

# **In-Service Training of Students of Theology**

*by Harold Johnne and Ernst H. Wendland*

[Two Short Essays Presented to the 1982 World Mission Seminary Conference; Leland, MI]

## **In-Service Training of Students of Theology While in the Seminary**

*by Harold Johnne*

I am not sure that I am familiar with current thinking in our circles on this subject. For this reason I have chosen to speak for the most part about what we are doing in Japan and then look to you for reactions.

In Japan we have not made practical experience a very large part of the program while the student is in the seminary. I feel that the academic work load that our students carry is quite heavy. We would like to keep it that way. I doubt whether a student could do justice to the studies prescribed in our curriculum and at the same time be engaged in an extensive in-service training program. We have opted rather to set aside an entire year for practical training as a vicar.

We have found, however, that the normal needs of our church provide our seminary students with opportunity for practical experience. Frequently there is a need for supply preachers. Our seminary students are often asked to help out. They get quite a bit of mileage out of their student sermons just the way you and I did in our seminary days.

We have had a seminary student serve as a part-time vicar at a preaching station while the missionary was on furlough. This involved Bible classes, instruction classes, and some preaching. He sort of watched over the little flock while the missionary was gone. He was under the supervision of one of our national pastors.

In one case, we had a long vacancy in a town rather near our seminary in Tsuchiura. We had our student and his family live in the parsonage for several years. Just being there meant that some, perhaps a lot, of pastoral work came his way.

If there is a need, and the student appears to have the time, we may have him work part-time as a pastor's or missionary's helper. This again may involve such things as Evangelism, teaching adult classes, supervising Sunday School, teaching Sunday School, keeping church records, etc. In general, the practical church work that we have our students do, is not part of an organized training program. Rather it is a natural response to the needs of the church as well as the student's need to put into practice some of the things he is learning in the seminary.

We encourage our seminary students to attend our pastoral conferences. Our last student was also asked to sit in on the regular meetings of our commissions on worship and on constitutional matters. Through these experiences the student not only learns more about the work of the church, he also comes to feel like a member of the group by the time he graduates.

Perhaps we are being complacent, but I believe that all of us in Japan are quite happy with our present arrangement or lack of it. Since we have a vicar program, I do not favor an extensive in-service training program while the student is in the seminary. I feel that a limited, planned program might be beneficial.

Sometimes in the early stages of the development of a seminary program the student will go from pastor to pastor. He will take one set of courses from a pastor for several weeks or months and then go on to the next pastor and another set of courses. I can well imagine that in a situation like that the student would learn much from observing his "bishop" at work. The student would probably soon be helping along as well. The Apostle Paul seems to have used this type of "training program."

If a church wishes to do some of its work through Evangelists who for the most part teach and preach materials prepared by others, then I would guess that an in-service training program might be the way to go. The student preparing to be an Evangelist might, to a large extent, learn how to teach a class, how to conduct a

worship service, or how to preach a sermon, by observing others do it and then by trying it himself while his instructors observe him.

If, however, after graduation the called worker is to do his own exegesis, write his own sermons, care for his own flock, then it is not so much in-service training, but rather in-depth theological education which is necessary, I believe.

## **In-Service Training of Students of Theology: The Vicar Program**

*by Ernst H. Wendland*

From bits and pieces of information gathered through correspondence and also by means of advance copies of presentations at this Seminar, I get the impression that the vicar program in our world mission seminaries is still for the most part in a formative stage. This may not apply to Japan. Unfortunately I did not know about Japan's vicar program until it was too late to write for more information. We certainly want to hear more about Japan's program from Pastor Johne at this conference.

From correspondence with Pastor Schlomer I gather that the vicar program in Colombia is presently under consideration and that a final decision has not as yet been made concerning its implementation.

In his paper on "The Role of the Seminary in Training of Pastors" Pastor Krueger states that in Central Africa "there is no real set procedure for the vicar programme." He adds: "The Seminary has not really defined its role as it pertains to the training of vicars." In some cases in the past, he explains, Central African vicars did not have opportunity to work closely with supervising pastors. Lack of manpower apparently contributed to this situation. Although the present vicar in Central Africa has been able to work closely together with his supervising pastor, his distance from the Lusaka Seminary has made it difficult to coordinate the training program between school and supervisor. Changes in mission personnel have added to the problem of carrying out a consistent program in Central Africa.

As far as we know, our other fields have not as yet reached the point in their worker-training programs where the use of vicars has entered into the picture. We hope that our discussions at this Seminar will serve to help us clarify our thinking in matters relating to this aspect of a worker-training program.

### **The Program at Our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon**

It may be of some comfort to those working in our world mission seminaries to note that the vicar program at our Mequon Seminary experienced some real growing pains before it arrived at a well-defined statement of purpose and policies. Even after nearly 40 years of use this program is still experiencing refinements and improvements.

I can recall some 25 years ago while working with WLS vicars in Benton Harbor, Mich., that we had very few guidelines and very little coordination between the school and the supervisor to regulate our activities. Much of the emphasis in those years was upon the use of vicars to assist with congregational work. As supervising pastors we were sometimes disappointed that we didn't "get our money's worth" in the process. We found that just about the time when a vicar was becoming useful to us, the time had come for him to return to the seminary. This meant, of course, going through the process of breaking in somebody else again.

Since those years the emphasis in the purpose of the WLS vicar program has shifted. No longer is the program intended chiefly "to give assistance in the work of congregations and institutions;" it is rather "*to aid the Seminary in its training program.*" The final purpose is "to give the students practical experience in church work" (*Purpose and Policies of the Vicar Program, WLS*).

In order "*to aid the Seminary in its training program*" the supervising pastor is required to submit a detailed report to the seminary in which he lists the services performed, gives an evaluation of the vicar's performance, and includes a characterization describing the vicar's strengths and weaknesses as he has observed them in the conduct of the work. This report is then presented to the entire Seminary faculty as together with its President it prepares a characterization for presentation for the Synod's Committee on the Assignment of Calls.

This procedure offers valuable assistance to the school in evaluating not only the ability of the student in applying his academic training to the practical phases of church work, but also the school's own effectiveness in carrying out its ministerial training program.

Moreover, the *Vicar Call* issued by the congregation states: "We agree to consider your service among us as part of your theological training under the general supervision of WLS and also under the direct supervision of (name of the supervising pastor)." Thus the congregation is made aware of this important purpose of a vicar's service in its midst.

The second purpose stated in the *WLS Purpose and Policies* does mention the fact that the vicar is "to give assistance in the work of congregations and institutions." Here it is stressed, however, that "all work is to be carried out under supervision of the pastor." The *Installation Form* for a vicar also stresses that the vicar is "to assist the pastor" and is to work "under the direction of the pastor" in the performance of his duties. This presupposes, of course, that supervising pastor and vicar will meet frequently to discuss the congregational work as a mutual task rather than some kind of function where each person acts more or less independently of the other. The vicar, in other words, doesn't "take charge" of the Young People's Society, the Pre-Confirmation Class, and a certain type of less important calling while the pastor does the rest. The responsibility for *all* the work still rests with the pastor, who will still want to know what is happening with the souls which the Lord has placed under his care.

This brings us to the final purpose as stated in the *WLS Purpose and Policies*: "To give the student practical experience in church work." In *The Shepherd under Christ* an entire chapter is devoted to the careful way in which a pastor is to introduce his vicar into his various duties. Under the chapter's title we find Paul's words in Philippians 2:22: "As a son with the father." The following pages emphasize how the vicar's sermons and instruction lessons are to be prepared in consultation with the pastor. The pastor is to introduce the vicar personally into the various aspects of pastoral work (sick-calls, visits to shut-ins, mission calls, organizational responsibilities etc.). He is to regard the vicar's work as a part of seminary in-service training.

At the Vicarship Supervision Seminar held at Mequon in 1980 this close association between seminary and supervising pastor was stressed throughout the sessions. The objectives of courses taught in the Practical Theology Department at the Seminary (Pastoral Theology, Homiletics, Catechetics) were reviewed by members of the faculty for all prospective supervising pastors. Emphasis was also placed upon the supervising pastor's role as one who motivates his trainee, serving as an example in preaching, teaching, counseling, stewardship and administration. The need for close consultation both between vicar and supervising pastor as well as between supervising pastor and seminary was repeatedly stressed (cf. "The Supervising Pastor's Role in Our Synod's Pastor Training Program," by Robert J. Voss).

One is left with the conclusion in all this that the WLS vicar program has developed more and more in the direction of the supervising pastor as actually serving as an important teaching arm of the seminary. He carries out this service both in guiding the practical phases of pastoral work as well as in evaluating the candidate's aptitude for the same. Those of us who have served in the ministry without having had the benefit of a vicarship can appreciate the value of this important addition to our WLS program.

### Conclusions

We are aware that one can't simply superimpose a vicar program developed under circumstances as we find them in the Wisconsin Synod to the situations which lie before us in our world mission fields. On the other hand we can certainly profit from a closer look at the basic principles which have been developed in the conduct of such a program over a period of more than three decades. Let us review them briefly:

1. The primary purpose of a vicar program is not to supply urgent manpower needs. It is rather to aid the seminary in its ministerial training program.  
(To send a vicar into some remote area where he cannot be properly directed and supervised would be to defeat the primary purpose of the vicarship.)

2. There should be a clear understanding between vicar and supervising pastor that the guidance supplied by the supervising pastor is actually an extension of seminary training. To this end it should be taken for granted that vicar and supervisor meet *frequently* to consult on *all* phases of the work, and that all the work is carried out under the supervision of the supervising pastor (missionary). (Frequent meetings between vicar and supervisor for mutual consultation and study can only serve to enhance the partnership aspect between national and expatriate, something so essential in world mission work, yet which often seems to be overlooked or neglected.)
3. There should also be a clear understanding by the congregation requesting the services of a vicar that the supervising pastor is still the congregation's pastor, and that the vicarship is still a part of the seminary's training program.
4. The supervising pastor should have a clear picture of the goals which the seminary wishes to achieve in its teaching program, particularly in the courses which deal in Practical Theology (Homiletics, Catechetics, Pastoral Theology). It is essential that the vicar program be combined with an ongoing study program (writing of sermons, catecheses, study of the Lutheran Confessions). The assignments for this program should be agreed upon by seminary and supervisor, but must be channeled through the supervisor in order to be carried out effectively.
5. The seminary should prepare a report form for the supervising pastor which covers those items helpful in evaluating the performance and the character of the vicar for the subsequent recommendation to the assignment committee of the church.
6. In-service training, whereby the vicar gains valuable experience through working closely together with his supervising pastor, is a very important aspect of the vicar program. This training should apply to *all* phases of practical church work  
(This feature is especially important in a mission field, where nationals can learn much by observation and practice rather than out of a textbook. This in-service training should apply to such routine functions as the keeping of records and accounts, and in later stages also to more difficult tasks as supervising work in congregations served by evangelists or lay preachers. This presupposes also that the supervising pastor will be a part of the work of the congregation of which he is still the pastor, not merely an occasional visitor who lets all the bushwork up to the vicar.)
7. There are obviously so many benefits connected with a vicar program that one must consider it a vital part of seminary training. This applies especially to our world seminaries, where in-service training, opportunity for cooperation between nationals and expatriates, and further testing procedures are so important for the development of a sound ministry.