

BURNING THE PLOW: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AND CAPITALIZING ON
THE BLESSINGS OF SECOND-CAREER SEMINARY STUDENTS

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
WHO ARE SECOND-CAREER STUDENTS?.....	4
CONCERNING THE DIVINE CALL	6
The Church’s Critical Role	7
Immediate and Mediate Calls	8
Divine Call Practices and Procedures	9
What God Does and Does Not Say	13
On Calls and Callings	16
Reaffirming Identity	18
ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES	22
The Spiritual Challenges	23
The Psychological Challenges	29
The Physical Challenges	36
RECOGNIZING THE BLESSINGS	41
The Spiritual Blessings	42
The Psychological Blessings	46
The Physical Blessings	50
BURNING THE PLOW	55
Current Training Paths	55
Practical Suggestions	58
CONCLUSION.....	67
APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	69

APPENDIX 2: REPRESENTATIVE ANSWERS	71
APPENDIX 3: CONCERNING PUBLIC MINISTRY	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

ABSTRACT

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt 9:37–38 NIV84). With these words, Jesus reminds his church that there will always be a need for harvest workers and that God himself will always be the one to send them out. This thesis will examine the experiences of second-career students in the context of how God equips, calls, and sends out workers into the harvest fields. It will assess the challenges presented to second-career students, especially as they pursue training for pastoral ministry. It will highlight the blessings that second-career students *are* and *bring* to the church. Finally, it will offer practical suggestions for encouraging and supporting second-career students on their path to pastoral ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Smoke rose in meandering coils from the cinders below. The sooty air was redolent of hide and hoof. The faint outlines of share and hitch were scarcely perceptible in the ashes. Elisha paused. He looked once more at the remains of the pricey slaughter. Then he turned and walked away.

With that, Elisha left behind a prosperous farming career to follow Elijah and serve as his attendant. Not long after, he would take up the mantle of that to which God had called him. On the bank of the Jordan, Elisha would pick up the cloak, strike the water, and ask, “Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” (2 Kgs 2:14 NIV84).

Where?

Right there. With him, Elijah’s successor. With God’s prophet.

Of all the marvelous miracles in the lives of God’s prophets, perhaps this is one of the most striking: that God took a simple farmer and gave him the ministry of the Word. Perhaps, too, this miracle is magnified by how little is said about it. Only three verses are set aside for the fulfillment of what God had commanded Elijah to do—to anoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kgs 19:16). With only two phrases is the conversation between them completed. But in one decisive scene, Elisha begins his journey into the ministry to which God had called him.

What precious little *is* said, though, is certainly revealing. In the relative silence, we find Elisha’s understanding of what had happened. There is no turning back. He slaughters the oxen. He gives the cooked meat to the people. He burns the plow. He becomes an ex-farmer with a new career. In the one plea he makes to Elijah, we find the difficulty confronting Elisha in this

pivotal moment. “Let me kiss my father and mother good-by, and then I will come with you” (1 Kgs 19:20). This is a new challenge, intensified by circumstance. Walking with Elijah means walking away from the family and the farm.

There are present-day parallels to this short, but significant, event from Scripture. God still calls his workers to preach and proclaim his Word, even if his call does not ordinarily come through a cloak cast upon the shoulder. God still trains and equips his workers to serve in the harvest field (Matt 9:38), even if that training more frequently comes through formal education rather than service as a personal attendant. God still uses workers with varied backgrounds and experiences, even if we have come to categorize some of these workers as “traditional” and others as “second-career.”

It is this latter category of workers with which this thesis is concerned. Second-career students are like Elisha in some respects, unlike him in others. Though they may have a desire to serve their Lord in public ministry, their call will most certainly be extended to them differently than it was to Elisha. Though they may receive personal encouragement and training from various people, the bulk of it will likely not come through only one mentor. However, the story of Elisha brings to mind similar experiences for second-career students. Just as Elisha burned the plow and left the farm, so second-career students have left their previous careers to pursue the pastoral ministry. Just as Elisha understood that burning the plow meant suffering through the pain of family separation, so second-career students understand that pursuing pastoral ministry brings unique and difficult challenges.

This thesis will seek to shed light on the unique challenges and blessings of second-career students at various stages on the path of pastoral ministry—contemplating a decision to pursue it, receiving training for it, and serving in it. This thesis will argue that our church body has the

blessed privilege and responsibility of encouraging and supporting these second-career students through their varied experiences. This thesis will also propose practical suggestions for addressing the challenges and harnessing the blessings of second-career students.

WHO ARE SECOND-CAREER STUDENTS?

To properly understand the unique circumstances of second-career students, it is helpful to begin with a plain definition of what makes them second-career students. This can be difficult since second-career students come from varied backgrounds and diverse experiences. They may have gray hair and grease-stained hands from years as a mechanic. They may have spent decades analyzing spreadsheets or filing tax returns. They may still have the warm dust of Iraq on their soldier's boots. Yet, though their first careers may vary, second-career students share a desire to leave behind their previous experiences and pursue the pastoral ministry. This is where a plain definition of second-career students begins. While they each look different, they all have their eager eyes open and their worn hands raised, hoping to present themselves to God's church, saying, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isa 6:8).

Of course, a plain definition also requires an acknowledgement that previous experience and a desire to serve in the pastoral ministry are not the *only* identifying marks of second-career students.¹ For the purposes of this paper, the definition of second-career students also includes one other identifying mark: these students have been removed from a college-level educational setting for some time. While this identifying mark may initially seem to be vague, it does allow for a definition of second-career students to move beyond a mere classification by age.² For the

1. After all, *every* worker who trains for the pastoral ministry will hopefully have a desire to serve (even if it is not yet fully formed) and will have had "general" previous experiences.

2. Second-career students who have been removed from an educational setting for at least one or two years could be 22 years old (young) or 32 years old (young-ish).

purposes of this paper, then, those who have spent at least one or two years away from a formal, college-level educational setting can be categorized as second-career students.

CONCERNING THE DIVINE CALL

In Matt 9:37–38, Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” There will always be a need for workers, just as surely as the Lord of the harvest will always be the one to send them out.³ Those who are considering ministry as a second career may initially appear to be part of the Lord’s answer to the prayers for workers. However, before the match is struck and the plow burned, it is wise to consider what God says in his Word about how he equips and calls these workers into the harvest fields.

One reason for a careful study of God’s Word regarding the divine call is that the harvest fields are not immune to danger or disease. God works through sinners to serve sinners, after all.⁴ Beneath an apparent desire to serve may be an unholy plan to abuse and manipulate God’s people for personal gain. Beneath a burning compulsion to be a public minister may be the devil’s twisted lie that God speaks to his people outside the Word. Beneath the praise of the lofty blessings of work in the harvest field always lurks the sinful nature’s attachment to self-righteous flattery—that this career is better than any other because, *well, God will really be quite*

3. Do we see Jesus’ words in Matt 9:37–38 as closely tied to his promises in Matt 16:18–19? Is a promise to always provide workers in the church implicit in the promise to preserve the church? Even if God does *not* promise to always use Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary—or even the WELS, for that matter—to send out workers into the field, God’s institution of the public ministry means that we can find enduring comfort in his promise to send out workers in the harvest fields. So, just like we pray for daily bread with the confidence of God’s promises to hear and provide, we pray for workers with the confidence of God’s promises to hear and provide those workers. There is no need for panic.

4. “Man’s role in God’s plan of salvation is not an insignificant one. Indeed, mankind plays so vital a role in God’s plan of salvation that Lutheran theologians have referred to man’s role as *the ministerial cause of salvation*.” Jonathan R. Hein, “Treasures in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God’s Plan of Salvation” (WLS Essay File), 2.

impressed with the work I do. Potential danger does not invalidate God’s command to pray that he raise up and send out workers. However, faithful stewardship of God’s blessings demands an awareness of these dangers. Likewise, faithful stewardship calls for a careful study of God’s Word, learning to address these dangers with what the Lord of the harvest does—and *does not*—say about how he calls workers into the harvest fields.

The Church’s Critical Role

The church recognizes and embraces God’s desire that his people be served with workers who administer the means of grace—the gospel in Word and sacrament. The church also recognizes and embraces the high and noble qualifications God requires of these workers. Finally, the church recognizes and embraces the truth Paul lays out in Rom 10:14–15: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” The church recognizes and embraces the truth that these workers only become public ministers when they are “called” by God through the church to work in the harvest fields.⁵ In other words, the church recognizes and embraces the critical (and blessed) role God has given it to play in this wonderful order of salvation: the privilege and the responsibility to “call” these workers into the public ministry that God has instituted.

But the concept of the “call”—including all its denotations and connotations—can be severely misunderstood, especially among those who desire to serve in the harvest fields. As the church attempts to connect God’s institution of the public ministry to the formal way in which it

5. “Of ecclesiastical order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called” (Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000] 46, AC XIV:1).

follows God’s commands to call these workers into the harvest fields, it is helpful to clarify what the “call” is and is not. The “call” is not at all equivalent to an emotional fluttering one feels in the heart, even if God acknowledges a desire to serve as both necessary and honorable.⁶ Nor is the “call” the burdensome (and mistaken) obligation one feels when told of the opportunities in the harvest fields. In both scenarios, the operatively dangerous word is “feels.” The call is *not* a feeling. The call is the church’s way of recognizing God’s institution of the public ministry and carrying out his command to send out workers who are qualified and trained. As such, the call into the public ministry is still from God, even though it comes through the church.

Immediate and Mediate Calls

To be sure, God has at times called his workers to the harvest field *immediately*—that is, outside of the activity of the church. God came directly to Moses, Isaiah, and Saul, giving each of them the purpose, the message, and the scope of their calls. However, God never revealed this to be his ordinary means of calling.⁷ In these (and other) specific situations, God took the extraordinary step of calling his servants directly into the public ministry for his specific purposes. But we should not expect the extraordinary to be the ordinary—precisely because God has not revealed it to be so in his Word. Thus the church follows the clear directives of God in the revealed Word of God.

6. Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2015), 477. We have an obligation to remind all potential called workers that their desire is not the same as the call. However, we should also be cautious not to use an insistence on a particularly-worded expression of this desire to unfairly discourage potential called workers. The desire to serve is certainly a self-evident requirement for service in the public ministry. But does this mean that such a desire needs to be fully formed even before one begins training for public ministry? As always, there is a narrow Lutheran middle road to be found.

7. Deutschlander gives a succinct and helpful summary of this principle in *Grace Abounds* (481).

There God does promise that he works through the church to extend *mediate* calls—that is, God calls his workers to service through the work and activity of the church. The Apology provides a beautiful summary of the church’s confidence in God’s working through a *mediate* call into the public ministry.

For the ministry of the Word has the command of God and has magnificent promises like Romans 1[:16]: the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” Likewise, Isaiah 55[:11], “...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose....” If ordination is understood in this way, we will not object to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. For the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it. Indeed, it is worthwhile to extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise against fanatics who imagine that the Holy Spirit is not given through the Word but is given on account of certain preparations of their own, for example, if they sit idle and silent in dark places while waiting for illumination.⁸

Divine Call Practices and Procedures

But this also raises some questions, which ultimately provide the church with a good and beneficial struggle. How does the church carry out its responsibilities when God has *not* given explicit directives for *how* to call these public ministers? How does the church move confidently forward when God has *not* established a sequential path to follow? How can the church find joy and certainty in procedures that God has *not* specifically enumerated? And perhaps the most compelling and urgent question of them all: how can wrestling with such questions ever be good or beneficial?

In View of God’s Mercy...

8. Apology, XIII:11–13 (*The Book of Concord*, 220).

As the church seeks to determine which procedures and practices to follow when issuing these mediate calls to properly qualified harvest workers, it is guided by gospel comfort and gospel joy. Paul summarizes this eloquently in Rom 12:1–8:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Even if God’s Word does not explicitly detail the procedures and practices for the church to follow as it calls workers into public ministry, it does offer an attitudinal guide of sorts. Paul reflects this with several key thoughts in these verses, the most striking of which is the phrase “in view of God’s mercy.”⁹ Here is the gospel comfort that guides the church in all it does. The church understands the fundamental importance of God’s mercy—Christ and his work is the only reason the church even exists in the first place. This glorious work then enables every member of the church, as well as the church as a whole, to offer its entire being—its thoughts, its plans, its opinions, its procedures, its hopes, its prayers—in grateful thanks to God. “We offer our choices and actions to God as fitting thank offerings, trust his grace to pardon what is amiss

9. διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. What a beautiful little phrase to govern the lives of Christians, to prompt them to offer their bodies—their entire lives—as living sacrifices to God! Martin Franzmann brings it out in this way: “The worshiper no longer gives to God the life of another creature; He gives God his living self” (*Romans*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1968, 217).

and to receive with pleasure for the sake of Christ what remains.”¹⁰ Here, too, is the gospel joy that permeates all the church does. The church finds beauty and blessing in using its God-given reason in service to God, in wrestling with decisions between all the wonderful ways to praise the Lord, and in knowing the glorious freedom of worshipping God—even in its eating and drinking (1 Cor 10:31).

But this freedom does not mean that the church neglects a careful study of God’s Word to find guiding principles in all its procedures and practices. Paul touches on some of these general principles in Rom 12. No member of the church—the body of Christ—would stubbornly emphasize one’s own gifts to the detriment of others (Rom 12:3). No member of this body would arrogantly presume self-sufficiency or greater value than any other—because all members of the church belong to each other (Rom 12:5). No member of the body of Christ would take pleasure in limiting or stifling the use of God-given gifts among God’s people (Rom 12:6–8).

In Christian Love...

Of course, the fundamental principle is that of Christian love. Not coincidentally, Paul follows his encouragement to sacrificial living in Rom 12:1 with an exhortation to love in Rom 12:9–21. “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love,” he writes. “Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom 12:10). God’s mercy drives the church to offer up all its practices and procedures as humble sacrifices of thanks to the God who created it, formed it, and redeemed it. God’s mercy is also what enables the church to have practices and procedures characterized by love for one another.

10. Daniel M. Deutschlander, “The Will of God and the Will of Man: What Do They Have to Do with One Another?” (New Ulm Pastoral Conference, November 6, 2001), 8.

Driven by God’s mercy and eager to demonstrate Christian love for all, the church carries out all its practices and procedures “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:40). What depth of love lies behind this simple phrase! Here is the reminder to both remember and proclaim that the church is God’s creation, that public ministry is established by God, and that the calls for qualified workers which come through the church are still God’s calls. Here is the God-given encouragement to maintain order and clarity in everything. The church sees here the gloriously broad parameters within which it can exercise its God-given freedom.

But the church also sees here the dutiful privilege¹¹ to show love to all involved in the calling process. Nowhere has God prescribed the method by which the church issues God’s mediate calls to the harvest workers. Acts 1 describes the infant Christian church casting lots to call Matthias. Paul encourages Titus to “appoint elders in every town, as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). But lacking in both cases is a prescriptive command to follow such examples. So the church adopts its particular procedures and practices for the sake of love and good order. It seeks to respect and honor the God-given blessing of a system that trains and equips harvest workers. It strives to be always mindful of how God has given public ministry as a gift—encouraging prayer and thanksgiving throughout the calling process. It acknowledges the simultaneously painful and joyful wrestling with which a harvest worker considers the calls. Through it all, the church understands that it remains a good and beneficial struggle to use God-given reason faithfully. “The artful dance that God has designed between human reason and his good and gracious will is something which we trust more than we can describe.”¹²

11. Luther’s quote from *On Christian Liberty* still remains the consummate summary of this beautiful truth: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all.” *Martin Luther: Three Treatises* (W.A. Lambert, tr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1970), 277.

12. Richard Gurgel, “ ‘After Much Prayerful Consideration...’: The Interrelation of Sanctified Reason and God’s Will in Deliberating a Divine Call,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 105:3 (Summer 2008): 9.

In Lasting Joy...

And after all this, the church rejoices. Not because it has developed some innovative new form for the public ministry—as wonderful and appropriate as that may be. Not because it self-righteously prides itself in following all God’s directions—as certain and serious as God may be about them. Not because it has labored to avoid possible pitfalls or dangerous misunderstandings within its calling practices—as noble and thoughtful as such an effort may be. No, the church rejoices simply because in the final accounting of all the work God has given it to do, God’s promises remain unshaken and unchallenged. There will always be a harvest field ready and waiting, even if its location may be surprising (2 Tim 4:1–5). There will always be a living and ruling Lord of the church, even if the church’s plans and procedures have not developed like it thought they would (Matt 28:18–20). There will always be a harvest, even if the church does not know when it will come in (Isa 55:8–11).

What God Does and Does Not Say

Just as surely as the church finds comfort and strength in God’s promises, so too do the individuals called into the public ministry by God through the church. They praise God for the same promises. But in a gracious and profound gift from God, they also draw tremendous comfort from what God *does not* say. While at first glance it might seem unusual—even contradictory—that God’s workers draw comfort from what God *does not* say, a closer examination reveals that such a truth becomes a liberating boon to service in the harvest field.

How can this be? Take, for instance, what God *does not* say about a call into public ministry. God *does not* say that a call into public ministry is inherently better than a life of service in any other field, be it car repair or congressional office. So God’s potential harvest

workers need not feel a burdensome obligation to serve God as a called worker. They have freedom and joy in deciding to present themselves to God's church for such service. God *does not* say that what makes a call into public ministry unique is that God values a thoughtful sermon more than a repaired radiator. So God's called workers need not torment themselves with an unholy obsession on their duties. They have freedom and joy in recognizing how God loves and uses both the sermons of his pastors and the wrenches of his mechanics.¹³ God *does not* say that he only blesses the selfless efforts of properly called and ordained ministers of the gospel. So God's harvest workers—especially his properly called and ordained ones—do not take on the work God alone does as their own. They have freedom and joy in knowing that all their faulty efforts are washed in “the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14), and that their “labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58).

Of course, there are qualifications and clarifications to be made here. The first is that the church does not want to diminish the marvelous grace of God in calling public ministers through his church. Nor does it want to downplay the glorious purpose God has provided for public ministry. God established the public ministry “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12–13). The church recognizes the awesome gift God has given in providing harvest workers who will function for the spiritual benefit of all.

13. On page 14 of his paper “Unleashing our Calling: Today's Christians Find Fulfillment in Their Vocations,” Professor Mark Paustian provides a wonderful quote from Martin Luther regarding this topic: “The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship” (quoted and cited by James D. Lynch, “Finding Vocation in the Corporation,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3:6, 2003).

The church certainly wants to emphasize the wonderful and unique blessings that God gives through this public ministry. These blessings are showered upon the members of this body, as God’s public ministers direct them to the God-breathed Scripture, which not only makes them wise for salvation, but also equips them to teach, rebuke, correct, and train each other for every good work (2 Tim 3:14–17). These blessings are given to the church as God’s called workers distribute Lord’s Supper and administer baptism on behalf of the very same body of believers that called them to service. These blessings are poured out on the workers themselves, as well, as God gives them the privilege of diligently studying the Scriptures, personally growing in faith, and watching the Holy Spirit strengthen and increase the body.¹⁴ These blessings are lavished upon God’s workers as they stand in awe of the privilege of living to share the life-changing truth that has already changed their own lives.¹⁵ Is it even possible to enumerate all the blessings God gives to his church through public ministers—blessings which often do not find an equal in the life of the mechanic or congressman?¹⁶ But still, God *does not* say that he is more pleased

14. Please don’t misunderstand. This is not to suggest that one will always be able to “see” how and when and in what way the Spirit works. However, most pastors will acknowledge that God gives a joyful glimpse of this work in various ways throughout ministry: the bold singing of an old hymn by a usually reserved member; the forgiveness in action as two people resolve a bitter dispute; the fierce attachment of a teenager to worship and Bible study, even when the rest of her friends are sleeping in, etc.

15. Deuschlander makes a terrific application for the those who are considering pastoral ministry: “It is through the saving message of forgiveness and salvation that the desire is born and the longing is created to make the work of sharing that saving gospel a lifetime work. The future pastor or teacher of the church is first overwhelmed by that fundamental, all important truth: Christ Jesus came to save the world, and therefore he came also for me, even for me; oh that I might live to give what I have received” (“The Theology of the Call and Ministry,” 14).

16. Professor Cherney makes an excellent point as he discusses vocation and the “value” God places on faithful service, regardless of the field/career: “True, none of these things will bring about my neighbor’s eternal salvation. But they are not for that reason valueless in God’s sight. Our Confessions refer to such deeds of love as works through which ‘Christ celebrates his victory over the devil.’ Christ’s victory came about in a most unspectacular way—through the agony and shame of the cross. How fitting that it is ‘celebrated’ in the simple, humble things that Christians do every day” (Kenneth A. Cherney, Jr., “Hidden in Plain Sight: Luther’s Doctrine of Vocation,” WLS Essay File, 7–8).

with the pastor than the prison guard. He *does not* say that public ministry is more noble or God-pleasing than public relations.

On Calls and Callings

At times, though, the church may be failed by its own terminology. It rightly honors the “call” into public ministry—a mediate call issued by God through his church. The church also honors various “callings”—which, though they are given by God, are not issued through the church. Perhaps a clearer distinction needs to be made, as fine and subtle as it may be. Perhaps there is even a need to develop and use different terminology to reinforce this fine and subtle distinction between “call” and “calling.” In referring to “callings,” can the church make a clearer connection to the doctrine of vocation—“the entire web of personal relationships in which, at God’s direction, [one is] enmeshed at any given moment”?¹⁷ One’s “callings” may include husband or father, musician or student, security officer or janitor. One’s “callings” may even include being a called pastor, teacher, or staff minister, even though these particular “callings” often involve a mediate “call” from God through his church. The “call” and the “callings” can too easily get conflated and confused.

Trouble is the inevitable result. Conflation of “call” with “callings” can diminish the unique blessings of being a called harvest worker, as noted above. But it can simultaneously diminish the special privilege of serving God and neighbor by cleaning toilets, patrolling property, or composing film scores. If “callings” are no different than the “call,” then any dissatisfaction one might have with the toilets to be cleaned or the hair to be styled is no longer an incidental challenge of a particular vocation or an opportunity to wrestle with the overlap of

17. Cherney, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 2.

cross and vocation.¹⁸ It now presents the implication of forsaking God and his Word, or of abandoning his clear directives for life. No longer is there freedom and joy in serving God, but instead a short, dark road to despair and frustration.¹⁹ God certainly issues the “call” through his church. And, he certainly gives “callings.” But he does not say that one’s “callings” are equivalent to a “call” that comes through his church.

Yet another danger lurks here. A conflation of “call” with “callings” can lead one to *assume* that the church has therefore called some to clean toilets or to style hair. While such an assumption might admittedly require another leap of logic (i.e. answering the question of what connection one has to the church), sinful human reason does not hesitate to jump, even before being asked. An individual then becomes the ultimate authority and arbiter for the church, determining what is best for others. Paul condemns such a self-serving attitude in 1 Cor 12:21. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” How could the eye ever think that it can do all the hand does? Or how could the head ever assume that the body has appointed it to do what the feet do? It is an undermining of the body itself—and of the one who has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (1 Cor 12:18)—to assume that one’s “callings” are equivalent to a “call” from God through his church.

This danger may be particularly threatening to second-career students. A conflation of “call” with “callings” can lead them to assume that their desire to serve in public ministry is

18. “There is a cross of some kind connected with every legitimate earthly vocation. There will be something about every possible Christian calling that any rational person would find distasteful and shun” (Cherney, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 4).

19. Cherney discusses a similarly fascinating aspect of vocation in his paper, emphasizing that it is “grounded thoroughly in the present” (“Hidden in Plain Sight,” 2). Where God desires that one find joy and freedom in serving him *right now*—a boundless and timeless gift, in a way—a conflation of calling and call can easily lead to guilt and regret from the past and fear and obligation for the future.

equivalent to an actual “call” from God through the church. This is simply not the case, and it is, as Deutschlander points out, “a dangerous delusion.”²⁰ It leads people away from the only place where God speaks—the revealed Word of God in Scripture. It sucks them into a hopeless mess of doubt or arrogance or despair. What if these desires change tomorrow—even tonight? Should they follow God’s “call” then, too? What if these desires remain even if they have not met God’s required qualifications for public ministers? Should they follow the qualifications or their desires? What if, after all the career changing and career training, they cannot find joy in this “call”? Has God then “called” them to a life of discouragement and frustration?²¹ A conflation of “call” with “callings” results only in confusion and uncertainty.

Reaffirming Identity

What lessons, then, would second-career students be wise to take away from all this—aside from a general pledge to avoid confusion and uncertainty? To begin with, they can reaffirm their identity in Christ alone. They can remember how Paul emphasizes this truth in 1 Tim 1:15 *before* he discusses the qualifications for public ministers: “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” God’s people do not find their identity in their “callings” as husbands or janitors or hair stylists—even though the same God of grace who sent his Son also gave them these “callings.” God’s people do not find their identity in a “call”—even though the same God who redeemed

20. Deutschlander, “The Theology of the Call and Ministry,” 14.

21. See Deutschlander’s pointed questions in “The Will of God and the Will of Man”: “What are you ‘supposed to do’? Guess and torment yourself that you may have guessed wrong and thus thwarted or threatened some cosmic plan for your life?” (13). He goes on to mention another danger worth pointing out. For many, the answers to these questions are found in prayer, which becomes a substitute for the means of grace. Yet again, the revealed Word of God takes a back seat to one’s thoughts and feelings (or worse yet, it’s tossed in the trunk as an item of only occasional use).

them has instituted public ministry and gives public ministers as blessings to his church. Their identity is established and wrapped up in Christ. “Jesus’ perfect life, innocent death, and victorious resurrection have won God’s approval for every believer, equally.”²² Therefore, it’s a fundamental truth that if God’s people are unclear on their identity in Christ, they will be unclear on their “callings” and their “call,” whatever they may be.

God uses the wonderful truth of justification as the foundation for his gifts of public ministry and public ministers to the church. Paul emphasizes this in 1 Tim 1:16, following his beautiful confession of Christ: “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” God desires that the whole world know this beautiful truth. God uses recipients of this glorious identity in Christ to spread the very same message that made them recipients in the first place. Second-career students can take comfort in the message that serves not only as the instrumental cause of salvation (the tools by which God creates faith and gathers the church), but also as the basis for the ministerial cause of salvation (God calls ministers who then use these tools by which God creates faith in others).²³

Second-career students can also continue to appreciate the many blessings God gives his church, not just through public ministers, but also through all those who serve in so many different “callings.” They can highlight and praise the glorious beauty of the “callings” God has given them—remembering that these “callings” are special and different than a God-given, mediate “call.” They can ponder and reflect on and rejoice in their “callings,” knowing that they

22. Cherney, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 2.

23. See again Hein’s excellent essay “Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God’s Plan of Salvation.”

need not be downplayed or denigrated in favor of a more noble “call.”²⁴ There is none. “The blessing of God rests upon him who knows his own responsibilities, looks after them, and serves his neighbor thereby. For Lutherans, there is no higher calling. There is no nobler or more blessed thing a person can do.”²⁵

When all God’s people—including second-career students—are clear about these noble “callings” and these privileged vocations, they will be better equipped to appreciate the special blessings and the unique challenges of public ministry. They will be better equipped to recognize that “those who carry out this ministry of preaching and teaching are distinguished from other Christians, not as being better or more important, but as having this special function from God.”²⁶ They will be better equipped to declare that there is wonderful and precious honor in being Christ’s ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20), in being the jars of clay that both contain and proclaim the life-giving power of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:5–15). They will be better equipped to accept that hardship, persecution, and scorn will often accompany this public ministry (2 Tim 3:12–4:5, 1 Cor 4:9–13). They will be better equipped to remember that those who serve the Lord in this “call” have a special responsibility to be faithful and wise in their use of God’s gifts (Heb 13:7, Matt 25:14–30). They will be better equipped to recognize that there may be times, especially with second-career students, when they should *not* burn the plow—*not* pursue pastoral ministry.

24. Note the following warning/encouragement from Deutschlander: “Those do a great disservice to the church and act contrary to the Word of God who imagine that the only real ministry is in the pulpit and the classroom. Those harm their own souls and will doubtless harm the church who prepare for the public ministry of the church because they think that it is only in the public ministry that God is served” (“The Theology of the Call and Ministry,” 7).

25. Cherney, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 8.

26. Deutschlander, “The Theology of the Call and Ministry,” 8.

It is critical that all God's people, especially second-career students, commit to honoring God by respecting both his "callings" to particular individuals and his "call" through the church. It is essential that they honestly and carefully evaluate their desires to serve God in various ways. It is vital that they recognize the glorious privilege of both "callings" and "call." Paustian summarizes all of this well:

Part of our pastoral calling is to help our people learn to draw more deeply on that well that is the Word of Christ, and then to *drink their cup*, and this not with bland acceptance—ok, so this is my life—but with an embracing of their reality, lifting to their lips with thanksgiving and trust the cup the Father has specially poured for each. 'I want to know how *this* life, not some other, is uniquely situated to know Christ and live in him in the sight of others. Not every life, so temporary, so like a mist, winds up in the glory of him in the end. This one does. I *want* this to be my life. It's from him.'

Does a person find no meaning in their calling? Let willingness transform their prison. Implore them to say 'yes' to their own life, to this place and this moment, all for the love of God that he has placed beyond all doubt in brave self-sacrifice of Jesus for us all. Let us "submit to the Father of our spirits *and live.*" (Hebrews 12:9)²⁷

27. Paustian, "Unleashing Our Calling," 18.

ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES

A commitment to listening is key to supporting, encouraging, and equipping second-career students. Not only does listening foster a greater understanding of the diverse experiences of second-career students,²⁸ it also helps to address the unique challenges that are both presented *to* second-career students and presented *by* second career students. This paper aims to provide a broader recognition of these challenges by using a tripartite examination: spiritual, psychological, and physical. Of course, such an examination is not without its limitations. A comprehensive list of these challenges is neither practical nor possible, precisely because the experiences and backgrounds of second-career students are so diverse. In addition, any classification of these challenges risks blurring the important connections between the challenges themselves.²⁹ Finally, such a classification does not adequately address how these challenges may intensify or diminish at various points throughout the experiences of second-career

28. It is important that the church recognizes these experiences and contemplates how they might impact the training these students receive for pastoral ministry. For example, the previous educational experiences of second-career students may not have occurred in our worker training system, where repeated education contact allows for consistent assessment and greater familiarity with students. Another example would be the theological background of second-career students. A conversation with Prof. E. A. Sorum at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary revealed that the majority of people who contact him about pursuing pastoral ministry as second-career students come from outside our church body and its fellowship. The point is not to assign preference to a particular background, but to recognize the diverse situations from which second-career students come.

29. Are all spiritual challenges distinctly spiritual? Might they also involve a psychological component? Perhaps the greatest potential strength of the following classification system is that it can function as the beginning of an honest conversation about these challenges, whatever they may be.

students.³⁰ However, examining the spiritual, emotional, and physical challenges surrounding second-career students allows for a broad analysis from which to proceed to focused solutions.

Many of the challenges described below were revealed through interviews with second-career students of various types³¹: those contemplating pastoral ministry as a second-career, those in the process of training for pastoral ministry, and those currently serving in the pastoral ministry. In addition, these interviews included individuals who decided *not* to pursue pastoral ministry as a second career—even though they had expressed a desire to do so at some point. These interviews revealed that regardless of the type or quantity of challenges presented *to* or *by* second-career students, the intensity of the challenges is both significant and lasting.³²

The Spiritual Challenges

The Desire to Serve

Perhaps the greatest spiritual challenge posed *to* and *by* second-career students is a misunderstanding of their desire to serve. Pastor Robert J. Voss, who served as president at Northwestern College and who was active in recruiting and supporting second-career students throughout his tenure there, described the challenge this way:

30. It is important to recognize and understand that some challenges do not simply “disappear” because a particular stage of life or ministry has been completed. For example, the desire to serve as a pastor obviously impacts a second-career student as he contemplates (re-)enrolling in school. However, it might also impact the second-career student who approaches retirement age after having served as a pastor for only ten years.

31. See Appendix 1 for interview questions. Interviews were conducted with 26 second-career individuals. In addition, interviews were also conducted with other individuals who had first-hand experience with recruiting, encouraging, or supporting second-career students.

32. Due to the personal nature of many of the responses in these interviews, as well as the comparatively small ratio of second-career students to “traditional” students, this paper will not use any direct quotations from these interviews. The names of those interviewed have been withheld to protect and ensure their personal privacy. A number of interviewees expressed a strong desire to protect their identities and a driving concern about the potential impact their answers could have on their future ministry, their current studies, or their previous relationships.

In so many cases these older students come with the concept of an inner call to the ministry. Some have asserted that they have heard a voice from God directing them to become Lutheran pastors. However the motivation to choose the vocation of a Lutheran pastor may have blossomed, what we often find is that second-career students have some kind of emotional call into ministry at the root of their thinking.³³

Second-career students may approach their decision to study for the pastoral ministry thinking that the desire to serve as a pastor is equivalent to a call from God. Such thinking not only distorts Biblical truth, but it also presents a distinct challenge to the students themselves. It can lead them to the endless frustration of wondering whether or not each emotional flux is yet another call from an inscrutable God. It can lead them to an arrogant assumption of guaranteed success in public ministry.³⁴ It can lead them to crushing despair should they come to the realization that “the full time public ministry will have to be left to someone else.”³⁵

Such thinking is certainly not limited only to second-career students. However, there are perhaps several key reasons why this challenge is particularly common among them. Many second-career students are coming from first careers that failed to provide them the fulfillment for which they had hoped. Perhaps their first careers demanded a rigid, uncompromising silence on all things spiritual or religious. Or maybe they were at times required by their employers to participate in morally dubious practices. Some second-career students even mentioned that their first careers often lacked a “lasting impact” or “greater meaning.” Consequently, their perspectives on the pastoral ministry may be colored. They may see pursuing pastoral ministry as

33. Robert J. Voss, “Second Career Students and the Pastoral Ministry: An Agenda for Discussion” (WLS Essay File, November 24, 1992), 8.

34. This is not to suggest there is some sort of tangible notion of “success” in public ministry. However, this *is* intended to highlight the dangerous place to which this thinking invariably leads. If one assumes that a desire to serve in public ministry is directly equivalent to a “call” from God, what’s to stop this person from concluding that God is bound make one’s congregation grow numerically? Or that he will produce a new member with each prospect visit? It is a short, straight road between an emotional call into ministry and an individual theology of glory.

35. Deutschlander, “The Theology of the Call and Ministry,” 15. In and of itself, this is not a crushing realization. But to someone who has blindly assumed God’s call within his own desires, it can be devastating.

a God-given call to leave behind that which has previously caused frustration, guilt, or resentment. They may even assume that no career other than pastoral ministry can provide the “lasting impact” or “greater meaning” they so desire.³⁶ While the circumstances may vary, the first careers of second-career students can contribute directly to an improper understanding of their desires to serve.

How second-career students understand their desires to serve can also be shaped by their various theological perspectives. While it is impractical to list the abundance of theological teachings from various church bodies regarding the nature of public ministry, the doctrine of vocation, and the will of God, it might be helpful to point out that even in Lutheran circles, there can be a confusing spectrum of teachings. Second-career students may have heard from their fellow church members that God will eventually confirm their desire to serve through prayer.³⁷ They may have even heard from a Lutheran pastor that God will give them “the inner call in the heart ...that hard-to-describe feeling that an individual gets prompting him, tugging on his heart to become a church worker, and he is convinced of it—that it *is the will of God.*”³⁸ The various

36. It’s important to walk a fine line here, as noted earlier in this paper. First, it’s good to acknowledge that a desire to serve in such a way can be both God-given and God-pleasing. It’s also good to acknowledge that God provides wonderful blessings to his people through both the public ministry and the pursuit of it (e.g. study, growth, etc.). But we also need to remember that God nowhere says that he has called individuals into public ministry simply *because* they have not found fulfillment in their present careers. We bear a loving responsibility to teach all God’s people about finding joy in their service—wherever and whatever it may be—through Christ.

37. Deutschlander gives an example of this very thought in “The Will of God and the Will of Man.” He cites a publication from Martin Luther College that quoted a student’s encouragement to one who might be unsure of serving in public ministry. “‘How am I supposed to know that I’m not supposed to be a teacher/pastor? How do I know that I’m making the right decision?’ A good one-word answer for that is pray. Dear Christian friend, if you pray about it, you [sic] decision can’t be wrong” (13). As Deutschlander points out, this encouragement wrongly implies that prayer is the means by which God speaks to us and confirms the decisions we make.

38. Raymond and Martha Van Buskirk, *Leap of Faith: A Resource for Spirit-Led Explorers* (St. Louis: LCMS Board for Pastoral Education, 2009), 30, emphasis mine. Could this quote be understood properly? Perhaps, but not without some serious explanation. At the very least, it muddies the distinction between God’s will and man’s will, and it sets the second-career student up for some dangerous conclusions.

theological perspectives of second-career students may contribute to the spiritual challenge of discussing and addressing their desires to serve.

The Nature of the Pastor's Work

Another spiritual challenge presented *by* and *to* second-career students involves their views on the nature of a pastor's work. Scripture uses a variety of metaphors to describe the work of a pastor—the pastor as servant, steward, or spokesman, for example. However, the Scriptural metaphor of the pastor as a shepherd is particularly striking. It emphasizes the humble service, the compassionate care, and the spiritual leadership God desires his called pastors to provide.³⁹ Yet these characteristics—indeed, these God-given qualifications—are not always properly understood or valued in our world. For this reason, second-career students may sometimes approach pastoral ministry with misunderstandings about the nature of a pastor's work. Having served in the military, for example, may lead them to approach pastoral ministry in a rigid, detail-oriented way. Having risen to upper management at a large corporation may lead them to approach pastoral ministry with a demanding, authoritarian style of leadership.⁴⁰ While these particular approaches may be helpful in addressing some aspects of pastoral ministry, they may also present particular challenges to second-career students who have not yet been able to evaluate them in the context of pastoral ministry. In his book *Dangerous Calling*, Paul David Tripp hints at some of the challenges that might come to second-career students who approach the work of the pastor from a rigid perspective of their previous positions.

39. These metaphors are explored in detail in John D. Schuetze's book *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 21–26.

40. Neither of these examples are intended to reinforce any negative stereotypes. Instead, they are used to promote a loving discussion about the spiritual challenges presented to and by second-career students.

Position orientation will cause you to be political when you should be pastoral. It will cause you to require service when you should be willing to serve. It will cause you to demand of others what you wouldn't be willing to do yourself. It will cause you to ask for privilege when you should be willing to give up your rights. It will cause you to think too much about how things will affect you rather than about how things will reflect on Christ. It will cause you to want to set the agenda rather than to find joy in submitting to the agenda of Another.⁴¹

Second-career students may also have an incomplete understanding of all that being a pastor entails. The former soldier may have difficulty comprehending a new career that does not demand he follow given orders from a superior—even if such a perspective might foster a proper understanding of God's spokesman. The former CEO may struggle to adjust to a new career that does not allow for advancement through dogged determination—even if such a perspective might enable him to give himself fully to the work of ministry (1 Cor 15:58). Certainly, second-career students will not be the only ones to approach their training with an incomplete understanding of the nature of a pastor's work.⁴² Yet their varied experiences can pose spiritual challenges to their understanding of what a pastor does, how the church operates, and what connection the pastor and the church have to each other.

The Timing of God

More than most, second-career students are aware of the mysterious and marvelous timing of God. They have simply had more life experiences than most traditional students. They have often already lived and struggled through the stages, difficulties, and uncertainties of life. But a keen *awareness* of God's timing does not necessarily translate into a proper *understanding* of it.

41. Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 180.

42. One could argue that *every* student who studies for pastoral ministry—whether second-career or otherwise—cannot fully comprehend the nature of a pastor's work.

Second-career students who have had varied and diverse life experiences might mistakenly think that God’s timing indicates his absolute will. “For such a time as this” (Esth 4:14) becomes a captivating mantra, applicable to all sorts of circumstances and experiences. Recent layoffs at the factory are no longer the consequence of a recessed economy or fiscal mismanagement, but instead, a not-so-hidden message from God for one to become a pastor. The late August emptiness of a couple’s home after their youngest child heads to college is no longer another stage of life, but instead, a whispering from God in one’s ear to try a new career. Second-career students, more than most, might be tempted to think that God’s direction and timing in their lives indicate his will for their future.⁴³

Second-career students might also be tempted to think that God’s timing in their lives suggests that they are already equipped to carry out the responsibilities of the career they desire to pursue. They may think that their years of experience, coupled with God’s provision of an opportunity, means that they are ready to be a pastor. Consequently, they may approach their study for pastoral ministry as either an unnecessary burden or a pointless hoop through which they are being forced to jump. Not only can such attitudes lead to resentment, bitterness, and frustration,⁴⁴ they can also lead second-career students to overlook key considerations in their pursuit of pastoral ministry. Second-career students may have a greater awareness of God’s timing. Yet this awareness may present spiritual challenges to their understanding of God’s will within the context of his timing.

43. A knowledge of God’s promises to direct and govern all things for the good of his people does not translate to a complete understanding of God’s will for one’s life (see Isa 55:8–9). That would be going beyond what God has revealed in his Word.

44. This is an example of how spiritual challenges often blend into psychological challenges.

The Psychological Challenges

The Psychology of Restart

A wide variety of circumstances may prompt second-career students to pursue the pastoral ministry. Whether voluntary or involuntary, though, these circumstances present significant psychological challenges.⁴⁵ In his book *Do Over*, writer Jon Acuff describes these challenges as “a jungle full of thick vines” and “dangerous pitfalls.”⁴⁶ Another author describes the trauma of resetting one’s career as similar to recovering from a car wreck: “Regardless of the cause, it feels like a wreck that catches you off guard, violently shakes you, and leaves you disoriented, angry, hurt, and asking questions of yourself and others.”⁴⁷ In fact, the abundance of self-help books and career path guides testifies to the powerful challenges presented by career change.

It does little good, however, to speak of the challenges in ill-defined or approximate terms. While not all second-career students face the same psychological challenges, a specific and pointed conversation about these challenges—whatever they may be—can provide greater understanding of their impact on second-career students as well as their potential repercussions on the public ministry. For example, some second-career students may be especially prone to the psychological challenges of a career restart that involves continued educational training. They may struggle with a return to academic life, recognizing how technology and practice have

45. Writer Jon Acuff makes a distinction between career changes prompted by choice and those prompted by forces outside of one’s control in his book *Do Over: Rescue Monday, Reinvent Your Work, and Never Get Stuck* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2015, 12–14). Such a categorization allows Acuff to move past the circumstances towards practical, beneficial solutions. Might there be a lesson here for our church body, too? Second-career students may be prompted by either voluntary or involuntary circumstances. The point is not to establish a priority of one over the other. Rather, it is to recognize that there can be challenges—and blessings—in both.

46. Acuff, 12.

47. Bradley G. Richardson, *Career Comeback: 8 Steps to Getting Back on Your Feet When You’re Fired, Laid Off, or Your Business Venture Has Failed—And Finding More Job Satisfaction Than Ever Before* (New York: Broadway Books/Random House, Inc., 2004), ii.

changed in the classroom since their first journey through school.⁴⁸ They may struggle to adjust to the expectations of completed homework, becoming keenly aware of how the passage of time applies slight but steady pressure to the brakes on brain activity.⁴⁹ They may struggle to deal with the daily rigors of class participation, realizing that their previous career perhaps involved a kinesiology not often utilized in the classroom.

Other second-career students may struggle with the psychological challenges presented by a sense of having to “start over”—to step back, in a way, and train for a new career that may not present the same opportunities for upward mobility or promotion.⁵⁰ Some second-career students face significant psychological challenges because of an entirely different “daily routine”—sermon studies and home visits replace performance reviews and board meetings.⁵¹ Still others wrestle with the challenges of a loss of career identity⁵² or the prospect of lengthy training before this new career can even be fully realized.

Here again, it is important to understand the difficulty—perhaps even the impossibility—of isolating psychological challenges from spiritual or physical ones. The combined

48. Some second-career students have never earned a college degree or even a high school diploma. In such cases, not only do the psychological challenges become even more dramatic, but the academic requirements may also present a significant obstacle to the second-career student’s pursuit of pastoral ministry.

49. In his book *Younger Brain, Sharper Mind* (New York: Rodale Inc., 2011), Erik R. Braverman describes how the brain loses processing speed and cognitive function over time. The bad news is that second-career students have obviously had more time for such degeneration to occur. However, the good news is that such losses can be countered and even prevented through targeted brain activity and brain “rebalancing.”

50. Obviously, the counter to this—one which we should be quick to point out—is that the pastoral ministry *is indeed* a paradigm shift in this sense. Yet the pastoral ministry *also* presents many wonderful and blessed opportunities for personal, spiritual, and even psychological growth. It’s important to understand that these may not be readily apparent to second-career students only familiar with their previous careers.

51. The rector of a Catholic seminary devoted entirely to second-career students has a pithy way of describing this challenge: “Of course it’s a challenge getting some of our students to broaden—they have well-tested modes of operation” (Melinda R. Heppel, “Designed for Second Careers: Two Schools that Planned for Students of Diverse Experience,” *In Trust*, New Year 1999, 20).

52. “Of the many roles we play, we most commonly define ourselves by our occupation.... When that identity is altered or threatened, we feel detached, lost, and in some cases less valuable. For many of us, our jobs are a source of pride, social standing, power, and relevance” (Richardson, *Career Comeback*, v).

accumulation of other physical and spiritual challenges might lead to the psychological challenge of simply feeling overwhelmed by all that a career change entails. A job loss or transition, a move to a new community, a real estate transaction, a separation from family and friends, a period of financial instability, a looming worry about adaptation to academic life, a building frustration among spouse and children—all of these challenges can pile up and contribute to a significant psychological hurdle for second-career students. The psychology of restart encompasses a broad spectrum of challenges that can have a lasting impact on second-career students and their service in the pastoral ministry.⁵³

The Strain on Relationships

Generally speaking, second-career students have spent more time developing relationships.⁵⁴ Perhaps these relationships were integral to their first careers—a business partner, an employer, a peer mentor, or a key employee. Or perhaps they were simply forged and strengthened over time and through regular contact. In any case, these relationships likely assume a different status as these second-career students pursue the pastoral ministry. Even though all students at some point must adjust to the changing dynamics of relationships, second-career students in particular often

53. Another intriguing area of study could be the psychology of restart's influence months—even years—down the road. Richardson hints at this in his description of a man who lost his job twice, got a new job, but still felt psychological strain: “Even after you have been working for a while, a feeling of uncertainty can remain. Michael, who had gone through two layoffs in eighteen months, says, ‘It is nerve-racking to jump through all of these hoops to get the job, and now that I have it, I feel pressure that everything is riding on this.’ It is a common feeling, and it takes a while for it to go away” (*Career Comeback*, 293).

54. Some of those interviewed for this paper pointed out that a driving factor in their decision to pursue pastoral ministry was a desire to foster greater and more meaningful relationships through the sharing of the gospel. Some first careers simply did not offer the opportunity to develop relationships—at least not to the extent for which some had hoped. While it is encouraging that these second-career students and pastors recognized the importance and value of relationships, a first career that lacked such opportunities can be a challenge in and of itself. Developing relationships—perhaps especially in the sense of being able to effectively communicate and establish rapport with another person—is essential to sharing the gospel. Second-career students who have had no such experience, though probably not too dissimilar from a “traditional” student, may in these cases require additional training and encouragement.

suffer through added strain in relationships which have been galvanized through career, life, and family experiences.⁵⁵ Some of those interviewed for this paper proposed an interesting perspective on this relationship strain. While traditional students experience challenges and changes as an essential part of working towards establishing and strengthening relationships, second-career students face challenges and changes that disrupt relationships which have *already* been established and strengthened over longer periods of time.

The strain on relationships can be especially severe as second-career students undertake their training for pastoral ministry. They may feel isolated and alone, lacking the emotional support system that guided them through their first careers and became an integral part of their lives. They may find it difficult to connect and bond with classmates who are ten, twenty, or thirty years younger.⁵⁶ They may grow frustrated observing the relative immaturity of their more youthful classmates while they struggle through more “mature” issues themselves—such as supporting a growing family or adjusting to an empty nest. They may even have difficulty engaging with teachers or professors who are younger or less experienced than they are.

In addition, these challenges can be multiplied by the individual circumstances of second-career students. Some have growing families—and the web of relationships that suffers strain expands to include those of wives and children. Some have been required to relocate to begin training for pastoral ministry—and their existing support systems begin to crumble beneath the pressures of distance and culture.⁵⁷ Some face hostility and even outright persecution for their

55. This is not to say that changing relationships among traditional students are any less traumatic.

56. Perhaps this is particularly challenging in the WELS, where the relatively small number of pastors trained each year (in comparison to other church bodies) leads to the formation of an intense and deeply-set “brotherhood.”

decision to pursue pastoral ministry—and their previous relationships have therefore not simply waned in intensity, but have been severed traumatically. Whatever the circumstances may be, second-career students face a significant strain on their relationships due to their pursuit of pastoral ministry.

The Ministry Box

In his book *Reach*, Dr. Andy Molinsky discusses the difficulty some people have in adjusting to a culture distinct from their previous experiences. He refers to this phenomenon as “cross-cultural code-switching,”⁵⁸ and mentions how it can pose a series of psychological challenges. He identifies five specific challenges that cross-cultural code-switching can lead to: a crisis of authenticity (what is one’s true identity?), an attachment to likeability (how can one foster new relationships?), a questioning of competency (how does one succeed in this new culture?), an atmosphere of resentment (why is everything so different?), and a challenge to morality (what is absolutely necessary for success?). Molinsky’s thoughts present a helpful model for understanding many of the psychological challenges second-career students face. In particular, his description of the question of competency is one worth exploring in the context of the pastoral ministry.

A reflection on what God says about public ministry is an essential spiritual component of the training for any student who desires to be a pastor. It is critical to not only understand God’s institution of the public ministry, but also the high standards that God demands for his

57. It’s worth mentioning how the places in which WELS worker-training schools are located have a culture that is decidedly different than other areas of the country. For example, adjustment to life in New Ulm, Minnesota, after life in Atlanta, Georgia, can pose a significant challenge.

58. Andy Molinsky, Ph.D., *Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Challenge, and Build Confidence* (New York: Avery/Penguin Random House, 2017), 10.

public ministers. It is equally critical to assess one's own God-given gifts and abilities within the context of these qualifications.⁵⁹ Competency for the public ministry requires both critical functions—to understand the qualifications and to recognize one's God-given ability to meet them.

This spiritual reflection becomes a unique psychological challenge for second-career students, though, given what they so often face—what Dr. Molinsky calls the cross-cultural code-switch. “Compounding the difficulty of acting outside your comfort zone is the fact that you might also *feel* incompetent: that you don't have the skills necessary to pull off the task you're trying to perform (and, by the way, that this incompetence is likely visible to others).”⁶⁰ In other words, the previous experiences of second-career students and the potential trauma of their career change can impair their ability to properly understand their fit within the “box” of ministry.⁶¹

There may be a number of reasons for this. As noted earlier, the variety of backgrounds from which second-career students come can make this challenge significant. Perhaps previous experience allowed for much more flexibility and creativity in determining the “box” of their first careers. For example, a person who previously served as a mechanic may very well have understood the fundamental purpose of his job: to repair automobiles. And yet, he may also have been given the freedom from his customer to rebuild a carburetor with spare parts or to replace it

59. See Appendix 3 for a more thorough discussion of the church and the institution of the public ministry, as well as the qualifications and forms of public ministry.

60. Molinsky, *Reach*, 35 (emphasis mine).

61. By no means is the term “box” meant to be derogatory. On the one hand, it's intended to highlight that God has specific, detailed, and purposeful qualifications for his public ministers. On the other hand, it's also intended to recognize the overarching purpose of public ministry: “so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12). There is a “box”—and it's a good one. The challenge for second-career students might be acknowledging the box. Or it might also be grappling with the reality of a different box than that to which they are accustomed.

with a brand new one.⁶² Or perhaps the circumstances which (in part) drove second-career students to pursue pastoral ministry cause confusion over what legitimately constitutes the “box” of ministry. For example, the self-employed web developer who struggled through a failed app launch might begin to make subtle expansions to God’s qualifications for public ministry as he begins his own training. He may re-adjust God’s spiritual qualifications beneath his own self-determined characteristics like fund-raising ability or public relations skills.⁶³

This particular psychological challenge—assessing one’s fit in the “box” of ministry—may have unintended consequences for second-career students. It may cause them to challenge commonly-held perspectives on public ministry and public ministers. Depending on the response, such a challenge could lead to division and bitterness.⁶⁴ Assessing one’s fit in the “box” of ministry may also lead some second-career students to harbor a subtle resentment towards the standards of the WELS worker training system.⁶⁵ It may even lead to frustration beyond their training for pastoral ministry and into their service in God’s harvest fields.

62. Every analogy limps, but hopefully the application to ministry can be gleaned from this example. The “box” of ministry could be seen as more restrictive, in a way, because God’s public ministers aren’t free to use other tools to build up the church. God “limits” them to the means of grace—the gospel in word and sacrament. And, too, even though the church has been given the gift of public ministers, the public ministry itself is dictated by God, not by the stated desires of either those who serve in it or those who benefit from it.

63. Admittedly, such a scenario might also fall under spiritual challenges. However, there is also an aspect of psychology here, driven by the previous experiences of this hypothetical second-career student.

64. This particular thought has the educational setting of the WELS worker training system in mind. A student that challenges what ministry is and how it should look doesn’t necessarily need to be “reprimanded” or “removed.” However, such a student should be reminded of the debt of love he owes to all those who have participated in the worker training system, who have worked to make this system a blessing, and who have adjusted it in Christian faithfulness and freedom. He should, at the very least, be encouraged to lovingly present why he thinks something *might* be changed, rather than insisting on the *necessity* of change. Richardson understands this debt of love, even though he writes from a secular perspective: “Be mindful that the organization likely existed and survived long before you came on board. You have to understand an organization before you can change it” (*Career Comeback*, 295). Of course, the debt of love also calls for a careful, measured, patient, and honest response.

65. Some second-career students mentioned feeling as if there were simply too many institutional hoops through which they had to jump, and that the process didn’t necessarily allow for a capitalization on their strengths

The Physical Challenges

Family Responsibilities

Of all the challenges presented *by* and *to* second-career students, those affecting their families are perhaps the most noticeable. Of course, not all second-career students are married or have children. In addition, even those who are married or have children are at different stages along the family development spectrum. Yet while the circumstances may vary, family responsibilities remain a key consideration for second-career students.⁶⁶ Richardson emphasizes this truth in his encouragement to anyone contemplating a career change: “Your situation doesn’t just affect you; it touches the lives of everyone around you, and they are dealing with feelings, concerns, fears, and anxieties of their own.”⁶⁷ He even proposes a series of questions that can be helpful in understanding the impact a career change can have on the family. How will it impact the daily routines of the home? What might relocation mean—especially for a spouse’s career or the children’s school?⁶⁸ Because second-career students each have unique family circumstances, these questions cannot always be answered broadly. However, the questions do present a good

as second-career students. Again, Christian love—on both sides—has the responsibility and the privilege to address such concerns honestly and fairly.

66. It might be tempting to think that an unmarried second-career student faces few, if any, challenges in the area of family responsibilities. While we may be able to say that such students face fewer challenges to family responsibility than those students who have been blessed with wives and children, an important word of caution is in order. Single students still have family responsibilities, especially to parents and extended family. It’s entirely possible that an unmarried, second-career student will face intense challenges as his parents or his siblings adjust to his new reality. Again, the point is that each circumstance is unique, and we would do well to refrain from assumptions which prevent us from listening to and understanding the challenges all students face.

67. Richardson, *Career Comeback*, 99.

68. Obviously, beginning the training for pastoral ministry often involves relocation—whether to Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota, or to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. In addition, the pastoral ministry itself often involves the opportunity for relocation through the calling process. It is good for second-career students and their families to at least be aware that relocation may impact the family at various points along the way.

starting place for second-career students, their families, and the church to discuss the challenges presented by their pursuit of pastoral ministry.

What can be said generally, though, is that second-career students with wives and children face the challenge of added responsibilities and adjusted priorities.⁶⁹ The responsibilities of coursework as well as of husband or father are God-given, and should not be pitted against each other, as if one is more God-pleasing than the other.⁷⁰ Professor Deutschlander has a helpful way of summarizing this challenge while also pointing out the inherent risks:

Those whose family responsibilities would have to be neglected in order to study for the ministry need to remember that the responsibilities of a husband and father come from God too. To neglect divinely given obligations in order to pursue a call into the public ministry is likewise not God-pleasing. Such a one will not be able to meet some of the most important qualifications for the ministry (1 Tim 3:5) and at the same time risks falling under the judgment of God (1 Tim 5:8).⁷¹

Second-career students with wives and families need to acknowledge and embrace the reality of these added responsibilities. A wife needs physical, emotional, and spiritual support, which requires not only thought and care, but also time. She may or may not need more of her husband's thought, care, or time depending on her own background, life experience, and current family situation.⁷² Likewise, children need physical, emotional, and spiritual support, and often

69. This is especially true in comparison to the "traditional" student who might be unmarried, living in the dorms, and making use of a school meal plan.

70. While it is God-pleasing to carry out both responsibilities faithfully, there may be times when it is important to recognize that either responsibility may require an elevated priority. Paustian gives the following encouragement in this matter: "We can honor the sacrifices of the man who chooses public ministry as a second career, for they are considerable, *and* we can honor the one who denies his own need for fulfillment, stays in the place in life God has already given, and offers an electrician's life to God. He pays a price as well. Of course, there is no need to go looking for self-imposed crosses, or to assume the vocation that is more difficult is necessarily God's will for us" (Paustian, "Unleashing Our Calling," 13 [footnote #69]).

71. Deutschlander, "The Theology of the Call and Ministry," 15.

72. That is, whether or not she and her husband have children, and what ages those children may be. A wife who stays home to care for a newborn infant may at times need more physical support from her husband. A wife

at varying degrees depending upon their ages.⁷³ Whatever the stages or circumstances may be, they can pose serious physical challenges to second-career students and their responsibilities in the classroom.⁷⁴ Of course, it's also important to recognize that second-career students themselves need physical, emotional, and spiritual support from their wives and families.

These challenges are not easy to address. Nor do they always remain the same. They may intensify due to personal circumstances like physical health, distance to school or work, and even housing. In addition, the challenges of family responsibilities may persist even after second-career students have become second-career pastors.⁷⁵ Of course, these are challenges and questions with which any pastor who has a family will struggle. It takes time and effort to assess these challenges and to address them at every stage of family life.⁷⁶

Financial Considerations

who works while her three children are in school may require more emotional support from her husband. Then again, each wife's personality may require the opposite.

73. Richardson offers some interesting generalizations about children and how their various developmental stages may present different challenges to those pursuing a career change. He argues that all children need stability, but that young children take things literally, older children worry about themselves, and grown children worry about their parents. While his arguments are far from scientific, they do prompt interesting questions for second-career students and their pursuit of pastoral ministry.

74. Voss summarizes this challenge with two simple, pointed questions: "How will the time and effort necessary for study influence family stability? Will it deprive the children of essential time with parents?" ("Second-Career Students and the Pastoral Ministry," 6).

75. Many of those students and pastors interviewed for this paper expressed the sentiment that the formal pastoral ministry offered more flexibility to address these family challenges than the actual training for this ministry. The routines of coursework can present a rigidity to which it can be difficult for the family to adjust.

76. "The impact of this particular career redirection on the marital relationship may be significant, and should be of potential interest to students of the family and those involved in seminary education, because of the particular nature of the profession involved. Unlike many professionals, the success of the minister in his pastoral activities usually calls for a high level of direct support from his marital partner. If, in the seminary experience, strains between the pair are created, it might be counterproductive for the individual's total education" (Lloyd A. Brightman, "The Impact of the Seminary Experience on the Marital Relationship," *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, March 1977, vol. XXXI, no. 1, 56).

The financial circumstances of second-career students are varied. When combined with other factors—such as family size, debt load, and previous career—these financial considerations become even more critical in the decision of whether or not to pursue pastoral ministry. Indeed, these considerations raise a host of questions with which second-career students and their families must struggle.

Perhaps the most obvious of these questions revolve around the financial circumstances of their previous careers. One student's previous career may have required him to accumulate massive amounts of debt during his initial schooling. Another student's previous career may have paid him only slightly above the poverty line, making it difficult to support his family or accumulate savings. Yet another student's previously lucrative career may have ended in dismissal, resulting in an inability to maintain an unsustainably high standard of living. Whatever the previous circumstances may be, financial considerations can substantially affect the ability (or inability) of second-career students to support their families.

The realities of educational training for pastoral ministry also compound the financial challenges second-career students face. In most cases, they are full-time students, presented with the problem of finding employment—either for themselves or for their wives—that will meet their monthly expenses and support their families. Temporary relocation for schooling often limits the availability of quality jobs for second-career students who have greater financial need.⁷⁷ Limited employment prospects, then, often result in limited access to the health insurance and benefits usually provided through one's employer. Federal, state, or county benefits which could supplement the needs of second-career students and their families can be difficult to

77. "Quality" is admittedly a relative term, but it seeks to balance a recognition of the needs without resorting to unsustainable extremes in pay or type of work. Many of those interviewed for this paper made a point of emphasizing the seriousness of this need. In particular, they expressed concern over the difficulty of sifting through job prospects in New Ulm, Minnesota, where many of them were required to live.

navigate, understand, or accept.⁷⁸ In addition, federal financial aid is often not available for second-career students who are typically required to enroll in a non-degree, certification program.⁷⁹

These financial challenges are not limited to second-career students and their families. They impact the worker-training system as well as the church at large. Preparing and equipping God’s people for service in public ministry requires valuable resources—which are sometimes in scarce supply.⁸⁰ So, the church seeks to be as faithful as possible in its stewardship of the resources which God has provided. To that end, it recognizes that there may indeed be a greater cost associated with training second-career students. It recognizes, too, that the investment in the training of second-career students might not result in as lengthy a service as “traditional” students.⁸¹ While guarding against overcorrection, the church strives to find a balance between using God’s resources faithfully and supporting all potential workers with them.

78. Because these benefits are often tied to the overall health of their respective economies (local, state, or federal), the benefits themselves are no certain thing, even for those who qualify. Several of those interviewed for this paper related frustration with the confusing process of completing and submitting the required paperwork—a particular challenge for those whose previous careers had never given them any experience in the process. Several also mentioned a hesitancy to rely on public benefits during their years of training for the pastoral ministry. For some, this hesitancy was borne out of a strong desire to be entirely self-sufficient. For others, it came from a desire to avoid a perceived stigma of relying on public assistance.

79. Some second-career students, because of their unique circumstances, may be required to enroll in a degree program. While that may allow them access to federal student aid, it also presents the challenge of a lengthier course of study. A cost-benefit analysis of pursuing a degree program rather than a certification program might be a worthwhile endeavor for some second-career students.

80. Or, at least, often not in as great a supply as desired.

81. If one wishes to examine this issue merely from a statistical perspective, a strict cost-benefit analysis might argue against supporting second-career students. They are generally older, and therefore, offer fewer years of service to the church. However, such a perspective does not account for the additional blessings that second-career students bring to pastoral ministry and to the church.

RECOGNIZING THE BLESSINGS

Just as certainly as the varied backgrounds and experiences of second-career students present unique challenges, so, too, do they present unique blessings. It is imperative, therefore, that the church recognize, acknowledge, and highlight these blessings. If second-career students are only considered within the context of the potential challenges they present, the church risks not only distorting their identity as fellow members of the body of Christ, but also discouraging their faithful service to the Lord. Peter encourages an awareness of these unique blessings by using the picture of a royal priesthood, where the lives of God's people give a continual testimony of praise to the God who saved them. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9). It is critical for the church to recognize the blessings that second-career students *are* within the body of Christ (their identity), and also the blessings that they *bring* to the body of Christ (their sacrifices of praise).

In addition, by assessing only the challenges second-career students present, the church risks not fully appreciating how God may be answering its prayers for the Lord "to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt 9:38). Second-career students provide opportunities for God's church not only to carry out the church's mission (Matt 28:19–20), but also to appreciate how God equips his public ministers with various gifts and abilities, and brings all of these together to participate in the work of sharing God's message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–20).

Before examining some of the unique blessings of second-career students, several reminders are in order. Because these students come from a variety of backgrounds, a commitment to listening is key to recognizing the blessings these students *are* and *bring*. Just as the varied backgrounds of second-career students make it impractical (and perhaps impossible) to provide a comprehensive list of challenges, so do they make an exhaustive catalog of blessings difficult. In fact, many of the unique challenges second-career students face often translate into specific blessings.⁸² Finally, a clear division between spiritual, emotional, and physical blessings is not always possible. Some blessings may have both spiritual and emotional aspects to them. Nevertheless, this tripartite division can provide a broad framework for beginning to recognize, acknowledge, and highlight the blessings second-career students *are* and *bring*.

The Spiritual Blessings

A Digesting of God's Truth

Nearly every second-career student interviewed for this paper mentioned the opportunity to study God's Word in greater depth as the primary spiritual blessing in their journey towards pastoral ministry. This likely comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the public ministry and the training required for it. The prospect of regularly hearing, reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting⁸³ the Word is what often drives many to pursue the pastoral ministry.

82. Many so-called leadership gurus have suggested that one's greatest strength can be one's greatest weakness. Not as many suggest that one's greatest weakness can be one's greatest strength. However, the latter might actually be more applicable to second-career students. In his book, *Higher: Awaken to a More Fulfilling Life*, Charles Hanna recognizes the potential value that challenges present, and how they can be turned into strengths. "Things that might appear negative are actually essential parts of the navigation system that guides us in this life. I should not be any more upset about running into a negative experience than I would be if the fuel gauge on my plane warned me that I was running low on gas in the left wing" (Vancouver BC Canada: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2017, 112). Might Paul have been suggesting a better version of this truth in 2 Cor 4:7—at least as far as it is conveyed to others? Could this also be drawn from Heb 12:4–12?

83. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 14.

Additionally, God's Word contains beautiful promises and purposes for those who desire to serve in the pastoral ministry: to create and strengthen faith in Christ Jesus through his Word (2 Tim 3:15), to equip them for every good work in their lives of spiritual worship (Rom 12:1–2), and to enable them to give glory and honor to his name (Eph 1:9–14). It is with great joy and thanks, then, that anyone who trains for public ministry—including second-career students—often exclaims: “What a glorious privilege to study the very words that not only comfort me, but equip me for what I so eagerly desire to do!”

With their varied experiences and backgrounds, though, second-career students often have had *more* time and *more* opportunities to reflect on this privilege. Sometimes, this is due to personal experiences which have compelled them to digest the unchanging truths of God's Word and apply them to their own changing lives.⁸⁴ The former construction foreman whose paycheck was delayed by a client's unpaid bill may have learned more deeply what it means to trust God's promises to provide (Matt 6:25–34). The former insurance salesman who struggled through a layoff and a discouraging bout of rejected resumes may have learned more deeply what it means to commit a path to the Lord (Ps 37:5) and remember his eternal plans (Jer 29:11).⁸⁵ Second-career students have often developed a mature perspective on faith through difficult and troubling circumstances.

These blessings are not limited to second-career students themselves or to any one particular stage of their training for pastoral ministry. To be sure, the mature spiritual perspective

84. This factor alone sometimes makes it difficult to discuss at length the particular spiritual blessings for second-career students. In the interviews conducted for this paper, the responses provided by second-career students indicated a much wider range of spiritual blessings than spiritual challenges, even if the challenges were notable for their intensity.

85. What a blessing to learn both humble persistence and patient trust—both with a heavenly perspective in mind! Such lessons prove invaluable for public ministry, when God teaches his workers to always give themselves fully to the Lord's work, remembering that the Lord controls the results and promises the eternal reward.

of second-career students can be a wonderful influence on “traditional” students during their training for pastoral ministry.⁸⁶ But Pastor Jeff Samelson, a second-career pastor, also emphasizes how these blessings provide benefits to the people that second-career students serve after they become pastors:

A second-career pastor has spent time on both sides of the pulpit. He begins his ministry already understanding what it’s like in the pews. Often he can identify from personal experience with the member who doesn’t know when the next paycheck is coming or if he will have a job next year. He knows what it’s like to spend 40 or more hours a week in a godless workplace, and sometimes he’s personally acquainted with a godless lifestyle. It’s hard to shock even a rookie second-career pastor with a problem or confession—he knows just how bad things can be.⁸⁷

The varied experiences of second-career students often prove to be a powerful spiritual blessing for them, their fellow pastors-to-be, and the church at large.

A Perspective on Ministry

While second-career students come from varied backgrounds and unique circumstances, they often share one particular experience. Many—if not most—second-career students have received explicit encouragement from someone to pursue the pastoral ministry.⁸⁸ No matter the source of this encouragement, it often sparks a period of reflection about ministry and an assessment of

86. Current and former faculty members from our worker-training schools who were interviewed also mentioned the positive impact that older, wiser, and more mature students can have on the younger student body at large. Pastor John Braun, who collaborated with Pastor Voss on his article (“Second-Career Students and the Pastoral Ministry”), spoke favorably about the spiritual impact second-career students can have on “traditional” students, who recognize both their sacrifices and their God-given wisdom.

87. Jeffery L. Samelson, “Second-career pastors—who are they?” (*Forward in Christ*, April 2002), 19.

88. Nearly all second-career students interviewed for this paper mentioned the specific encouragement they received from another individual to use their gifts to serve in the pastoral ministry. There was, however, one notable exception. One student never received explicit encouragement, but simply witnessed the enthusiasm of his pastor and thought, *I’d love to do the same thing*. The encouragement was still given, though it was more implicit than explicit. This might be another interesting area of study, especially as it relates to recruitment of students for our worker-training schools. Is explicit or implicit encouragement more powerful? While there seems to be wisdom in preserving a “both-and” strategy of recruitment, it’s fair to wonder if implicit encouragement has more value than we realize.

one's potential fit within it. John C. Maxwell describes some of the benefits of such a period of reflection. "When you engage in reflective thinking, you can put ideas and experiences into a more accurate context. Reflective thinking encourages us to go back and spend time pondering what we have done and what we have seen.... Without reflection, it can be very difficult to see that big picture."⁸⁹

Certainly, reflective thinking can provide physical and psychological blessings, as well as spiritual ones. But the latter are especially in focus here. The encouragement provided to second-career students—whether explicit or implicit—can better equip them to properly understand ministry and their desire to be a part of it. This period of reflection may lead them to conclude, for example, that the collapse of their first career provided a unique opportunity to refocus and work for "better and lasting possessions" (Heb 10:34).⁹⁰ In other words, some second-career students are blessed with a refined perspective on the purpose and function of public ministry—often because they've had specific experiences that have reminded them of a scarcity of spiritual blessings in some (other) careers.⁹¹ Consequently, they may have better learned to recognize and embrace the spiritual blessings that pastoral ministry brings to both God's people and God's workers.

89. John C. Maxwell, *Thinking for a Change: 11 Ways Highly Successful People Approach Life and Work* (New York: Warner Books/AOL Time Warner Company, 2003), 179.

90. It's striking how the writer to the Hebrews begins this section of verses with an exhortation to these Christians to *remember* the difficulties, the persecutions, and the troubles they faced. In some ways, second-career students may be better equipped to *remember* than "traditional" students. They may have experienced such difficulties more often. They may also have been prompted to a more personal and meaningful reflection on their experiences through the encouragement of others. For example, a recruiter may encourage a "traditional" student to study for pastoral ministry because it is necessary, beautiful, and important work. To a second-career student, though, the encouragement may be similar to "You know this well from your own experience...." To be clear, both strategies are wonderful! But, the latter demonstrates how second-career students may have a different perspective on ministry due to their personal experiences.

91. Again, it's important to properly teach vocation here, promoting joyful service to one's neighbor no matter what the situation, because God loves it and because the neighbor needs it.

The Psychological Blessings

A Contagious Enthusiasm

By virtue of their varied and diverse experiences, second-career students often bring a contagious enthusiasm to their studies and their service as pastors.⁹² This enthusiasm is not simply limited to those with certain personality traits more inclined toward outward displays of joy or happiness. Dr. Andy Molinsky argues that personal enthusiasm—particularly the type that is demonstrated in one’s chosen field—is often caused by a keen awareness of one’s own desires, as well as a deep sense of conviction about one’s actions.⁹³ Both causes are particularly applicable to second-career students pursuing the pastoral ministry. Not only have they had more time and opportunity to assess their own desire to serve in the pastoral ministry, but they have also had more time and opportunity to develop a deep sense of conviction in the work they hope to do. At a very basic level, they may have learned about particular career paths that do not (or would not) bring them personal fulfillment and joy. But their experiences may also have allowed them to gain a new focus on work and family, “a new appreciation for the physical, emotional, psychological, and even spiritual impact that work (or lack of it) has on [themselves] and those around [them].”⁹⁴ Perhaps even their own conversion to the faith has given them a joyful and irrepressible conviction to do everything possible for others to experience the same.⁹⁵

92. This might be comparable to the enthusiasm which is often noticed by called workers as they observe recent converts. These converts begin to recognize the magnitude of what they have learned, the powerful implications of God’s working in their hearts and minds, and their lives seem to explode in thanksgiving joy and enthusiasm. Some second-career students demonstrate a similar enthusiasm, though not because they are new to the faith, but new to the joy of ministry. As they begin their studies and even when they begin their formal service as called pastors, they realize the impact that God does have and will have through them, and they cannot restrain their enthusiasm.

93. Molinsky, *Reach*, 86.

94. Richardson, *Career Comeback*, vi.

95. Such a conviction—while certainly good and God-pleasing—always needs to be tempered with several considerations. First and foremost, it’s critical to recognize that conversion is not an emotional experience to be

There may also be other factors that contribute to this contagious enthusiasm. Molinsky talks about the impact of expanded horizons. “No one likes to move beyond their comfort zone, but as the saying goes, that’s where the magic happens. It’s where we can grow, learn, and develop in a way that expands our horizons beyond what we thought was possible.”⁹⁶ Second-career students have often been forced out of their comfort zones. Their experiences have often already given them a number of opportunities to grow, learn, and adapt. In fact, even the decision to pursue the pastoral ministry is one that can provide the impact of expanded horizons.⁹⁷

In many cases, these expanded horizons have allowed second-career students to develop a fine-tuned awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. Such an awareness may be, in part, what leads them to consider pursuing a career in the pastoral ministry. They may recognize, for example, that they have unique gifts for teaching or communicating. They may begin to understand how these unique gifts can be used in service to the Lord and in service to God’s people. The combination, then, of awareness of gifts and recognition of their potential use for service, can bolster the enthusiasm that second-career students have for pursuing and serving in the pastoral ministry.⁹⁸

pinpointed as proof of God’s work, even though God most certainly works on the intellect, the *emotions*, and the will in creating faith. Some second-career students, then, may need to be reminded that God works through the means of his gospel and not through a careful construction of ideal circumstances. They may also need to be reminded that God works through the means of his gospel in his own time. Second, it is still important to carefully analyze both the desires and the required qualifications for ministry. A particular emphasis in this case might be the qualification that a called worker *not* be a recent convert (1 Tim 3:6). With these considerations in mind, though, it is good to praise and foster such a God-pleasing conviction, and to highlight this evangelical heart as a beautiful gift from God.

96. Molinsky, *Reach*, 2.

97. This can also be the case for the “traditional” student. And yet, most of those interviewed for this paper reflected on their own inability to recognize or take advantage of this opportunity during their time as “traditional” students. There is an added impact that comes from having the self-awareness to recognize such moments. Molinsky calls this the “power to notice: to appreciate and internalize what’s good and positive and fulfilling about this experience of acting outside your comfort zone, to remember that tinge of pride you felt the first time you did it, or to recall that drop in anxiety once you got into the flow of things” (*Reach*, 196–7).

Such enthusiasm can be a wonderful blessing for second-career students, especially as they face the spiritual, psychological, and physical challenges of training for the pastoral ministry.⁹⁹ In addition, this enthusiasm can also be a wonderful blessing for their fellow students as well as the church at large. The classmates of second-career students often recognize this enthusiasm, and grow in their own appreciation for the pastoral ministry and their desire to serve in it. The church also recognizes this enthusiasm and rejoices in the gifts God gives *to* his workers and *through* his workers.

A Potent Maturity

Second-career students often bring to their training an understanding of the world outside ministry in general.¹⁰⁰ This understanding—this “experiential wisdom”—is a wonderful blessing both to second-career students and their classmates. Second-career students have often learned in very personal and profound ways the value of struggling and persevering through challenges. Consequently, they are sometimes better equipped and prepared to meet the particular challenges that come from training for pastoral ministry, such as adjusting to the rigors of academic life and learning the Biblical languages. Some second-career students have already learned to regularly assess and evaluate their many family and work obligations, striving for a healthy balance

98. Many self-help books devoted to career guidance and fulfillment recognize (and emphasize) this point. For example, Ben Arment brings it up in the first two sentences of his introduction to his book *Dream Year: Make the Leap from a Job You Hate to a Life You Love*: “After this year, I want everyone to look at your life and say, ‘Ahhh, but of course.’ I want them to hear the faint sound of a proverbial ‘click’ as your experience, gifts, passions, and platform all converge into one beautiful endeavor” (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2014, 1).

99. What psychologist has ever come close to equaling Paul in praising the beauty and power of God-given joy? “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Php 4:4–7). Even the secular world recognizes the power of joy. How much more should we, who have the greatest reason there is for joy?

100. Many of the thoughts in this paragraph were prompted by a conversation with Pastor John Braun, who has played a critical role in recruiting and supporting second-career students throughout his ministry.

between them. At times, these experiences may spare them some stress as they add training for pastoral ministry to their list of responsibilities. Their previous experiences may have even taught them to be more thoughtful, reflective, and considerate of others, which in turn, equips them to avoid the pitfalls of impetuous decision-making, whether in the classroom or in the varied settings of pastoral ministry.

The maturity of second-career students can also have a positive effect on their fellow classmates. Second-career students may function as informal counselors for their younger, more “traditional” classmates.¹⁰¹ They may serve as resources for practical information, such as buying a car or learning how to file taxes. Second-career students who have children may serve as supportive mentors to fellow classmates who might be struggling with marriage or parenting issues. They become, in a way, a valuable part of the psychological support system for their classmates (Eccl 4:9–10).

Sometimes, second-career students may not even have to offer verbal advice or encouragement to convey a positive maturity to their classmates. When they display faithfulness in their homework despite the added responsibilities of family life, they may be teaching others about time management. When they model a calm demeanor during emotionally-charged conversations, they may be teaching others about the importance of being “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable” (1 Tim 3:2).¹⁰² The potent maturity of second-career students can bring a balanced and beneficial perspective to their classmates.

101. This thought is deliberately relying on a broad view of the notion of “counseling.” Second-career students do not provide licensed counseling to their classmates (although, such a situation is not an impossibility, especially if a licensed counselor decides to become a second-career student and pursue pastoral ministry...).

102. Molinsky touches on this, too. He talks about the importance of “clarity,” which he refers to as “the ability to ‘normalize’ your reactions and perceptions of a situation so that distorted thinking doesn’t sabotage your behavior” (*Reach*, 132). Second-career students can serve a critical role in fostering this “clarity” in their classmates.

The Physical Blessings

The Expertise of Experience

In addition to spiritual and psychological blessings, second-career students also provide tangible physical blessings, as well. While a previous career in accounting, for example, might allow a second-career student to better appreciate humble and often unacknowledged service in ministry, it might also provide the physical blessing of helping a congregation keep its financial house in order.¹⁰³ A previous career as a construction foreman might very well foster the unique psychological blessing of decisive leadership,¹⁰⁴ but it can also provide the physical blessing of helping a congregation construct its facility during a building project. Pastor Jeff Samelson highlights some of the physical blessings that second-career students can bring to ministry from their previous careers.

The specifics of a previous career also provide advantages—maybe the people skills of a salesman or the administrative skills of a manager. A farmer may bring patience to evangelism and discipline. A tradesman might bring expertise to a building project. Time spent overseas or working with other cultures may open doors to outreach that would otherwise stay closed.¹⁰⁵

These physical blessings are not limited only to a long-term perspective on the ministry of the student or the church.¹⁰⁶ For example, a second-career student with expertise in graphic

103. Once again, this is not meant to suggest that it's always easy (or wise, for that matter) to clearly delineate between the spiritual, psychological, and physical blessings. Some of the blessings that follow could perhaps be categorized differently. Maxwell touches on this overlap when he argues that “experience alone does not add value to a life. It's not necessarily experience that is valuable; it's insight people gain because of their experience” (Maxwell, *Thinking for a Change*, 180). This section of the paper could be seen as a cautious counter to Maxwell's argument. Insight from experience certainly is valuable. But so is experience itself, especially when it comes to expertise in a particular field. Regardless of how these blessings are categorized, though, it's important to both recognize and embrace the reality of these blessings in the lives and experiences of second-career students.

104. Another particularly intriguing area of study might include an exploration of whether or not second-career students have, by virtue of their experiences, greater leadership potential than their “traditional” counterparts. Of course, each situation and each student is unique. In addition, the definition of leadership—especially in the spiritual sense of servant leadership—would be a fundamental and critical starting point.

105. Samelson, 19.

design can immediately benefit a congregation by improving its branding or digital communication. Of course, second-career students are not the only ones who might offer this sort of expertise. Many second-career students have wives or even children who possess unique, valuable, and functional expertise.¹⁰⁷

Capitalizing on the expertise of experience often leads to an exponential increase in blessings. Not only are these congregations and their ministries blessed through this expertise, but so also are second-career students and their families. They may receive valuable encouragement from knowing that their previous experiences are complementary to pastoral ministry. Or they may find increased joy as they utilize expertise which otherwise may not be used in full-time pastoral ministry.¹⁰⁸ Depending on the circumstances, the expertise of experience may even provide critical financial assistance to support them during their training.

Financial Opportunities

Earlier, it was noted that the financial challenges to second-career students are often the most observable challenges they face. However, because of the broad spectrum of their experiences,

106. It may be tempting, at times, to only take the long view of a second-career student's particular expertise—as in, “This student's experience will certainly be a tremendous asset *once he graduates*.” This paper argues that a short view is, at the very least, equally necessary (and comparably beneficial). Capitalizing on the expertise of these students *right now* may even be a powerful recruitment tool for other second-career students.

107. It is unfortunate that the scope of this paper prevents a lengthy and thoughtful treatment on the perspective of the family—especially wives—of second-career students. Obviously, they view the challenges and blessings of second-career students from a different perspective. In addition, they play a critical role in the success of second-career students' training and service in pastoral ministry.

108. This is not to suggest that such expertise has no long-range benefit to ministry. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the pastoral ministry does not always allow for a full and maximum use of such expertise. The former mechanic may be able to help his members by occasionally fixing an alternator or suggesting a good repair shop. However, because of the demands of pastoral ministry, he ought not operate his own repair shop (unless it is clearly a “tent ministry” arrangement). It is important to recognize the priority to ministry that is acknowledged and assented to in one's choice to pursue public ministry. Of course, the expertise of some careers might be more valuable in ministry than others. The journalist or realtor may find more ways to use their God-given gifts in pastoral ministry than the mechanic or corporate executive. But they all need to acknowledge that their previous careers should not interfere with the responsibilities of their call.

second-career students may also bring powerful financial blessings to their training for (and service in) the pastoral ministry. While some may have severe financial struggles, others may have expansive financial flexibility. This flexibility may be evident in a mature financial perspective, as previous experience has taught them appropriate financial responsibility. Their unique experiences may result in an increased ability to confront financial challenges. This, in turn, can be a wonderful blessing to their fellow students and those they serve, as they model financial stewardship and encourage others through financial maturity.

Second-career students who have a greater availability of financial resources can not only model generous giving, but can also serve and support others. They may be able to cover the costs of their own education, freeing up critical financial aid funds for other students.¹⁰⁹ They may be able to provide targeted financial support to other individuals who may be struggling. In short, the previous careers and the varied backgrounds of second-career students can sometimes give rise to significant financial blessings.¹¹⁰

The Treasure of Family

Not to be lost among these physical blessings are those that wives and children bring to second-career students, the public ministry, and God's people in general.¹¹¹ A wife does more than serve as an administrative assistant or church musician—even though such service is valuable and

109. Without denying the obvious and often severe financial challenges second-career students face, it is also important to recognize and utilize the available financial assets they have. Perhaps a simple example might be the second-career student who can use G.I. Bill benefits to help pay for his education at a worker-training school.

110. It might be good to reiterate at this point the wisdom in preventing undue stress on second-career students, even those with financial flexibility. Simply because these students might have flexibility does not mean that they should be required to burn through these resources in their pursuit of the pastoral ministry. It could be that a moderate amount of financial aid and support could play a pivotal role in encouraging long-term generosity.

111. For the sake of organization, the physical families (wives and children) of second-career students are seen as physical blessings. However, these physical blessings quite obviously bring profound spiritual and psychological blessings, as well. The placement of families in the category of physical blessings simply allows for a more concentrated discussion of these blessings.

God-pleasing. Children do more than simply increase the enrollment of a local school, or add to the membership rolls of a local congregation—even though these simple statistics can also be seen as blessings. In other words, families are more than mere numerical treasures or quantifiable assets.

The children of second-career students may take on greater roles and responsibilities in the home, learning the value of humble service and bringing support to a family during a stressful and challenging time.¹¹² Their tendency towards natural joy and enthusiasm may not only provide valuable relief and entertainment for their parents, but also valuable insights and applications for second-career students training to preach and teach.¹¹³ Their avidity to embrace the truths of Scripture, as well as their eagerness to embrace their parents in a meaningful embrace are priceless and inspiring gifts.

“A wife of noble character” (Prov 31:10) takes on countless responsibilities to support, sustain, and encourage her family while her husband trains for the pastoral ministry—and her children “call her blessed” and her husband “praises her” for it (Prov 31:28). “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue” (Prov 31:26) as she teaches her children, prays for her husband, models Christian faith and love, and earns the respect of others through her hard work and calm dignity.¹¹⁴ She serves her Lord with joy as she “opens her arms to the poor and

112. On a personal note, my own children have often commented about this very thing when they reflect on their journey through this training for pastoral ministry. When my oldest son quizzes his younger sister on her memory work, he isn’t simply a warm body helping her complete required tasks because her father is busy. He is her brother—in more ways than one—serving his sister in Christ and encouraging her on those (hopefully) rare occasions when her father’s availability may not line up with hers.

113. A child who asks why the sky is blue and not green can prompt an awful lot of discussion about the natural knowledge of God, as well as faith.

114. Psychological and social research has revealed what powerful impact a spouse can have. In fact, Bradley Richardson even sees a career change as an opportunity to refresh one’s perspective and renew one’s appreciation for the blessings of family. He writes, “They take a bullet for you every time someone asks about you,

extends her hands to the needy” (Prov 31:20), putting her faith into action. Even a wife that is a new convert to the faith can offer a critical perspective on the pastoral ministry and the training that her husband is receiving. The common refrain among those interviewed for this paper reflects an understanding of the wonderful treasure that children and wives can be for second-career students: *we could not get through these challenges without the love and support of family*. Such blessings are not to be taken for granted, but are to be celebrated, honored, and treasured.

and you’ve never known ... until now. Now that you know this, you can start to understand that the situation is hard on partners and spouses in ways that you never see or think about” (Richardson, *Career Comeback*, 111).

BURNING THE PLOW

Current Training Paths

Currently, two paths of study are available to second-career students who desire to serve in WELS pastoral ministry. Regardless of the path of study chosen for or by them, second-career students face unique challenges and offer special blessings simply by virtue of their status as second-career students in the WELS.¹¹⁵ While this paper seeks to highlight the unique circumstances for second-career students, it also seeks to propose specific suggestions that can both address the challenges *to* second-career students and also harness the blessings *of* second-career students. Nevertheless, a brief description of the available paths of study may prove beneficial.

The Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI)

In 2003, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) launched the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) to assist second-career students in their preparation for the pastoral ministry.¹¹⁶ While the program

115. Other church bodies do not have the same academic requirements for pastoral ministry as the WELS. The point is not to debate about the relative merit of such requirements, or even to wonder if some requirements might be more or less problematic than others. The point is simply to emphasize that the realities and requirements of our WELS worker training system result in certain challenges and blessings.

116. The PSI is not the first “program” within the WELS with the stated goal of assisting second-career students in their preparation for the pastoral ministry. The “Bethany Program” sought to assist second-career students in WELS by utilizing Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota, for some of their training. This program ran from 1962 until 1988 (for a brief history, see William R. Kant’s “The Pre-Seminary Training of Second-Career Men at Northwestern College,” *WLS Essay File*, 1995). Following the closure of the “Bethany Program,” Northwestern College began developing a Seminary Certification Program to assist second-career students. In 1992, the Non-Traditional Student Committee at Northwestern College circulated a document which studied some of the unique challenges presented to second-career students (this document provided vital information for this paper). In 1993, a retreat specifically targeting second-career students was held at Northwestern

was at one time available to any “non-traditional student,” it has now been re-configured “to address increasing pastoral training opportunities overseas.”¹¹⁷ Now the PSI primarily serves second-career students from various ethnic communities who desire to serve as pastors in ethnic congregations.¹¹⁸ However, the PSI may still be an option for second-career students who do not seek to serve specifically in ethnic congregations or mission fields. Professor Sorum explains:

Most second-career students by far receive their pre-seminary training through the Seminary Certification program at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. There are rare situations, however, when a man who is active in his home congregation’s ministry and whose ministry potential is broadly recognized just cannot relocate to New Ulm for the Seminary Certification program. Just for these rare situations, the seminary’s PSI Executive Committee may enroll men in the PSI’s pre-seminary training program. PSI’s distance learning approach that is supported by the local pastor as mentor and “adjunct” instructor allows these men to prepare for the seminary in their home setting.¹¹⁹

Several key features of this program are worth highlighting. First, the PSI is *primarily* focused on second-career students with diverse ethnic backgrounds.¹²⁰ Second, while Anglo students are not prevented from taking advantage of the PSI’s pre-seminary training program, they are only allowed in the program through extenuating circumstances and at the discretion of the PSI Executive Committee.¹²¹ Third, the PSI’s pre-seminary training program allows for instruction of second-career students to occur in their home setting.

College, and included a trip to WLS (the retreat was entitled *Is This the Time?*). The current Seminary Certification Program at MLC traces its origins back to the program of the same name at Northwestern College. For its part, WLS also developed the Multi-ethnic Pre-seminary Program in 1994 to specifically assist second-career students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The PSI has roots in this program.

117. E. Allen Sorum, “Developments in the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 115:3, Summer 2018, 212–13.

118. Some wonderful mission opportunities not only prompted this reorganization, but also accompanied it. Mission fields in East Africa, Vietnam, and Liberia have seen an explosion of growth and opportunity.

119. Sorum, 212.

120. In other words, it is *not* primarily intended for Anglo second-career students (ethnic terminology can be difficult to navigate, at times). Generally speaking, these students receive their training through MLC.

The PSI offers substantial blessings for the training of second-career students.¹²² For those students who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the PSI supports a program that offers valuable training with minimal cultural disruption. In addition, the PSI offers some flexibility in training second-career students from various backgrounds. The PSI commits considerable financial and personnel resources to determining how best to meet the needs of various second-career students. Finally, the PSI can provide the necessary pastoral training to Anglo second-career students with the invaluable asset of stability. Second-career students who are admitted to the PSI's pre-seminary training program have the benefit of avoiding costly (and occasionally traumatic) moves while capitalizing on an established pastoral relationship for instruction. These blessings, though, are usually accompanied by the challenge of a lengthier training time, unique to each second-career student.

The Seminary Certification Program

The far more common path for second-career students who are pursuing pastoral ministry is the Seminary Certification Program at Martin Luther College (MLC) in New Ulm, Minnesota. There are many parallels between this program and that of the PSI's pre-seminary training program. In fact, the Seminary Certification Program maintains a close connection and working relationship with the PSI.¹²³ The Seminary Certification Program is intended to assist a broad range of

121. Prof. Sorum points out that since 2003, only six (Anglo) second-career students have received their pre-seminary training through the PSI ("Developments in the Pastoral Studies Institute," 212). This statistic would seem to reinforce the rarity of admittance to this program. However, several second-career students interviewed for this paper wondered about what precisely constitutes a "rare situation." While Prof. Sorum's article is intended to be a brief summary of the PSI, perhaps further clarification would be helpful.

122. This is not intended to be a thorough analysis of the blessings of the PSI, but rather a simple summary of those reflected in the article by the PSI Director, Prof. E. Allen Sorum.

123. "Men whom the Pastoral Studies Institute recommends to apply for the MLC Seminary Certification program must meet with the Admissions Committee before they are accepted to the program" (*Martin Luther*

second-career students with varied and diverse experiences. For this reason, a helpful flexibility is built into the program to accommodate second-career students who may have previous university degrees, who may have no previous university experience, or who may have simply been removed from academic life for a significant amount of time. To assist these various types of second-career students, “the Dean for Pre-Seminary Studies tailors a Seminary Certification program to correspond with the academic background of each student,” and “the Dean for Pre-Seminary Studies arranges a program that allows each student to acquire the needed academic skills in the fewest possible semesters.”¹²⁴ The Seminary Certification Program offers the added flexibility for second-career students to complete a degree program (Bachelor of Arts) or a certification program.¹²⁵ However, there is at least one critical difference between the PSI and the Seminary Certification Program. Students who enroll in the Seminary Certification Program are required to move to New Ulm, Minnesota, to complete this pre-seminary program of study.

As with the PSI, the Seminary Certification Program at MLC offers substantial blessings. It contains intentional and programmatic flexibility to offer training to a broad spectrum of second-career students. In addition, it provides the option for both degree and non-degree courses of study. Finally, it offers the added blessing of providing this training at the site of a quality educational institution with a vast array of academic resources and a nurturing educational environment of professors and students.

Practical Suggestions

College 2018–19 Undergraduate Catalog, <https://mlc-wels.edu/undergraduate-catalog/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2018/03/2018-19-Catalog-3.15.2018.pdf>).

124. *Martin Luther College 2018–19 Undergraduate Catalog*, 71.

125. The latter is a non-degree program. This becomes a significant issue especially in determining financial aid for second-career students. There is no federal financial aid for non-degree programs.

In light of the significant challenges second-career students face, as well as the valuable blessings they present, it is worth considering how to best serve and support them. Such consideration could be carried out in a number of ways. A thorough and comprehensive analysis of the available programs of study could provide valuable insights into whether or not these programs adequately serve second-career students.¹²⁶ A formal, qualitative study could be done of all previous, current, and potential second-career students to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the available paths of study.¹²⁷ This paper has focused on some of the challenges and blessings that are unique to individual second-career students. By no means is it intended to be a replacement for other methods of analysis. Rather, it is intended to promote and supplement other resources and tools, offering insights which might prove helpful to serving and supporting second-career students. In view of these unique challenges and blessings, the following practical suggestions are offered for further discussion and evaluation.

A Comprehensive Study

The most recent study of various issues connected to the second-career student experience was completed in 1992. Much has changed since then.¹²⁸ But this certainly remains the same: second-career students face challenges and present blessings that have a wide-ranging impact on their families, the church, and public ministry. Already back in 1992, Pastor Robert Voss recognized this impact of these challenges and blessings:

126. It is possible—if not likely—that this very type of analysis is an ongoing, informal process among the PSI Executive Committee as well as the faculty of MLC. A comprehensive, formal study is being suggested here as a possible way to evaluate the approach to second-career students.

127. The interviews conducted for this paper, while qualitative in nature, were intended to provide a snapshot of various perspectives on the second-career student experience. A more complete and detailed study could be an immensely valuable tool for supporting and encouraging these students.

128. Not the least of which is the amalgamation of our worker training schools.

Our desire is to find ways to discover those whom the Lord will give us to be future pastors and encourage such gifted adult learners to prepare themselves for service in the church as pastors. In order to do this we must wrestle with the tensions at work in this area. We want to train as many pastors as possible, but at the same time we want to do whatever we can to protect congregations of God's people from potential problems with their called pastor. The sad cases of conflict between pastor and congregation or of a pastor's failure in office remind us that these issues require our prayerful and thoughtful consideration. We pray for the Lord's continued guidance and strength remembering that he gives the gift of pastors to his church. He is the head of the church; we are his humble servants dependent upon his power and guidance.¹²⁹

This may be a good time for a thorough study of this issue to be conducted again. The WELS Board for Ministerial Education (BME) and other synod leaders could evaluate whether or not the available paths of study adequately meet the needs and address the challenges of second-career students. They could also assess the overall stewardship of the blessings that second-career students *are* and *bring* to the public ministry. Some of the comments made by those interviewed for this paper suggest that there might be value for the BME in establishing a second-career student committee of people from diverse backgrounds that could assist with a thorough study of these issues.

Listening would obviously be a critical component to any study that is undertaken, revealing how even small steps can address the big challenges that some second-career students face. Could any terminology suggesting that second-career students are “starting over” be avoided—thereby encouraging these students to see their pursuit of pastoral ministry as part of an ongoing journey of training and instruction? Could a simple assessment tool be offered for second-career students to pinpoint their particular gifts and strengths—and in the process, encourage them to capitalize on these strengths in pastoral ministry? Listening would also reveal how there may be larger, more measured steps that can be taken to support second-career students. Could the Seminary Certification Program be adapted into a degree program—thereby

129. Voss, 11.

opening the door for federal financial aid to support some second-career students? Could the compensation guidelines for pastors be studied to determine whether or not they adequately express gratitude for the unique experiences and life skills that second-career students bring to pastoral ministry?¹³⁰ It is time again for a thorough and honest study of these issues. The value of such a study makes the effort worthwhile.

A Resource Handbook

A comprehensive study presents a host of potential long-term benefits. Yet even without such a study, a resource handbook could provide immediate benefits to second-career students. What would such a handbook look like? It could be similar to a book that is sometimes presented to second-career students in another Lutheran church body: *Leap of Faith: A Resource for Spirit-Led Explorers*, by Raymond and Martha Van Buskirk.¹³¹ It could be significantly less formal—such as a binder or folder or booklet that touches on second-career student issues. Whatever the format, a resource handbook could provide honest, accurate, and helpful information to assist second-career students in their decisions, their training, and their ministry.

At the very least, a resource handbook could include a theological presentation of some of the critical issues faced by second-career students (such as the doctrines of the call and public ministry). This presentation could potentially address many of the spiritual and psychological challenges for second-career students, such as the desire to serve or “the psychology of

130. The BME is not responsible for setting the compensation guidelines for called workers in the WELS. However, they could provide valuable insight to the Synodical Council in assessing these guidelines. Once again, this highlights both the importance and the value of having a second-career student committee composed of people from diverse backgrounds that can address the second-career student experience from a variety of perspectives.

131. It is unclear how frequently this book is distributed to second-career students in the LC-MS. The fact that the book exists, though, is an encouraging sign.

restart.”¹³² It would be helpful for a resource handbook to include practical suggestions for addressing some of the physical challenges presented to second-career students. For example, this handbook could contain contact information for local food pantries or housing authorities, sample family budget worksheets, or even time management resources.¹³³ Perhaps this handbook could even include detailed information from a second-career student liaison or a financial counselor.

A Counseling Plan

The lasting impact of the unique challenges presented to second-career students should not be underestimated. Many of these students expressed the need for personal counseling throughout their journey to the pastoral ministry. Sometimes this counseling took place in a formal setting with a licensed counselor. At other times, it took place in informal settings, through personal encouragement from friends, family members, pastors, faculty members, or academic advisors. At the very least, the need for counseling is pressing, and the benefit of counseling is great.

The lasting impact of these challenges calls for a formal counseling plan—at least one available counseling session per year to support and encourage second-career students and their families.¹³⁴ Through the cooperation of the students, their families, and all those involved in supporting them, a counseling plan could help address any challenges before they become more

132. See, respectively, pages 21 and 26 in this document.

133. Speaking from personal experience, my family and I were tremendously blessed by another second-career student and his family who had arrived at MLC a year before us. They shared specific resources and contacts with us, as well as giving regular encouragement. It would be wonderful if such blessings could be shared through a formal resource handbook as well as through personal relationships.

134. Obviously, such a plan would be unique for each second-career student. Offering at least one counseling session per year (regardless of the form or structure this implies) would provide a valuable point of contact and support for these students and their families.

serious issues. A counseling plan could also help harness the blessings of second-career students, their families, and the pastoral ministry. In addition, a counseling plan could positively contribute to the training of second-career students who seek to one day be those who provide spiritual counseling to others.

A Regular Retreat

Other church bodies have implemented a regular retreat for second-career students as part of their consideration of the pastoral ministry. Such a retreat provides an opportunity to not only present important theological and practical information, but also to foster relationships with other second-career students. “The retreat...is a time apart and happens off campus. It is a time to engage more fully in the storytelling that has begun in spare moments. Students speak of the life journeys that have brought them to seminary.”¹³⁵ Northwestern College sponsored a retreat, of sorts, for prospective second-career students and their spouses in 1993. So, the concept of a retreat to support second-career students and their families is not a foreign one, even if it may need to be adjusted to adapt to recent developments in our church body and in our culture.

A retreat hosted every other year could offer vital blessings to both current and prospective second-career students and their families. It could allow these students to connect with others who share similar circumstances and face parallel difficulties. In addition, such a retreat could provide participants with honest and accurate information about the challenges and blessings second-career students face at various stages of pastoral ministry. The retreat could also serve as a forum for students to develop relationships with some of their professors or with other pastors. A retreat with a presentation on a significant theological issue could also address some of the spiritual challenges that second-career students and their families face.

135. Heppe, 19.

An Academic Advisor

Every second-career student who receives training through the Seminary Certification Program at MLC is assigned an academic advisor. So, too, are students who are enrolled at WLS. While these advisors bring unique skills and gifts to their relationships with all their students, the unique circumstances of second-career students calls for an advisor equipped to address these challenges and harness these blessings. By no means does this suggest that some advisors are not capable of providing the necessary academic support and encouragement. However, an academic advisor with specific knowledge of the second-career student experience might be better equipped to multiply the blessings of the student/advisor relationship.

Though there may be difficult logistical issues to address, an advisor that is assigned to serve all second-career students may offer particular benefits.¹³⁶ First, this advisor may be able to assist in fostering relationships between second-career student advisees.¹³⁷ Second, this advisor may be able to better manage these relationships through group activities and connections, especially in regard to the resources second-career students often require. Finally, the accumulated experience of one second-career advisor would provide exponential blessings to second-career students and their families.

A Mentor Relationship

136. Depending of the number of second-career students, a single advisor plan may be practically impossible. What a blessing it would be if the number of second-career students made it impossible to have one academic advisor to serve them all!

137. Several of those interviewed for this paper commented on feeling as if they were the only second-career students in their class—even when they actually weren't. One advisor might better be able to connect second-career students to each other. Of course, there certainly is value in having second-career students develop relationships and connect with “traditional” students.

In his book *Reach*, Dr. Andy Molinsky offers several suggestions to help those who might be suffering through the trauma of a career or other major life change. He argues that everyone who faces such challenges needs what the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky called “scaffolding.”¹³⁸ Vygotsky found value for this concept especially in a mentoring relationship between a master and an apprentice. Molinsky picks up on this concept, arguing that a “truly essential resource for gaining clarity in a stressful situation is an insightful coach or mentor.”¹³⁹ While relationships with other second-career students and an academic advisor are important and necessary, a mentoring relationship with another pastor could offer additional blessings to second-career students especially during their training for pastoral ministry.¹⁴⁰

At times, this mentoring relationship may develop between second-career students and their local pastors, or the pastors who first encouraged them to consider pastoral ministry. In other cases, the mentor may need to be chosen or assigned in consultation with the students and their academic advisors. In any case, this mentoring relationship could provide significant support and encouragement to second-career students. Through regular personal contact, mentors would be able to offer specific encouragement to support second-career students and their families through the challenges they face. Through a yearly visit, second-career students would be able to experience first-hand the blessings and privileges of pastoral ministry.¹⁴¹

138. Molinsky, *Reach*, 73.

139. Molinsky, *Reach*, 140.

140. In some cases, this mentoring relationship could potentially continue after a student’s training. However, while some challenges for second-career students may have impact beyond graduation and assignment, they are often significantly less than during training. In addition, such a mentoring relationship would ideally be taking place with other brothers or classmates, circuit pastors, mission boards, and district presidents.

141. Would it be possible even to allow this personal visit to count as completion of a particular ministry-related assignment for a class? Would it be possible to make accommodations for these students to be absent from class for the purposes of this visit? In some ways, this already occurs at WLS, especially during Winterim classes or trips. In that case, perhaps the mentoring relationship would be more beneficial for those second-career students who are enrolled in the Seminary Certification Program at MLC.

A Career Network

Often one of the most difficult adjustments for second-career students is the transition out of a previous career. This adjustment can be especially traumatic for second-career students who enjoyed and found fulfillment in their previous careers. It may be intensified by the dramatic loss of income as they transition out of these careers. The training for pastoral ministry not only requires a radical change to previous routines, it also presents significant financial challenges to many second-career students and their families. To help meet these particular challenges, a career network could be developed to support and encourage second-career students.

While a career network could assume various forms and provide various benefits, certain aspects would be particularly beneficial to second-career students and their families. Especially for those students who receive their training through the Seminary Certification Program at MLC, this network would include a list of job openings that provide a pay scale more suited to meeting their financial needs. This network could also include contact information for career counselors who would assist second-career students in finding employment to suit their unique experiences and abilities. Partnerships with local businesses, industries, and organizations could be developed in order to cooperatively serve second-career students. In fact, partnerships with local WELS congregations could provide some of the best opportunities to support these students and their families.¹⁴²

142. Would some local WELS congregations be able to utilize second-career students in their ministry plans? A network of such “career” opportunities would have the powerful triumvirate of blessings of supporting second-career students as they train, giving them practical tastes of ministry, and helping a congregation carry out its own ministry. Molinsky recognizes this career “sweet spot,” so to speak, even as he writes from a secular perspective. “Another critical feature of practice is the ability to craft practice settings that are high in what psychologists call ‘physical’ and ‘functional’ realism: in other words, settings that, ideally, look somewhat like what you will ultimately have to confront in the real world, and, perhaps even more important, function like those settings” (*Reach*, 187). Second-career students and these congregations would benefit greatly from this “functional realism.”

CONCLUSION

“Go back,” Elijah said after he had thrown his cloak around Elisha. “What have I done to you?” (1 Kgs 19:20). Perhaps these words don’t seem to be the most encouraging to Elisha as he prepares to embark on a second career as God’s prophet. But then again, the situation was unique. Elijah had a specific command from God: to anoint Elisha to succeed him as God’s called prophet. And though the timing was yet to be fully realized, both understood what this cloak meant. Both understood that there would be challenges and blessings for Elisha as he burned the plow and began his new career.

Second-career students today face significant spiritual, psychological, and physical challenges as they seek to serve in the pastoral ministry. Sometimes, these challenges are significant enough that Elijah’s words need to be echoed, though for a different purpose. Sometimes, second-career students may need to be encouraged *not* to pursue the pastoral ministry. Though it can be a difficult, painful, and uncomfortable conversation, such encouragement is borne from a recognition of God’s blessings and a love for God’s people. It recognizes that the public ministry is a divine institution, and that God calls for faithful use of all the gifts he has given to his people. It recognizes that unique and challenging circumstances sometimes make a particular path of service impossible. It recognizes that these second-career students are still blessings from God, even if they will *not* be serving in the pastoral ministry.

At other times, the encouragement for these second-career students may come after they have *already* burned the plow. They may need the encouragement to persevere, to continue to

study, and to serve their Lord faithfully by pursuing pastoral ministry. When these times come, the same recognition of God's blessings and the same love for God's people will guide such encouragement. But perhaps these times will also prompt another difficult, painful, and uncomfortable conversation, reflected in the questions of honest personal assessment. Have the unique blessings and challenges of second-career students been fully recognized and appreciated? Has the encouragement and support given to second-career students been specific and targeted? Is there more to be done?

Through honest reflection on these questions, the church will learn to better recognize and appreciate the blessings and challenges of second-career students. It will also learn to better encourage and support these students as they pursue the glorious gift God has given his church—the public ministry.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions were used to interview second-career students who were contemplating pursuing pastoral ministry, in the process of training for pastoral ministry, or currently serving in the pastoral ministry. In addition, several interviews were conducted with individuals who had considered pursuing pastoral ministry at some time, but had ultimately chosen not to (for a variety of reasons). Interviews were conducted in person, via email, and via phone.

Representative (anonymous) answers to these questions can be found in Appendix 2.

Background Information

1. What is your age?
2. Are you married? (If yes, how long?)
3. Do you have children? (If yes, how many and ages?)
4. Are you a WELS member? (If yes, for how long?)
5. What is your current occupation?
6. What was your previous occupation before deciding to pursue pastoral ministry?

Your Story

7. Why do you want to be a pastor?
8. What circumstances led you to consider pastoral ministry? (e.g. job loss, church involvement, recommendation from pastor, etc.)

9. How did you evaluate your desire and gifts for pastoral ministry? (i.e. how did you determine whether or not you had the desire and the gifts to be a pastor?)
10. Whom did you contact about your desire to study for pastoral ministry?
11. What other steps (if any) did you take to begin your study for pastoral ministry?
12. What knowledge did you have about the practical aspects of studying for the ministry? (e.g. academic demands, distance learning vs. on-campus learning, etc.)
13. What parallels did/do you see between your previous/current occupation and pastoral ministry?
14. What particular strengths might your previous occupation give you for pastoral ministry?
15. What challenges did/do you face because of your decision to pursue pastoral ministry?
 - Physical:
 - Emotional/Psychological:
 - Spiritual:
16. How much time did you take to make your decision about studying for pastoral ministry?
17. What equipped you to make your decision to study for pastoral ministry even though it would be challenging?
18. What impact did your decision have on your immediate family (if applicable)?
19. What do you feel is the greatest challenge you have faced/do face during your study for pastoral ministry?
20. What suggestions do you have to minimize or to address your particular challenges?
21. Why do you think it might be important to have second-career pastors in the WELS?
22. What other comments, thoughts, suggestions, or concerns do you have about your decision to pursue pastoral ministry?

APPENDIX 2: REPRESENTATIVE ANSWERS

The following answers are representative of those given during the formal interviews conducted as research for this paper. These answers were chosen to provide enlightening commentary on some of the topics addressed in this paper. They do not, however, summarize all the topics or issues that were covered in the interviews. Some questions lend themselves to greater and deeper commentary than others. In addition, these answers were edited and kept anonymous in order to protect the identity and confidentiality of those interviewed.

Your Story

7. Why do you want to be a pastor?

- *“I simply want others to hear the same comforting message of the Gospel that I discovered during that time.”*
- *“It was a long process of not being satisfied with the business world and climbing the corporate ladder while over the years reading Scripture, Martin Luther, and teaching Sunday School. I had the increasing desire to do something more directly with the gospel. I spoke with a number of pastors. I also had a close WELS friend with whom I had many discussions over the years.”*
- *“I find many things interesting and engaging and even important. But there is nothing more important, more profound, more impactful than sharing the message of Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins – and I feel driven to make this common calling of every Christian a primary focus in my day to day activities. I can think of no better way than to serve than in full-time ministry.”*
- *“After all my life experiences, there is nothing I would rather do. Having the ability to impact people’s eternal life is incredible (by bringing Jesus to them) and the responsibility is daunting, but is work worth doing.”*

8. What circumstances led you to consider pastoral ministry? (e.g. job loss, church involvement, recommendation from pastor, etc.)

- *“Although I grew up Lutheran, I wandered away during my years in college. I started attending Baptist and Calvinistic type churches in my personal quest to discover ‘real’ Christianity. These kinds of churches appealed to my emotions and presented a type of ‘authenticity’ that I did not experience in my Lutheran upbringing.”*
- *“It was days after a job change to a higher corporate position that I decided to apply.”*
- *“I walked the layman ladder as high as it could go. I even was asked to lead worship on some occasions while pastor was on vacation. My enjoyment of work at church grew all the way along, I looked forward to those activities more than my job.”*
- *“I was heavily involved with outreach where I lived. As a result I was able to work with some great outreach pastors and mission counselors and seeing their example and love for the gospel was encouraging.”*

9. How did you evaluate your desire and gifts for pastoral ministry? (i.e. how did you determine whether or not you had the desire and the gifts to be a pastor?)

- *“We had three gifted pastors there, all with diverse talents and different areas of ministry in which they flourished. They all encouraged me to look at the ministry as a second career.”*
- *“Since I was a young man, I sensed the importance of serving in the pastoral ministry. I liked people and I wanted to help people. I was encouraged by my parents and teachers (Christian day school, high school) that I should consider the pastoral ministry, that God had given me gifts suited to this service.”*
- *“I’m not sure if I went through an evaluation per se.”*
- *“Looking back at my life, I realized that many people were pushing me into the pastoral ministry, some gently and others more forcefully.”*

10. Whom did you contact about your desire to study for pastoral ministry?

- *“I first spoke with my pastor, Pastor _____, about my desire to become a pastor. He encouraged me to call the seminary and I eventually spoke with Prof. Sorum.”*

- *“Started with traditional entrance into MLC.”*
- *“I did not actively reach out to anyone, to my recollection.”*
- *“I asked a couple friends what they thought and ultimately the missionary was one of the first people I contacted.”*

11. What other steps (if any) did you take to begin your study for pastoral ministry?

- *“Ultimately I was turned down [for the PSI program]. The reasoning I was given was that the fact that I was single and didn’t have that much debt there should be no reason I couldn’t follow the traditional route of pastor track completion at MLC and then on to the seminary.”*
- *“I am going to have to pay off debt before I enroll in school full time again.”*
- *“I remember shadowing a pastor for a day in high school. I recall working on the bulletin in the church office as part of that experience. I also recall that it wasn’t a terribly inspiring experience.”*

12. What knowledge did you have about the practical aspects of studying for the ministry? (e.g. academic demands, distance learning vs. on-campus learning, etc.)

- *“I studied the WLS catalogue. I spoke with WELS pastors. My father had been a pastor.”*
- *“I knew that it would include 8 years of study after high school, that I’d have to attend MLC in New Ulm, and that it required a facility with language. I had always been interested and rather comfortable with learning languages, so no problem there. To go back to pastoral training after such a long break seemed very unlikely. But after prayerful consideration, I decided to give it another try.”*
- *“You would hear a lot about homework at Sem. Study, study, study, and that’s all you do, even if it means you miss this or that with your spouse or kids. This is a commitment and what God expects of his pastors. There was a perceived shunning of the marriage gift and priority in life. This didn’t come per se from professors, but students a year or so ahead. Even at Sem there are those who I think may have pushed the misconception of homework and so forth ruling your life.”*
- *“Zero. Academic demands kind of took me by surprise.”*

13. What parallels did/do you see between your previous/current occupation and pastoral ministry?

- *“Building connections in the community, bringing people along on ideas in an organization.”*
- *“I really did not see any direct connection with my work and the pastoral ministry. I certainly would be able to understand and work with the financial and administrative aspects of the ministry. I did have the opportunity to work with and lead other individuals to reach a goal so there were some leadership skills that I was able to develop.”*
- *“I worked a lot of hours because I was young and striving to move up thanks to my work ethic.”*
- *“I learned people skills as well as de-escalation techniques (I also became much more comfortable interacting with people I didn’t know at all and learning about them as well as public speaking). As a teacher I became more comfortable with teaching and public speaking.”*

14. What particular strengths might your previous occupation give you for pastoral ministry?

- *“But we also deal with those who have been victims and have experienced a lot of suffering and pain due to sin. I believe these experiences will help me serve the church and better minister the Gospel to sinners in need of grace.”*
- *“Experience with managing people, volunteers, and developing programs. Practical experience seeing all people as valuable and getting to know people with a wide range of abilities, experiences and backgrounds.”*
- *“My previous occupation, while fulfilling, was also very stressful at times. I grew a lot in my ability to manage challenging and stressful situations and people. I feel that growing in my trust in the Lord through these difficult times has already paid dividends in preparing for the pastoral ministry (stresses of seminary life) and will serve me well in the future.”*
- *“Since I lived in a foreign culture, I have noticed a great many things we do in the States that are cultural. It has raised my sensitivity to culture in general and how we form it (especially in our schools/churches).”*

15. What challenges did/do you face because of your decision to pursue pastoral ministry?

Physical:

- *“The main challenge is leaving behind the friends we’ve made and the comfortable life we are experiencing right now.”*
- *“Why would I leave a good paying position to incur debt and then go into what is definitely a poor paying profession?”*
- *“Keeping up with the needs of school aged children while moving so often was almost impossible. Providing food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education as a second career student family is really a struggle.”*
- *“Not being able to work as much as I would like because I needed to be a student. When I was balancing work and school, I was constantly stressed and tired. I didn’t take care of my body as well as I should have.”*

Emotional/Psychological:

- *“I have a hard time balancing my present commitments with my preparation for the ministry. When I do something I tend to give all of my time and energy in accomplishing it. So right now I am struggling with wanting to do more in my studies in order to be best prepared for seminary, but I do not simply have the time to do it all while remaining faithful to my current vocation and family.”*
- *“The whole family [was] pretty burned out and unable to settle in.”*
- *“I had to overcome much of my previous disgust/disinterest/bitterness about the past with MLC while I was there.”*
- *“Generally I would say that being a little older helps you to be in a better position this way but you have to also consider the emotional wellbeing of your wife and kids. Mine handled it well but it helped that my wife had been a called worker before I started all this. I will say that I think the pastoral ministry is a lot more stressful than maybe in the past.”*

Spiritual:

- *“Why would you want to take a dedicated, active lay minister out of the local church when they could still be making an impact for the kingdom there and studying to ultimately go into the called ministry as a pastor?”*
- *“When your kids aren’t thriving, it is quite a spiritual struggle. Our calling as parents is important to us and it was often difficult to feel that we had done the best thing for our family in continuing through Seminary.”*

- *“‘That’s what you get for going into ministry’ pops up ... and when we are just trying to meet basic needs of a young family, it hurts.”*
- *“Huge here; I felt like my spiritual life became ‘harder’ since I had decided to enter the ministry (i.e. more temptations, more doubts, more struggling in prayer).”*

16. How much time did you take to make your decision about studying for pastoral ministry?

- *“We took more than a decade to decide once and for all.”*
- *“About 3 years.”*
- *“Perhaps I took a few months to mull it over – but it wasn’t a terribly long time. It seemed like a natural next step for me.”*
- *“A month? I had decided quickly, but I thought about it throughout that month.”*

17. What equipped you to make your decision to study for pastoral ministry even though it would be challenging?

- *“Through the classes and interactions with the professors, I believe God had solidified my desires to become a pastor. Ultimately, I saw the great need for people to hear the Gospel the more I studied the Scriptures.”*
- *“Education/job opportunities both made the financial component of finishing Seminary easier for us than for others.”*
- *“My faith in Jesus Christ and a love for Scripture. What also equipped me was having been in the work force and not finding satisfaction in my career.”*
- *“Support!!! Support of new bride. Support of our two families and their promise to help regardless of circumstance. Support of our church family.”*

18. What impact did your decision have on your immediate family (if applicable)?

- *“Epic impact. Despite everything, we pray God has used this to grow our kids’ faith.”*

- *“We moved for the first time away from family. Since it was just the two of us newlyweds it probably had less of an effect. We were young and naïve, we could do this.”*
- *“She was not able to pursue another degree. Plus, she became the breadwinner in our family immediately, which doesn’t allow for a lot of time to pursue her own studies. So, she has put many of her aspirations on hold for the time being (which is a blessing because it allows her to consider her aspirations more and deeper).”*
- *“This was a priority to not have a negative impact on my family. We had always approached moving in a positive way and looked for the positives wherever we moved and this move was no different. I would say it was a positive thing for our family.”*

19. What do you feel is the greatest challenge you have faced/do face during your study for pastoral ministry?

- *“We also worry about how we will be able to pay for things since I will be devoting most of my time to my studies.”*
- *“The greatest challenge was learning the languages and having to finance additional years of education.”*
- *“What turned out to be my biggest challenge was having classmates whose lifestyle was less than what I would consider to be above reproach.”*
- *“I think it is the culture. There isn’t much flexibility when it comes to the culture of the WELS. The culture of the system is that this is just how it works and every time I ask about it, I get the same answer, this is how it works.”*

20. What suggestions do you have to minimize or to address your particular challenges?

- *“I appreciate the support I have received thus far and would benefit from more of it. I know the professors are quite busy, but perhaps it would be beneficial for more frequent check-ins (via phone call/email) just to see how things are going with us or if we need anything or just to encourage us along the way.”*
- *“Factoring kids and special needs in to assignments would probably help more second career families make it through – or even bother considering.”*
- *“Give a good evaluation to the program at MLC. Also, I would appreciate knowing that Bethany has a program to become a pastor and that it is better suited for second-career pastors. It is more stable and flexible to the needs of the student I think many*

other church bodies are doing a better job of finding ways to work with second-career students while not compromising their program.”

- *“Have a financial counselor talk to you before you sign up for MLC.”*

21. Why do you think it might be important to have second-career pastors in the WELS?

- *“Not saying that traditional seminary students do not have the same experience, but I feel like God has used my experience in my current job help prepare me better to relate with those who also work a ‘regular’ 9-5 job.”*
- *“Second career guys bring an amazing diversity of skills and experience to ministry. Second career guys bring a certain amount of basic common sense about professionalism and experience working with others that not all pastors have. If you are second career, chances are you’ve at least had to work and function within an organization of some sort before leading one. Second career guys are often better able to relate to lay members and their experiences in church, work, and home life because they’ve been there.”*
- *“Second career students have to varying degrees lived in the world where we seek to minister, where our future members are. I believe that experience can be a great asset when carrying out ministry. Additionally, time has a way of giving perspective, maybe even wisdom. Older pastoral students who have dealt with relationship challenges, financial challenges, health challenges, and so on – and have come through by the grace of God – bring a maturity to the classroom that benefits everyone.”*
- *“They bring a different perspective to the WELS than we might have otherwise, they come in with skills some pastors take many years to learn. They keep the system honest as they have the courage and ability to talk to their professors in a respectful and yet honest way. They are able to open the eyes of their classmates to thoughts and perspectives they might not otherwise get to see from someone they respect.”*

22. What other comments, thoughts, suggestions, or concerns do you have about your decision to pursue pastoral ministry?

- *“I absolutely pray the road can be smoothed a bit for the sake of more workers in the harvest field. Some of the challenges are very big, and create practical reasonable reasons for not pursuing pastoral studies with a family in tow.”*

APPENDIX 3: CONCERNING THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

Understanding the Church

A proper understanding of the public ministry begins with a proper understanding of the church. In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul describes the church as a divine creation: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4–6). Using the picture of the church as a body,¹ Paul emphasizes how this gathering of believers is connected to Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit. This body is not a mere generic or haphazard construction, like a paper doll hastily glued together with roughly-cut cardstock. God creates the parts of the body. God assembles the body into a seamlessly-woven whole. God gives life to the body through the powerful working of the Spirit. The perspective from which this body is viewed always reveals the same picture: God is “over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). God rules *over* this church, guiding and directing all things for the good of these people assembled into this body. God works *through* this church, using his people as a powerful testimony of his Word and work in both gathering and growing the church.² God is *in* this church, dwelling within his people “by his Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

1. It is interesting that this picture of the church as the body of Christ is one that previously pops up in 1 Corinthians, which was most likely written during Paul’s three-year stay in Ephesus.

2. In his commentary on Ephesians, Thomas M. Winger questions whether the preposition *διὰ* in verse 6 refers to the instrumentality of the church. He argues, instead, that it refers to God’s omnipresence (*Ephesians*, ConcC, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015, 437). However, in light of what Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 4:11–13, it would seem that instrumental applications are at least suggested in this verse.

The Institution of the Public Ministry

The one true God—who is *over*, *through*, and *in* all—also establishes the public ministry for the benefit of his church.³ It is in the name of this one true God that the church—the gathering of believers—is given the command to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). This command is given to each member of the church. God also gives his church public ministers—that is, members of this church who function on behalf of the body for the spiritual benefit of the whole.⁴ Paul explains in Eph 4:11–13: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Paul’s description of this public ministry in Eph 4 emphasizes how God is more than a mere overseer or manager of this body, the church. He creates each part. He gives grace as Christ apportioned (Eph 4:7). He unites the body as one under the glorious Head (Col 1:17–18). He establishes the mission and the ministry of the church—to make disciples of all nations by “the public preaching and teaching of the gospel.”⁵ And, as detailed beautifully in Eph 4:11–13, he

3. “To use the traditional Latin terminology, the public ministry pertains *ad bene esse ecclesiae non ad esse*—it belongs to the well-being of the church, not the essence” (John F. Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009, 81). This becomes important lest we insist that public ministry *is* the church—as if there is no church without the public ministry. Here again we remember God’s promise that the church will always endure, even if our church body or our worker training schools would cease to produce public ministers of the Word. At the same time, we pray for God to provide his church with workers and trust him to bless his church through them.

4. Winger quotes Andrew Lincoln’s commentary on Ephesians to emphasize this point: “He gives not just grace to people, but he gives specific people to people” (Winger, *Ephesians*, 449).

5. Deutschlander, “The Theology of the Call and Ministry,” 7.

gives his church the gift of public ministers. These public ministers “are therefore not to be regarded as officers created by the church at her own good pleasure, but are gifts to her, appointed and given by God himself.”⁶

It would be a mistake, then, to attribute the public ministry to mere human expediency, as if the church itself stumbled into the fortuitous recognition of its need for practical leadership.⁷ Does a physical, human body deny the God who formed it and say, “I’ve found that I walk better when I make interphalangeal joints in my feet”? No! It recognizes interphalangeal joints as a beautiful part of God’s glorious and gracious creation of the body. And so, neither does the church—the body of Christ—say that it has, through trial and experience, discovered that it makes convenient sense to have this arrangement called public ministry. Rather, it recognizes public ministry as a divine institution, a gracious gift from God. “Wherever Christians are assembled, God wills that there be servants who shepherd them with the means of grace as Christ’s representatives.”⁸

The Qualifications for the Public Ministry

Because the public ministry is established by God, and because public ministers are God’s gift to the church, and because God is the one who gives the gifts and abilities that are used by these public ministers in service to the church, God is therefore the one who determines the

6. Winger, *Ephesians*, 449.

7. Brug and others identify Johann Hoefling as the name most often associated with this idea. Brug references Franz Pieper’s summary of Hoefling’s error: “As far as the ordaining of presbyters which was carried out or initiated by the apostles is concerned, it was nothing more than the fulfillment of a natural need for a leader, which becomes an imperative necessity not only for every fellowship but also for every kind of association” (Brug, footnote on 66). While it’s fair to recognize a practical benefit of human leadership, even within the church, it’s wrong to see this as the establishing cause of public ministry. Such a teaching not only contradicts God’s desire for the public ministry in his church, but also inevitably leads to a diminished view of that public ministry.

8. Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 571.

qualifications that are required of those who serve in this public ministry.⁹ Paul is not merely providing pithy quips from his handbook of life experience when he lays out the qualifications for God’s workers to Timothy and Titus. To catalog and analyze each qualification for public ministry is beyond the scope of this appendix.¹⁰ However, even a cursory glance at these qualifications reveals several key features. First, the qualifications are a reflection of God’s desires and demands of all Christians.¹¹ “In general, we could say that the qualifications Paul lists are something *every* Christian should strive for. Yet these qualifications must be there in a higher degree for those who serve in the public ministry.”¹² Just as God desires that all Christians be above reproach,¹³ so also he goes into specific detail about how this should look in the lives of his public ministers (1 Tim 3:2–7). Just as God desires that all Christians be gentle, sincere, and truth-loving,¹⁴ so also God demands his public ministers to be the same (1 Tim 3:3,8–9).

Second, the qualifications God requires are specifically designed to reinforce the divine institution of the public ministry. As God’s gift to the church, public ministers understand their role not as one of self-righteous authority or self-serving philanthropy, but rather as one of humble and grateful service to the God who formed the church, gathered them within it, and

9. It is worth noting, too, that the qualifications themselves serve as a powerful argument against human expediency as the prompting cause of the public ministry. Would God go into such great detail and depth about these special qualifications if it were simply a matter of human convenience or practical necessity? One who argues that Paul was only giving gentle suggestions or practical tips for ministry in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1 cannot do so without committing great violence against these specific texts and Eph 4 as well.

10. For more in-depth study, see Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 123–132.

11. One could argue that not all of these qualifications are required of all Christians. For example, God does not demand that all Christians be able to teach. However, he most certainly blesses all Christians through those who make use of this skill.

12. Lange, *God So Loved the World*, 572 (emphasis mine).

13. See 1 Pet 2:12. The idea behind the word ἀνεπίλημpton (from 1 Tim 3:2) is one of an observable character that is irreproachable or unassailable. Though Peter does not use the same word in his letter, the idea is similar. He encourages God’s chosen people to live observably upright and honorable lives.

14. See, respectively, Eph 4:2, Heb 10:22, and Phil 4:8.

gives the latter to the former. “One of the best definitions of the ministers of the church and their relationship to the rest of the church is that they are the servants of Christ in the midst of the people of God.”¹⁵ Therefore, God requires these public ministers to be respectable and hospitable (1 Tim 3:2). He requires them to have “a good reputation with outsiders” (1 Tim 3:7). He requires that they serve in such a way that their humility and joy leads God’s people to see them as reflections of Christ himself (1 Pet 5:2–4). In short, God wants these workers to do nothing that hinders God’s people from knowing God’s salvation or from recognizing his grace in establishing the public ministry. In 2 Cor 6:3, Paul puts it this way: “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.”

Finally, the qualifications God requires of public ministers are designed to beautifully reinforce the purpose for which God has established public ministry: to prepare God’s people for service, to build up the body of Christ into a mature unity in faith and in knowledge of the Son of God. Public ministers are God’s agents through whom God not only dispenses the vast spiritual riches of the means of grace to his people, but also prepares and equips them to serve and support each other in their lives as members of the body.¹⁶ Therefore, God requires these public ministers to “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that [they] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9). God requires his workers to be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2) the God-breathed Scripture which not only makes God’s people wise for salvation, but also equips them for every good work (2 Tim 3:14–17).

15. Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2015), 476.

16. There is a long and vigorous (also ongoing) debate about Eph 4:11–12 and whether it suggests the public minister does all the ministry in these verses or whether it suggests the public minister equips the members of the church to do the ministry along with him. Brug and Winger both speak on the topic at length. This author prefers the latter interpretation, and finds this passage an intriguing voice in the discussion of “callings” and “call” beginning on page 13 of the body of this paper. At the very least, this passage highlights yet again how God’s public ministers are the ministerial cause of salvation utilizing the instrumental cause of salvation, the means of grace.

The Forms of the Public Ministry

Finally, it's vitally important to understand what God says about what this public ministry looks like in the church. God has certainly established the public ministry and given the gift of public ministers to his church—public ministry is no mere human arrangement, prompted by convenience. He has also certainly established the qualifications for those who desire to serve in this public ministry. But nowhere has God specified the exact form in which these qualified workers will carry out this public ministry.¹⁷ Paul lists at least five different forms in Eph 4 as he describes God's institution of the public ministry. Some are apostles. Some are prophets. Some are evangelists or pastors or teachers. Yet *all* are legitimate forms in which this divinely-instituted public ministry is carried out. Paul explains further in 1 Cor 12:28–29:

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

How easy it might be to quibble about the distinctions between apostles and prophets, or to wonder whether or not Paul's list was comprehensive!¹⁸ But that's not the point. The point is the first phrase that governs the list that follows: *in the church* God has established the public

17. The scope of this appendix prevents a thorough analysis of this topic. There are some in Lutheranism that see the pastoral office as the *only* divinely-instituted form of public ministry. Professor Thomas Nass discusses this issue at length in several fine essays that can be found in the WLS Essay File (see especially “The Pastoral Ministry as a Distinct Form of the Public Ministry” and “What is ‘Divinely Instituted’ and What is ‘Necessary’ in Regard to the Public Ministry”). One particularly beneficial point he makes that might also be relevant to this discussion is the reminder that while God does not specify any particular form of public ministry for his church, he certainly provides great blessings through these particular forms—perhaps especially through the “species” of the pastoral office. His encouragement to precision in our terminology is decidedly apropos: “However, if we are to be as precise as we can, we should point out that the genus is divinely instituted, but not the species. People in all forms of the public ministry are part of something divinely instituted because they are a part of the public ministry. However, none of the individual forms as such are divinely instituted. And no one form may claim divine institution in opposition to any other” (“What is ‘Divinely Instituted’ and What is ‘Necessary’ in Regard to the Public Ministry,” 10).

18. The distinctions are probably finer than we realize. And Paul's list was most certainly not comprehensive.

ministry and provided workers who carry out this public ministry in various forms and ways.¹⁹

Professor Nass offers a helpful illustration to drive the point home.

Think of how we express ourselves with reference to secular government, where the same general situation prevails. We know that God has instituted secular government for all people of all time.... Yet we know he has not instituted specific forms of government. Over the course of history, there have been countless forms, from kings and princes, to chieftains and elders, to mayors and presidents. To be sure, every individual in each form is “God’s servant” (Rom 13:4). We know “there is no authority except that which God has established” (Rom 13:1). Yet we wouldn’t say that the office of president is divinely instituted. We wouldn’t say the office of mayor is divinely instituted. We speak of the divine institution of the genus, not of the species.²⁰

God has instituted the public ministry for the benefit of his church. God also gives his church the freedom to carry out this public ministry in various forms.

This truth, then, provides helpful direction for the church as it prays for, trains, supports, and equips workers in the harvest fields. The church recognizes the freedom God has given it to carry out the divinely-instituted public ministry in various forms. But it also rejoices that this public ministry—whatever its form—is still governed and directed by the Triune God, *not* by the emotional whims of an individual or by the arbitrary constraints of a secular society. “The Lord wills that Christian assemblies be provided with shepherds who administer the means of grace in Christ’s name and on their behalf. He did not, however, ordain any particular form of the public ministry. The church is at liberty to devise various forms of the ministry, as the circumstances demand.”²¹

19. καὶ οὗς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ. The aorist middle of the verb τίθημι can legitimately convey the idea of some thing—or in this case, some people—being effected or arranged. This fits nicely under the Scriptural teaching that God has established the public ministry in the church and arranges for the possibility of many different forms of this public ministry.

20. Nass, “What is ‘Divinely Instituted’ ...,” 7.

21. Lange, *God So Loved the World*, 576–77.

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