valuable skill in and of itself. (15)

50% of all employee skills become outdated in three to five years (Shank and Sitze, 2004); in high-tech areas workers may need to learn to operate a new machine, or a new software program, or a new hardware configuration every eighteen months or less (Desimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002). (15-16)

Others have speculated that half of what most professionals know when they finish their formal training will be outdated in less than five years, perhaps even in months for those in technology-related careers. Thus, the need for continuing education has dramatically escalated with the increase in knowledge production. (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 18)

Is it any wonder that some have pictured the accelerated pace of change as living in “a world of permanent white water” (Maehl 1999, 157)?

As Christians, we certainly would interject here the powerfully comforting truth that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). Jesus is and always will remain “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Our basic human need as sinners in desperate need of a Savior does not change whether someone works in the glow of the flickering computer screen or candlestick. Nothing that God has told us in his Word will become outdated or obsolete even when human beings and all their glory have withered and faded for the last time on the Last Day (Isa 40:6-8).

But as important as it is to state those unmovable realities, those realities do not alter the fact that rapid changes in culture and society impact how we get across the changeless message to a changing world. The heart and core of the message dare not change, but if we are not learning anew how to communicate that message to a changing world, we risk distorting the very message we seek to preserve and share. God’s law and gospel do not change, but the methods at work to share them must. That is why this shift in the essential purpose of education is not useless theory for pastors and those who would help them thrive in ministry. God will never be a useless relic irrelevant to current culture. But a pastor can become precisely that.

Continuing education for clergy is more important today than ever. In our society, in which changes in technology, mores, social systems, and occupations take place at a dizzying pace, clergy on the one hand tend to remain on the job over the course of a professional lifetime. On the other hand, they are confronted over the years with issues about which their seminary professors knew nothing during those early years of entry-level formation. Today’s fifty-year-old graduated from a seminary whose notable scholars did not understand family systems therapy, end of life decision making, narrative preaching, adult learning theory, substance abuse, how to access religious categories on the world wide web or the subtle effect of deconstructionism on the *textus receptus*. Assuming that the pace of change will accelerate, a congregation of astute Christians will quickly know whether their albeit caring pastor is in touch with current knowledge or is hopelessly out-of-date. (Zersen 1998, 211)

So what does this mean for someone seeking to help 21st-century pastors cope with ministry challenges in preaching—or any other area of ministry? Knowles offers a key test for everything offered for adult education. “One of the tests of everything the adult educator does—whether it be to conduct a course in hat-making, a human-relations workshop, or a staff meeting—is the extent to which the participants leave a given experience with heightened curiosity and with increased ability to carry on their own learning” (Knowles 1980, 28).

Right here, a corrective on a faulty image of self-directed learning may be helpful. It is critical that self-directed learning not be considered as an interchangeable synonym for learning alone. The image of the lone scholar lost in the dusky depths of his study may be endearing to those of us who love academia—and some may learn well that way—but it is becoming increasingly clear that for many learning in isolation from others may mean not learning much. “What becomes evident is that this type of informal learning does not necessarily mean learning alone, a major myth about self-directed learning (Brockett 1994). Rather, adults often use other people, and even groups, whether they are institutionally based or not, in their self-directed learning pursuits” (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 37). In fact, learning from others may be critical not only during a learning event, but after as well.

Instead of going off to isolated events and then returning without the benefit of support from others who have shared that experience, I suggest designing events that involve immediate peers with whom one could continue in ongoing study and conversation as well as natural prayer. Such an approach would recognize that the need to shape and integrate never ceases. (Beekman 1993, 48-49)

Specifically for my project, ideas of education and learning (Reber 2000, 41) must change as pastors learn to partner both with ministry peers and key lay leaders whom we serve and with whom we serve. “When ministers of the Gospel try to live as spiritual

Lone Rangers, they cut themselves off from the potential nurturing and sustaining of God's people—colleagues, laity, and family alike—gathered around Word and sacraments” (Carter 1986, 59).

Speaking theologically, it would be wise to approach this issue not so much from the “law side” as accountability (though it certainly is that), but from the “gospel side” as making the most of the gift of the body of Christ of which we are one part intimately connected with Christ and one another. Carter shows why such an approach has merit.

Support systems for ministers depend on the Gospel. All sorts of programs and techniques for building support mean nothing without God's love in Jesus Christ. Ministers as sinful human beings will isolate themselves from support, compete with colleagues, distrust lay leaders, and neglect their own families for the sake of a higher calling. Because of the same sinful nature, colleagues will assert their independence and relate on a merely superficial level; lay leaders will see the minister in an adversarial position; and the family will constantly fight the shackles with which the church binds the minister's life. The minister will fear the consequences of reaching out to others for support and will labor alone with a martyr complex or a spiritless resignation.

But the Gospel makes the difference. Eyes focused on the cross and the empty tomb meet each other on high and holy ground. Resentments, mistrust, jealousy, and suspicion melt in the mercy and grace of God. Sustained by the Gospel, bridges are built, honest communication begins, healing occurs, and love binds hurts. Sharing the faith objectively and subjectively leads to a support system with colleagues, laity, and family. (Carter 1986, 59)

Here it would be beneficial to repeat another corrective referenced briefly above. Since so much of adult education and CPE is impacted by a constructivist approach to education (there is no set body of unchanging truths that need to be learned), those who hold to the reality of God's unchanging, objective truth need to be as unapologetic as ever in passing down from one generation to the next God's unchanging truth. Present-day pastors cannot

stand with Timothy and “guard the good deposit that was handed down” (2 Tim 1:14) unless that body of truth has indeed first been carefully passed down to them.

*Insights to Be Gained from a Shift of Focus
from Teaching to Learning*

A second driving force behind what is going on in the fields of adult education and CPE is the shift in focus from teaching to learning. Especially for professionals who are dealing with the public, it is critical that information and skills and their application in wise practice are not just being taught, but that there is actual learning going on that impacts their everyday practice. Especially in professions where professional misconduct is frequently punishable by civil lawsuit, the pressure is on for adult and continuing education that actually produces more capable practitioners.

It is here especially that most educational theorists find fault with most of what passes for CPE. Too many involved in CPE are so focused on teaching vital content that they fail to note whether what they have shared actually made any difference at all in the practice of the professionals who were before them. There is much more going on than merely offering professionals a “data dump” in order to keep them “up to date.”

Keeping professionals up-to-date is as close to a unifying aim as continuing education has (Nowlen 1988). This educational model flows from the deeply embedded view that professional practice consists of instrumental problem-solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique (Schon 1987). This scientific knowledge is produced by theorists and researchers, and the foundation is laid in professional school, with additional building blocks added through forty years of continuing education. In a sense, continuing education becomes an extension of faculty members’ lines of research. Yet most of the problems professionals face are not in the book. (Cervero 1986, 83)

Even when the one leading the educational event is skilled in how theoretical knowledge intersects with real-world dilemmas, the critical information is often not being shared in a manner that actually facilitates real learning among those in attendance.

I think the future of continuing education for clergy and laity should mean paying serious attention to the teaching/learning enterprise, no matter what the subject or topic is. How do people learn? How are needs and interests assessed and tested? How does change take place in persons or institutions? What does it mean for the congregation or local church to understand itself as the agency of education? Who is an effective teacher? If learning means change in knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, and skills, what has to be part of the teaching/learning transaction? (Reber 2000, 48-49)

The following description of the all-too-common professional learning event makes many an adult educator wince because of its familiarity.

A central feature of North American societies in the late-twentieth century was the professionalization of their workforces. One estimate is that nearly 25 percent of the United States workforce claims membership in a profession (Cervero 1988). These professionals teach our children, guide our businesses, manage and account for our money, settle our civil disputes, diagnose and treat our mental and physical ills, fight our wars, and help mediate our relationship to God. Thus it is important to keep our eye on what is truly at stake in continuing education. The bottom line of continuing education is to improve the practice of these teachers, physicians, managers, and clergy. It is instructive to contrast the bottom line with the picture of the most frequently encountered form of continuing education:

It is dominated by the informational update. In what is typically an intensive two or three-day short course, a single instructor lectures and lectures and lectures fairly large groups of business and professional people, who sit for long hours in an audiovisual twilight, making never-to-be-read notes at rows of narrow tables covered with a green baize and appointed with fat binders and sweating pitchers of ice water. (Nowlen 1988, p. 23)

This picture is as universally recognizable to people in any profession as it is criticized for being largely ineffective in improving the performance of these same professionals. Indeed, the familiarity of this picture would be funny if the importance of continuing education were not so great. (Cervero 2000, 80)

What is needed is paying attention more carefully not just to the quality of the material being shared but to the educational soundness of how it is being shared. Does what wants to pass itself off as true CPE actually promote learning that shows itself in improved practice by the professionals it seeks to reach?

That means as we deal with this second key element of what is driving adult and continuing professional education, we must venture at least briefly onto the battlefield of competing educational theories and gather up as much solid, research-based help as we can on what it means to actually help adults learn and professionals improve practice.

In addition to the personal limitation stated earlier that I cannot in any way claim to be an expert in educational theory, I will sound three other cautions as we briefly venture into the arena of learning theory. Caution 1: much of what is trumpeted in the popular media outlets about education breakthroughs is often fuzzy science.

It is hard not to miss the latest goings-on in brain research. Stories about what researchers are finding about how our brain functions abound in popular outlets, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and our daily papers and newscasts. ... Although these stories are certainly interesting, the data for these stories come from experiments in laboratories. Thus, much of our knowledge about the brain is currently only in the form of working hypotheses. (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 411)

And again: “Connecting what we know about the brain and related systems to learning in adulthood is at best a set of working hypotheses” (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 416). Those same authors speak almost identical warnings about what is so excitedly reported about the concept of “emotional intelligence” (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 380-81). They also warn about commonly used tools in discerning learning styles such as Kolb’s learning inventory and the Myers-Briggs personality profile (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 409).

Caution 2 is a reminder that especially here, as we get into details of how and why people think and act as they do in the process of learning, we must be especially cautious of keeping all ideas “obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Whether it is Knowles’ humanism that almost utterly ignores the realities of original sin (Knowles 1980, 41; Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 282) or the neo-Marxist radical deconstructivist leanings of much of critical theory (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 241-42), there is much from which the conscience bound by the Word of God must recoil.

Caution 3 would be to warn against an over-reaction as much of education views the role of the instructor as moving from “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side.” Is it critical to pay attention to sound teaching methodology that facilitates real learning? Absolutely! But the role Scripture paints of an authoritative teacher of the Word is clearly not a relic of a bygone era of education any more than it is passé to preach with authority in the pulpit. The fact that God holds those serving as teachers to a higher standard (James 3:1) is already sufficient evidence of that.

But, keeping these cautions in mind, we can still learn much from the voluminous research that is going on in learning theory. Here again, one author’s summary of insights into learning among adults seems to cut through much of the smoke of the battle and give us at least something to take home. Loosely adapting Knowles’ original characteristics of adult learners and seeking to find the closest thing to what could be called a consensus among theorists, William Maehl ventures to offer four very generally agreed upon characteristics of what promotes real learning for adults. As we bring this area of the switch in adult and continuing education from teaching to learning to a close, here are Maehl’s four characteristics and some

brief “so whats” to help apply what this would mean for those seeking to help adults actually learn.

- I. First, Maehl states that “the learning experience should recognize and address the experience of adult learners” (Maehl 1999, 36). What does this mean?
 - A. The one-size-fits-all lecture hall presentation (more conducive to Henry Ford making Model T’s—one size and color fits all—than producing competent professionals) cannot continue to be the regular method of instruction in continuing professional education. Even if they may be entertained and wowed by the wit and wisdom of the presentation, too often they go home with “the lingering realization that significant educational needs remain unmet” (Stych 1995, 45). Such presentations by their very nature easily discount the varied professional experience and the very real unique questions of all those in attendance.
 - B. More and more our practice needs to model what some have called “inside/out” learning rather than “outside/in” learning (Brown and Lord 2000, 92-93). Those “inside” the profession are assumed to have already learned much. The need then is to take what they have learned and step “out” for a time to reflect wisely on their past, present, and future practice. Some have called this developing the “wise practitioner” (Brown and Lord 2000, 94).
 - C. Without sacrificing one iota of God’s unchanging truth, those teaching adults need to undergo a crucifixion of their ego that loves to puff them up by telling them that they are the experts who possess the really important knowledge while those attending the learning event are those who bring little or nothing to the

table. Knowles quotes adult learning pioneer Eduard Lindeman's statement that "In an adult class the student's experience counts for as much as the teacher's knowledge. Both are exchangeable at par. Indeed, in some of the best adult classes it is sometimes difficult to discover who is learning most, the teacher or the students" (Knowles 1980, 68). Any adult educator worth his salt must be constantly asking as he designs a presentation, "Am I the only one doing the talking?" As Lindeman points out, if the answer to that question is yes, not only may those in attendance be learning less, so may he! Even if adults conditioned by years of "sit there and listen" education may be perfectly happy to lapse back into "teach me" mode (Knowles 1980, 46), we cannot allow that to happen. What practitioners crave more and more is not monologue by an expert but dialogue with that expert (Lord 2000, 58).

- II. Maehl then adds his second encouragement: "Many adults prefer to play an active role in the planning, direction, and evaluation of their learning" (Maehl 1999, 36). What does this mean?
 - A. Any organization that wants to produce real learning and to encourage potential participants that such real learning has a good chance of taking place will work hard to involve practicing professionals in planning out specific educational offerings. Here is some specific application to clergy continuing professional education:

The best way to strengthen the relationship between continuing education and professional competence is to seek ongoing grass roots input from both clergy and laity on the kinds of learning experiences that contribute to mutual ministry. Seminaries and graduate theological institutions may not have all

the answers for ministry in the trenches. Annual conferences involving clergy, laity, and some outside experts (change theorists, futurists, sociologists, theologians, community leaders, and business people, among others) might provide invaluable resources for the next year's preaching, Bible classes, community outreach programs, and continuing education for the pastor. (Zersen 1998, 218)

- B. For professionals to become fully engaged in meeting their educational needs, it is critical to help those professionals work through a process that identifies their needs as objectively as possible. Of course, in ministry practices as complex as preaching, great care must be exercised to design tools and methods that actually reflect the complexity of what is being measured. When it comes to preaching, for example:

Ideally, performance abilities are assessed directly in the actual practice context. Strict observation and evaluation of daily activities or practice in personal or work settings offer the opportunity to obtain a clear picture of strengths and discrepancies, and hence of areas that need educational intervention. Unfortunately, such assessment is costly, frequently inconvenient, or even disruptive in the situation under observation, and therefore out of reach for most if not all organizations seeking to identify continuing education needs. Fortunately ... more practical alternatives are available. (Queeney 1995, 80)

- III. Here is Maehl's third point for fostering adult learning: "Flexibility and adaptability in the learning situation are desirable to accommodate learners' variable and changing circumstances" (Maehl 1999, 36). What does this mean?
- A. With all due respect for the legitimate concerns raised earlier about tools such as Kolb's learning inventory and the Myers-Briggs personality profile, it is critical to grasp the different ways different professionals learn. For instance, while many who excel in the world of academia thrive on learning from reading and abstract

theorizing, the number of those who learn from direct experience and prefer to test out their learning by trial and error is legion (Brown and Lord 2000, 95).

- B. Closely related to that is the wisdom of designing learning experiences that move beyond the merely theoretical and provide opportunity to put learning to use immediately in real-life application to the professional's actual context. This doesn't mean we abandon presenting and discussing theory in the classroom (a clear over-reaction), but it does mean that educators must plan wisely and creatively to help students put what they learn into real world uses.
- IV. Maehl's fourth way to foster real learning in adults is remembering that "the relation between teacher and learner should reflect their mutual respect as adults and be characterized by facilitation and cooperation rather than control" (Maehl 1999, 36). The specific application of this point is so closely connected to honoring the experience of the adults (Maehl's first point) that the "what does this mean" of that point serves this point as well.
 - V. Maehl's fifth way to foster real learning in adults is understanding that "adults benefit from a positive learning environment. ... such an environment embraces the physical, social, and personal settings of learning and should include regular and constructive feedback" (Maehl 1999, 37). What does this mean?
 - A. While many of the "so whats" here are so situationally specific as to go beyond the broad scope of this project, yet this much can be said: the continuing professional educator who ignores the importance of what Knowles calls the learning "climate" (Knowles 1980, 14) should expect a high chance of threatening storms when it comes to his hope of fostering real learning in his students.

*Insights to Be Gained from a New Emphasis
on Lifelong Learning*

Having taken a longer look at some of the implications of Knowles' second driving force in adult and CPE (focus shifting from teaching to learning), we now move on to the third. Knowles' third driving force is the new emphasis on lifelong learning. While self-directed learning (the first driving force) addressed the *what* (or *essential purpose*) of adult and CPE, and shifting the emphasis from teaching to learning addressed *the how* of adult education and CPE, lifelong learning addresses the question of *when* that learning is to take place.

It is important to note that there is an especially close connection between self-directed learning and lifelong learning. Self-directed learning emphasizes that adults need to be trained how to access and use all available tools to gain new learning. Lifelong learning emphasizes that this training is meant to be put to use throughout an adult's life and throughout a professional's career.

That emphasis of lifelong learning runs counter to several assumptions that may have been fostered quite unintentionally through years of formal education. The first such assumption inimical to lifelong learning is the "two-stage" theory of life. First you have your time for learning that prepares you for your chosen profession. That is followed by the time of living out in your profession the learning previously gained. What is too easily hidden from the perception of the professional is that these two functions (learning and serving) are often best pursued when they merge almost completely. In fact, the more formalized and, strangely, excellent the pre-professional training proves to be, it can easily have the unintended side-effect of lulling the professional to sleep about the need to keep learning throughout one's life. Sadly, much of learning then comes to an end when practice in the field begins.

In North America, the rise of institutions for primary, secondary, and higher education in the middle and late nineteenth century displaced the understanding of learning as a lifelong activity. Learning came to be understood as an activity primarily for children, adolescents, and young (college age) adults. ... As Cyril O. Houle observes, "When the opportunities for learning in adulthood were minimal and when knowledge did not increase rapidly, it may have been prudent to try to compress all education into a short span of years near the start of life. Today it is not." (Brown 1997, 159)

Closely associated with that assumption of learning as pre-professional activity is a second assumption that learning is the task of the child, not the mature adult.

Most adults alive today were educated in their youth according to the doctrine that learning is primarily a function of youth and that the purpose of education is to supply individuals in their youth with all the knowledge and skills they will require to live adequately for the rest of their lives. But the rapidly accelerating pace of change in our society has proved this doctrine to be no longer valid. Facts learned in youth have become insufficient and in many instances actually untrue; and skills learned in youth have become outmoded by new technologies. Consequently, adult years become years of creeping obsolescence in work, in play, in understanding of self, and in understanding the world. (Knowles 1980, 27-28)

The third assumption, deeply imbedded in the other two, is this: if learning is the task of the young during their pre-professional life, then those who seek continuing education must be those who didn't get it right the first time.

Many persons, especially those outside the profession of adult education, still see adult learners as playing catch-up after a failure to achieve expected stages of education at the traditional age. Adult education has been considered a remedial effort to repair an earlier omission. ...

These comments are borne out by the persistence of phrases such as "getting an education" and "finishing their education," which are applied to graduates, particularly from four-year colleges; whatever their age. The notion persists that education is a finite product or condition, normally obtained by early adulthood. Fortunately, new realities are beginning to change this view. Education and training are moving to the forefront of planning for the future. (Maehl 1999, 6)

The results of these and similar assumptions (often more powerful because they are not consciously articulated) have devastating effects on professionals' abilities to carry out their chosen profession with wisdom and skill. George Brown makes specific application of that to the pastoral ministry.

One barrier to lifelong learning in ministry is the view that theological education is preparation for ministry. Eduard C. Lindeman ... observed that "Education conceived as preparation for life locks the learning process within a vicious circle." When education is conceived as preparation for life, or for ministry, it becomes something to be endured because it leads to something more satisfying. Learning becomes painful rather than joyful, and, once completed, is often viewed as no longer being necessary. Lindeman believed that within a decade of graduating an adult formed by this understanding of education, "will be out of touch with the world of intelligence, or what is worse, he will still be using the intellectual coins of his college days; he will find difficulty in reading serious books; he will have become inured to the jargon of his particular profession and will affect derision for all 'highbrows'; he will, in short, have become a typical adult who holds the bag of education—the game of learning having long since slipped by him." One does not need to look far to find clergy whose bookshelves are lined with books whose copyrights do not extend more than a year or two beyond the date of their graduation from seminary or whose pastoral counseling methods are so far out-of-date as to border on malpractice. (Brown 1997, 160-61)

It is unbelievably tragic to see so much effort put into well-planned and -carried out seminary curricula for undergraduates only to see much of that training rendered almost null and void by the pastor's stunted growth after graduation. "An incredible amount of resources, financial and human, are used to support three to six years of professionals' initial education. Until recently, however, little systematic thought was given to what happens for the following forty years of professional practice" (Cervero 2000, 81).

There may also be a unique reason lifelong learning is critical to those serving in the pastoral ministry. In most small to mid-sized congregations across most denominations, a pastor is still very much a generalist in a world of specialists.

Great demands are placed on the minister in today's world. As western society has become increasingly complex and specialized, the requirements for effective pastoral ministry have also increased. Just as in medicine and law, the ministry has become divided into a number of specialized areas. Preaching, teaching, and pastoral care (traditional areas of ministry) have developed as special disciplines requiring academic knowledge and skill development. Additional areas receiving attention include counseling, marriage and family enrichment, administration, evangelism, stewardship, liturgics and hymnology, youth work, and a host of subdisciplines such as conflict management and time management. (Carter 1986, 11)

While my words here may sound like the defensive reflections of a seminary professor, no seminary in the world is able to send out graduates who possess all the knowledge, skills, and abilities in all the critical sub-disciplines of the ministry. What is more, no matter how good the pre-service training may have been, rapidly changing ministry settings and calls to new ministry positions may make it absolutely critical to develop particular gifts far beyond entry-level knowledge and competency. What many may perceive as a ministry crisis may in reality be an educational crisis. The ministry duties have continued to grow. The minister has not.

Fortunately, especially among the rising generations (for whom living with rapid change in a digital age has always been the norm), the winds of change also appear to be blowing here when it comes to understanding that learning is lifelong. "The most important contemporary change is that adults' search for learning is no longer seen primarily as catch-up. For increasing numbers of people, learning has become a permanent condition of their lives into advanced age. This results from social and economic necessity but also from personal motivation for growth" (Maehl 1996, 23). Certainly one would pray for the day when the following example of the former president of Princeton would become the norm. "When John A. Mackay retired as the president of Princeton Theological Seminary, he went to England to study linguistic philosophy. Unlike Mackay, many ministers retire from learning before they retire

from ministry” (Brown 1997, 164). Or consider this example from a minister’s life as he shares with us an anecdote from the life of Pablo Casals.

Take preaching, for example. I’m an okay preacher. I can get by with the skills I currently have. Most people at my church are satisfied with what I say and how I say it. Invitations to preach in other churches tell me that other people like my preaching, too.

But I know I’m capable of more. Some days, in fact, I feel overcome with the sense that there’s a whole new level for me to reach in preaching. And it’s on those days that I go to work all over again—I study the videotapes, I enlist the help of preaching coaches, I read one more book.

How will I know if I’ve fully developed my preaching gifts? I don’t have a clue. All I know is that I have this call to tell the good news as effectively as I can.

The great cellist Pablo Casals was once heard practicing when he was well into his 80s, and someone asked him why at his age and level of accomplishment he was still practicing. He said, “I think I’m noticing some improvement.”

If I make it to my 80s, I suspect God will be nudging me to notice improvement, too. (Brouwer 1999, 32)

Are we beginning to see the day when more and more never retire from learning even when they have left their chosen profession behind? If I may poach into the fruits of my research, I believe the answer is a guarded “Yes.”

And what may be some of the keys to helping more and more see lifelong learning as the norm—helping more and more retire from ministry before they retire from learning? The first key is related to a fourth assumption we can add to our list. That is the assumption that learning only happens in the midst of course syllabi and bespectacled professors and degree programs.

Another barrier to lifelong learning for ministry is the confusion between education and school. Many people find it hard to think about education or learning apart from educational institutions or formal instruction in classroom settings. And yet a number of those same people confess to learning as much from informal discussions in the hallway or cafeteria between classes as they do in the classroom.

One does not need to register for a class or to enroll in a degree program in order to learn. While continuing education may be one way to engage in lifelong learning in ministry, it is not the only means available. Houle has identified a richly diverse pattern of lifespan learning which ranges from reading and travel to the use of tutors, small group discussion, and observation. While some of the patterns involve formal education, most are informal in character. (Brown 1997, 161)

Brown's use of the terms "formal" and "informal" already begin to open up the pathway to see the broad ranges of options that professionals have and—more than they may realize—are already using. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner even more helpfully break down "formal" and "informal" learning into three categories.

For formal settings, we envision adults sitting in a classroom, with an instructor, learning in a variety of ways, from formal lectures to small-group interactions. ...

The term *nonformal education* has been used most often to describe organized learning opportunities *outside* the formal educational system. These offerings tend to be short-term, voluntary, and have few if any prerequisites. However, they typically have a curriculum and often a facilitator. Nonformal educational opportunities are usually local and community-based, such as those programs offered by museums, libraries, service clubs, religious and civic organizations; mass media is also classified as a nonformal delivery system. (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 30)

Informal learning is the third form of learning in Coombs' typology. Defined by him as "the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighborhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media" informal learning is by far the most prevalent form of adult learning (Coombs 1985, p. 92). (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 35)

Drawing on still other studies, Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner also supply a typology that further subdivides the informal learning in which adults engage regularly.

Informal learning, Schugurensky (2000) suggests, has its own internal forms that are important to distinguish in studying the phenomenon. He proposes three forms: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization, or tacit learning. These differ among themselves in terms of intentionality and awareness at the time of the learning experience. Self-directed learning, for example, is intentional and conscious; incidental learnings, which Marsick

and Watkins (1990) describe as an accidental by-product of doing something else, is unintentional but “after the experience she or he becomes aware that some learning has taken place” (p. 4); and finally, socialization or tacit learning is neither intentional nor conscious (although we can become aware of this learning later through “retrospective recognition”) (Marsick & Watkins 1990, p. 6). (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 36)

What is the purpose of all this categorizing and subcategorizing of the various ways that adults learn—and especially of pointing out the informal learning going on day by day? All of this seeks to overcome the fact that so much learning goes on in the life of the typical adult of which she or he is unaware. That is the point Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner highlight.

The very nature of informal learning is what makes it so difficult for adults to recognize. Embedded as it is in our everyday activities, whether we are at work, at home, or in the community, and lacking institutional sponsorship, adults rarely label these activities as learning. However, studies of informal learning, especially those asking about adults’ self-directed learning projects, reveal that upwards of 90 percent of adults are engaged in hundreds of hours of informal learning. ... It has also been estimated that the great majority (upwards of 70 percent) of learning in the workplace is informal (Kim, Collins, Hagedorn, Williamson, & Chapman 2004), although billions of dollars each year are spent by business and industry on formal training programs. (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 35-36)

Without downplaying the importance of formal degree programs and the many types of nonformal learning opportunities, two wonderful things happen when eyes are opened to the rich vista of what can legitimately be called learning. First, those in the professions suddenly recognize all the many ways that they have already been learning rather than merely feeling guilty because no new diplomas or CEU certificates have been recently hung on the wall. What happens when professionals learn to see how many ways they do learn, how many work and life-related challenges they are solving by specific learning strategies? This opening of the eyes could be a significant boost to the confidence of many professionals. Those who

wondered if they could still really learn anything might be pleasantly surprised to see how much learning they already do day after day. Far from being inimical to continuing formal and nonformal education, recognizing all the informal learning that is going on in their lives could be the nudge needed to aggressively seek out more organized forms of learning.

Second, when those providing continuing education open their own eyes to the rich vistas of the ways adults learn, suddenly we learn to give thanks to God that the ranks of those refusing to grow may be much smaller than we thought. Speaking personally, as I look ahead to the plan this project is seeking to put together, it will be much easier to approach brothers in the ministry with patient encouragement about continuing professional education if I have let go of the unloving judgment that a sizeable percentage are apathetic or lazy non-participants.

Research of the last twenty years by people like Allen Tough, Patrick Penland, and Stephen Brookfield indicates that adults address major issues in their personal and professional lives with independent learning projects. Tough indicates that adults are typically involved with five or more learning projects annually each of which can consume up to one hundred hours and more. My own research in recent years has shown that clergy also have extensive involvement in personal projects that seek to address challenges and increase competencies. The research shows that the intellectual turning points in clergy careers result largely from self-directed initiatives imposed because of personally identified learning needs. Such conclusions are important in the MCE argument. Any discussion about what clergy need to be doing in clergy continuing education must take into account what clergy are already doing—and both judicatory officials and clergy themselves tend not to regard the largely unrecorded independent learning as “learning.” The reasons for this require another article. It is important to note, however, that those who are not attending conferences and workshops need not be branded as “laggards.” It is actually questionable, given the challenges clergy regularly face in daily ministry, whether there are many, apart from the dysfunctional, who pursue no learning at all. (Zersen 1998, 213-14)

While it is wise for those encouraging and providing continuing professional education to recognize the many ways most are already learning, even wiser still would be

for those adult educators to find places in formal or nonformal learning settings to incorporate learning tasks that mimic ways adults are learning every day. The more we can blur the lines between the classroom environment and the workplace, the better it will be for those we hope to assist.

The other key insight for helping more brothers in lifelong learning flows from the previous one. The fact that many more are engaged in beneficial learning in the ministry than might be assumed changes the approach of educators to those in ministry in still another way. Now for many the primary need is not to convince them of the need for learning and cajole them into getting busy (both very challenging assignments!). Instead, the greater need for many is to turn haphazard continuing professional education into more planned and purposeful growth. Strangely, this appears to be one area of ministry in which many pastors who decry the worst tenets of postmodernism end up adopting a tenet of quite radical postmodernism. They subscribe *de facto* to chaos theory!

Despite our verbal assent to the principle of purposeful or intentional continuing education, despite our sincere desire to engage in more effective ministry, how often do we operate without any target at all? When we aim at nothing, we will hit the target every time. So often our continuing education is haphazard. We set no goals. We have no directions. We simply go to local and regional pastoral conferences because they are being held or because they are required. We may attend a workshop because we haven't been to any learning event recently or because someone suggested we go. (Carter 1986, 26)

A critical need for many professionals is finding the encouragement, insight, and tools needed for regular analysis of strengths and weaknesses of their performance and to formulate an aggressive yet realistic learning plan that would truly benefit those they serve. Returning to a concept mentioned earlier, that many pastors are still generalists in a specialists' world, there may be an exceptional reason it is vital to give encouragement and help to develop a plan for

learning. “Pastors often describe themselves to me as a ‘jack of all trades and master of none.’ This description sometimes indicates a feeling of futility that no skill can be mastered because the minister is being stretched in several directions at once. It can also become an excuse for not concentrating on specific skill building” (Carter 1986, 14-15). It may be critical to find ways to help pastors plan and prioritize possible areas of growth so that they are not paralyzed by the many ministry needs for which growth could prove beneficial. Helping ministry professionals honestly evaluate their own gifts and comparing that with the ministry challenges before them may help yield some insights on where the greatest benefit of focused growth may lie.

This careful analyzing and planning—and the more organized growth that follows—may be critical for another reason not yet articulated. Some of the informal learning in the pastor’s ministry may have been more detrimental than beneficial. Some adaptations to ministry methods since seminary may be less than healthy and theologically less than defensible. When a pastor’s path to a learning plan puts him into dialogue with peers and lay leaders, that allows him to reflect more objectively on ministry practice. Some unlearning of unhealthy pastoral practices may be the eventual fruit.

But the careful reader may have noted that all of this has sidestepped one of the most hotly debated issues in the church in regard to CPE. The rising tide of recognizing the importance of self-directed, lifelong learning has yet to float all pastoral boats. While it may be quite rare—and technically almost impossible—that someone has ceased to grow at all in ministry, it is certainly true that there still appears to be a significant percentage with no organized plan for making the most of formal, nonformal, and informal educational opportunities.

And yes, it would be less than honest not to acknowledge that there are some with no desire or inclination to do so. What is to be done with those whose planning and participation in continuing professional education is sporadic or, from all appearances, (almost) nonexistent? Stych traces in broad outlines some of the “groups” of pastors out there in the field.

Innovators consistently strive to improve professional practice—and often do so in unconventional ways. They are likely to take pride in overshadowing the performance of colleagues, to possess multifaceted plans for independent learning, and to become experts in areas outside of their professions. Not surprisingly, they are attracted to promising ideas and practices which remain largely untested. In Christian ministries, we type these people as visionaries.

Pacesetters strive to improve practice, but resist innovations which have not been substantiated by other practitioners. They welcome new opportunities for learning and are likely to support established professional activities. As acknowledged leaders, they also tend to sponsor the use of new technologies within their professions. In ministries we might call them progressive managers.

Most practitioners are part of the *middle majority*. Within this group, innovations are adopted gradually, and rates of participation in organized education activities vary greatly. The middle majority tends to distinguish itself from the innovators, who are viewed as too extreme in their views and too far removed from the real world of day-to-day practice. These are the maintainers in Christian ministry, who often consider workshops superfluous.

Laggards turn away from innovations. Because their job performance often reflects the presence of outdated thought patterns, unbreakable routines, and skill deterioration, laggards tend to be a source of embarrassment for colleagues, and a threat to those who remain in their care. They learn only what is necessary to survive in professional practice, and have to be ordered to attend workshops. (Stych 1995, 46-47)

To borrow Stych’s terminology, the challenge is how to inspire and enable more in the large “middle majority” and at least some among the “laggards” to become involved in more planned and intentional ministry growth. Of course, having eyes opened to the many ways adults are learning already keeps us from approaching this task with quite such judgmental hearts. However, it does not remove the very real challenge of overcoming the reticence and, at times, apathy that keeps all too many pastors from making the most of their God-given

abilities. Because of the uniqueness of individuals and ministry settings, the challenge is really quite complex.

Of course, as it is often said, for every complex question there is a simple answer—that is usually wrong. Casting an eye on the minimum standards established in many professions, there are voices being raised in many Christian denominations for solving the dilemma of “non-participation” in CPE by making it mandatory for clergy to meet minimum standards. All three of the largest Lutheran church bodies in the United States (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran—Church Missouri Synod, and the WELS) have either just completed studies on making continuing education mandatory beyond seminary or are in the midst of such studies.

But is mandating continuing education (MCE) the best answer for improving clergy performance? There are several compelling reasons to slow any over-enthusiastic and perhaps naive embracing of MCE as the best way to improve clergy performance. First, the track record of MCE (in some circles called compulsory professional education) is not as stellar as some may assume. In many professions, at least part of the push for mandatory or compulsory continuing education has flowed from less than noble motives, and the results that flow from it have been less than compelling.

Few if any professions serving the public have escaped growing demands for accountability. In some cases, professional associations have developed credentialing systems to address the issue, often doing so somewhat reluctantly but with the concern that if they don't police their membership, a governmental agency will step in to fill the void. In many other situations, state legislatures have taken the lead in establishing processes intended to promote accountability (Collins, Queeney, Watson, and Zuzack, 1998). The systems these different groups have adopted range from requiring little more than completion of a registration form and periodically paying a fee to completing a specified amount of CPE in a given time period. By thus contributing to “certificamania”

(Hodapp, 1988, p. 372), many groups have promoted the *appearance* of accountability but have done little or nothing to address the underlying issue of competence. This strategy keeps critics at bay for a while, but increased consumer awareness and growing incidence of litigation have made it clear that the appearance of accountability no longer is sufficient. ...

Much criticism of CPE as a vehicle for providing accountability has centered around the failure to document its relation to issues of competence, as articulated by the Colorado Board of Nursing in a statement saying, "There is no research available either in Colorado or anywhere in the nation that shows any correlation between linking continuing education with license renewal and the continued competence of any licensed group" (1994). If CPE is to be a viable response to questions of accountability, evaluation methods measuring the effects of CPE activities on practitioner performance will be required; program evaluation that addresses participant satisfaction no longer is sufficient, or even acceptable. (Wilson and Hayes 2000, 377-78)

It would seem this weakness of MCE is closely related to a challenge mentioned earlier that still remains in how many CPE events are designed. Far too often key insights on how adults learn are ignored. Those providing continuing education take in the money, and the participants put in their required continuing education hours, but those the professionals serve notice little if any difference. This should trouble us especially when the training is meant to impact the spiritual welfare of eternal souls.

Another important issue with respect to adult learning involves the way in which adults learn most effectively. Those insisting on MCE for clergy are often those who lament the loss of the church's tradition and who insist that clergy should revisit, via some means of re-indoctrination, data and content regarding everything from the articles of faith to the principles of interpretation. The lecture-style teaching strategies typically employed by these committed incubators show that even though they may be riding a good horse in revisiting and redefining fundamentals, their approach will keep the students in the barn. If one is to ride free as a learner, those responsible for clergy continuing education need to learn more about the roots of continuing education in adult learning theory and the appropriate communication/learning techniques that arise from such theory. (Zersen 1998, 214)

Certainly, this reason for cautioning against rushing into MCE weakens if those encouraging and offering continuing education make certain that their own teaching-house is in order.

Expressing this objection in another way, the push for MCE falls into the common logical error of substituting the means for the end. It may make everyone feel better (and quiet, temporarily, the public clamor for better professional competence) when minimum standards for continuing education have been set. The means are in place! Yet how easy to lose sight of the real and much more elusive end! The goal was not merely participation in learning events crossed off the “to-do” list. The goal was actually improving performance in carrying out the work in day-to-day realities. Making education mandatory may achieve the easier goal quite efficiently (getting more people into learning events) while still remaining almost worthless for actually impacting performance. What is worse, continuing education, one of the greatest tools for changing performance when used wisely, may appear to have been tested and found wanting.

Still another reason for slowing the onrushing MCE train (or at least building it safer tracks) is to recognize how easily such legislative top-down efforts fail to take into account the complexity of the unique learning needs of professionals. They may be serving in the same field, but they often work in vastly different settings. All too easily, well-meaning one-size-fits-none ideal-world regulations for what everyone needs in learning ignore the needs of particular practitioners struggling with unique challenges in real-world settings. What is more, the fact that regulations tend to favor giving credit for learning that can be equitably and easily measured and credited ignores the potentially beneficial learning that cannot be so easily measured and assigned credits or CEUs. Once again, Zersen speaks eloquently.

Without the MCE albatross hanging over the head, clergy might be freed to explore, together with their parishioners, the real issues—including fresh and

innovative avenues with which to address them. My hunch is that, were all to seek a full measure of the Spirit and a generous dose of human creativity, some of the wisest and wildest continuing education experiences might be devised—many of which might not qualify for MCE, and some of which would not be capable of being measured by CEU's! But they would fill a stagnant phrase like continuing education with ozone-like possibilities—like the perfume that fills the air after a rainstorm—and learners might find it difficult to contain their appetites. (Zersen 1998, 218)

Another strong argument that cautions against moving too quickly toward a program of compulsory CPE is that the push often misses the complexity of the situations that keep more professionals from pursuing growth more actively. If the only barriers were laziness or apathy, then it might be argued that a mandate to get busy might be just the kick in the pants to get moving that some professionals have long needed. But what if the worker is facing barriers (both internal and external) that are much more complex—and that even may not primarily be self-imposed?

Again, Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner share with us the fruits of research that begin to reveal the complexity of what may keep some professionals from pursuing CPE more aggressively or at all.

Valentine and Darkenwald (1990) derived a typology of adult nonparticipants. According to their analysis, the adult nonparticipants in the general public cluster into five distinct groups. People are deterred from participating by personal problems, lack of confidence, educational costs, lack of interest in organized education generally, or lack of interest in available courses. (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 67)

Just consider what issues among those five groups of barriers a simple mandate might not address. A thorough study of just that consideration could consume this whole writing project, but as an example, let's pursue their category of those deterred by personal problems. For those with personal problems (a crisis of finances, family, or faith, for example), what is

needed most at that moment is not an administrator carrying a big stick but a brother Christian with a big heart. Personal problems may also include time management skills that are weak or almost nonexistent. Especially for pastors, so many needs may be crying out already for his time that a requirement for continuing education just seems like one more burden piled on top of too many responsibilities already. The camel's back was already about to crack; now one more straw is added to the load. Fred Craddock, as he discusses in *Preaching* why so many pastors seem to give up on a life of study and growth, makes this perceptive comment.

It is sometimes the case that the life of study is a casualty of an unsatisfactory transition from school to parish. If in seminary a person did not establish good study habits that were portable to future locations, but only met the faculty's requirements and deadlines, then graduation was withdrawal of the scaffolding for study. However much one may have complained about school demands, the fact is, those demands gave a pattern and structure to life. Recent graduates confess to wasting time and struggling with the question, How do I spend Tuesdays? Older pastors may counsel the young pastor not to worry; Tuesdays and every other day will be filled and overflowing soon enough. That is true, but it is poor advice because it misses the point. The aim is not to fill all one's days with busyness, but rather to have sufficient discipline with priorities firm enough that the minister can sort through the countless claims on the available hours. Of course pastors are called to serve the needs of people, but to have their schedule totally dependent on the schedule of others is to undercut their own effectiveness in that very endeavor. There is a difference between being a servant and being servile. (Craddock 1990, 72-73)

Such may easily be the complexity of just one type of barrier—personal problems. Now add in the other groups of barriers that rise up like a series of high hurdles in the path of professional growth. A simple denominational legislative swat on the backside suddenly seems a bit simplistic!

But barriers become even more complicated and challenging when we remember that those barriers may say more about the setting in which the professional serves than they do about the professional himself or herself. Mandating continuing education can easily assume

that all the barriers are within the individual or directly controlled by him or her. But that is simply not reality for most professionals. There can be socio-cultural factors at work as well.

If individual interests and motivation account for participation, then recruitment efforts would center on responding to an adult's perceived learning needs and stimulating motivation. If, in contrast, participation or nonparticipation is seen as a function of the social structure, then one would work toward changing aspects of this social structure in ways that would facilitate participation. The most robust explanation of participation is likely to be found in considering both the psychological and sociological perspectives. (Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner 2006, 70)

To speak directly to the purpose of my project, I must consider what among WELS pastors might be socio-cultural barriers that keep many pastors from pursuing more aggressively organized programs of continuing education. Going back to issues discussed in the theological section of this chapter, leaders in our church body must wrestle with whether we have we built a culture by expectation—or twisted theology (trust in the means of grace's power means that developing skills and talents is unimportant)—that subtly discourages continuing education. Congregations and their leaders who act as if they believe their pastor's faithfulness means he is always busy outside of his study may exert open or subtle pressure against real growth for their shepherd. Similarly, when congregations and their leaders fail to translate the growing needs of continuing education in their own vocations to that same need for public ministers, they easily fail to value continuing education in two critical ways: little time is granted for such study and little or no budgeted funds are provided to support the interest. Finally, have those in our church body charged with continuing education done all that they can to make sure that what is offered reflects in both content and delivery the real learning needs of the pastors of our synod? When all these factors are taken into account, how easily many forms of MCE seem like the ecclesiastical version of unfunded government mandates.

But the biggest objection from the perspective of a confessional Lutheran is that mandating continuing education can be an impatient substituting of law for gospel. The law certainly can compel action, but it often leaves important heart issues unaddressed. To use terms from continuing education, I can compel the CEU, but I cannot compel the heart to be motivated to make the most of such opportunities for the glory of our Savior and the benefit of eternal souls. In a fallen world, no law has ever yet by its power produced a single genuine fruit of faith. Law can direct action, but the real power behind fruit is Christ's love that compels us (2 Cor 5:14) as it flows through us with its vital energy. Fruit comes from connection to the Vine (John 15:5). Have we so exhausted every possible way of helping brothers see the beauty of their high calling and the opportunity planned and organized continuing education gives for carrying out that calling with wisdom and skill that we have no other recourse than to command them to come? Have we been so zealous in creating a wise and winsome program of continuing education that applies sound learning theory to real ministry needs that all that is left now is to gather subtle and not-so-subtle cattle prods to drive the unwilling to take the bitter medicine of education?

But right here I must share the most compelling argument I have heard for MCE for pastors. This argument was made to me by a professor at another Lutheran seminary whom I interviewed primarily for another project.⁷ There were two considerations that I believe made his argument winsome and persuasive. First, in word and demeanor this professor impressed me as the epitome of someone who breathed the gospel of Jesus Christ and love for those

⁷ I had been asked to play a leadership role in helping our seminary through a process of reviewing our undergraduate program.

servicing in the public ministry. Second, this was a seasoned veteran of the “continuing education wars” who had devoted much of his ministry to seeking to help pastors grow through continuing education in ways consistent with much of the best of adult learning. In other words, his point was not made from a legalistic stance adopted too easily by someone who has little or no experience in these efforts.

And what was his point? After decrying how pitifully inadequate and childlike were many of the continuing education offerings also in his synod, he asked why, if it is not legalistic to mandate a curriculum before graduating men with an MDiv, that it is suddenly legalistic to mandate some form of curriculum after they graduate? He added that there are many (the “middle majority” mentioned earlier) who are not pursuing planned and organized continuing education who need a gentle nudge to get started. After that, the gospel-empowered joy of learning how to serve Christ and his people better will take over. His years of experience had convinced him that if we don’t use that nudge of something compulsory, many will never try anything.

But as winsome as that argument is, I believe it still fails to be conclusive. The counter argument begins by quoting a statement by my project mentor made in a classroom excursus about worship forms in his denomination. “What you win them with is what you win them to.” If we win participation in continuing education by mandate, will we perhaps frustrate ever attaining participation that flows out of genuine zeal to serve Christ and his people more faithfully? Having won them with law, will we make it to pursuit of continuing education that is the free and spontaneous fruit of the gospel? Once again, by substituting

means for an end, I could seem to be winning the battle while simultaneously losing the war.⁸

There is one more answer I would give to my new friend's comments. Mandating continuing education seems to fly in the face of all that we are striving to accomplish with adult education. Won't we very easily be hindering, not helping, growth in self-directed learning and lifelong learning? In a way roughly analogous to how God treated Old Testament Israel, the pedagogue of mandated education might serve well the more immature students, but as we move toward maturity in age—and most of all, in Christ—such pedagogical features of education need to fade away more and more. In my study of curriculum review, there is considerable evidence that more and more seminaries are seeking to get away from treating their students like children even before they are handed their diplomas. Why would we reverse that trend in post-graduate pastoral education? Could, in fact, an adult-learning-friendly change to pre-graduate training be a large piece of this puzzle? As I have worked simultaneously on

⁸ Some may ask whether mandatory professional education is merely imposing needed educational discipline into the lives of many pastors. The analogy may be made to the spiritual disciplines (specific times and methods for prayer and devotional study of the Word, etc.) that can be so beneficial to our individual growth as Christians. Such comparisons make a compelling point. But the question is still this: is the effect the same if the disciplines (spiritual or professional) are imposed from without rather than being embraced from within as a fruit of faith? When it comes to spiritual disciplines, those imposed from without can easily produce the exact opposite of what was intended. As an example of what can happen, it may be fair to point to the monastic movement. Consider what happened when a well-meaning zeal for pious living took the self-imposed piety of a few and turned it into laws imposed on the many. But spiritual disciplines embraced willingly tend to be of a whole different nature. While pride in my self-chosen form of piety is always a danger, such self-imposed spiritual disciplines are helpful tools we use to curb our own sinful nature. A key factor is that the spiritual disciplines have been welcomed in childlike faith. Likewise, may it not be critical that even professional or educational disciplines be embraced from within as well? While this author would *not* label every form of mandatory CPE as legalism, I have yet to be convinced that such an approach is wise, especially in the current culture of our synod where imposing mandatory CPE would instantly be seen by many as heavy handed.

this final project and curriculum review in our seminary's MDiv program, I am ready to give a hearty "Yes" to that question.

I say all this knowing full well that I am thereby leaving open a Mack-truck-wide path for lazy sinful natures like mine to continue to find every excuse in the book to avoid getting busy with continuing education. I know that in addition to the barriers mentioned in the secular literature, the natural laziness and spiritual apathy of the heart with which I too was born remain a formidable barrier to all things good in the kingdom of God. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul from Romans 7, "The good of continuing education I would do, I do not do. But the evil of continuing in gospel-defeating ministry ruts, that I do." So, what about those who are not crucifying that part of their sinful nature every day? What about those who will not be won no matter how winsome and well designed are the programs for continuing education? What about those who persist in resisting growth no matter how honestly barriers to CPE (internal and external, personal and cultural) are dealt with? What about those who seem willfully deaf (Craddock's term in *Preaching* [Craddock 1990, 181]) to the compelling reasons why a servant who loves his Savior and his flock would participate? For such there *is* a use for the law. No, not to compel outward compliance like driving beef to the butcher. Here the law is to be used in its primary function, as a mirror to show such pastors the ugliness of the selfish and stubborn sinful nature that still beats within the heart of every Christian (Rom 7). For those pastors who persist in showing themselves to be nothing but mercenaries (swineherds, as Luther called such pastors in the preface to the Large Catechism), then those entrusted with oversight in denominations need to begin the process of removing them from the clergy roster before they carelessly allow even one more sheep to be scattered or butchered by the wolf (John 10:12).