

Worker Training: Preparing that “Someone Preaching”

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*And how can they hear
without someone preaching to them?
Romans 10:14*

- I. The Setting
- II. A View to the Past
- III. The View Ahead
- IV. System and Structure

I: The Setting

Consider a moving experience this past May as related by one of our district presidents:

Last month I was called on to go to New Ulm and Mequon and be involved in assigning calls to teacher, pastor and vicar candidates—as awesome and humbling a task as I have ever faced. And actually handing a number of those candidates their calls and welcoming them into the Lord’s vineyard in our district—that was a truly exciting thing to do!

Today . . . something . . . stands out in my mind . . . It is something that happened on Assignment Day at the Seminary. Four seniors were asked to consider world mission calls (Zambia, Malawi, Colombia and Puerto Rico).

I don’t recall just how much time passed, but I know that in less than an hour three responses came back—all of them “yes.”

I don’t think I will ever forget that; and what I will never forget is not so much the fact that four “yes, send me” responses came in no time at all. Rather, it was the realization that those four young men were obviously very glad to serve the Lord.

The same thing came through at New Ulm. After the call service, teacher candidates came up to me smiling and excited. They could hardly wait to learn more about the calls they had been assigned.

It warmed and thrilled me at the time, and it still sends a bit of a shiver through me to write and talk to you about it.¹

“How can they hear without someone preaching to them?” asked the Apostle Paul in that text which provides the thematic basis for our convention (Rom. 10:14). Paul’s question was answered for that district president. As Pastor Bivens noted in his essay yesterday, Everyman—that is, every person—needs someone to be preaching. Candidates at New Ulm and Mequon were responding: Here am I; send me! Candidates for the public ministry within the Wisconsin Synod were declaring themselves ready to go “to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

Where they are going this summer of 1993 is no vague dream. Those candidates received specific calls to named congregations in definite locations; or to particular mission fields or teaching stations, home or abroad. For domestic work, you caught glimpses of that in yesterday’s essay; and you will hear more about the mission frontier in Pastor Koelpin’s essay tomorrow.

¹ David N. Rutschow, “President’s Address,” Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastor-Teacher Conference, June 8-9, 1993, 1.

As experienced by that district president, the “someone preaching” is no idealized abstraction, either. These are dedicated, prepared and eager, real flesh-and-blood young people of God. They have been formed, they have been shaped, and they come with a positive set of attitudes and perspectives. They come with their own particular set of gifts, each himself or herself constituting a precious gift of God to the church for the public ministry.

Similarly, their development has not occurred in a vacuum. The influences of God have been many, paramount of which is the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts through the word of God. A multitude of agencies comprise avenues for the Spirit’s work in the word. Parents, pastors, teachers, friends—all are a part of it. Such varied real-life influences of the Spirit to the public ministry parallel scriptural examples. John Mark revealed the influence of a Christian home and his strong attachment to it. Peter benefited from three years in the day-to-day company of the Savior. Paul was prepared through years of Jewish study and Spirit-led contemplation following his conversion.

In a more formal way within the WELS, many Spirit-utilized influences have been consciously shaped into a program of ministerial education we now call the worker training system of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Our synod looks to that system as a formally organized and sustained workshop of the Holy Spirit through which that same Spirit shapes full-time workers in this church body for service in the century to come.

It’s basis is a biblical command. This system is the response of the people of God in the WELS to carry out the divine injunction as expressed by the Apostle Paul: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). Individually Christians encourage others to the public ministry. Collectively they organize a church body, one prime purpose of which is to act jointly and effectively in carrying out that scriptural injunction of entrusting the gospel’s proclamation to a new generation.

This biblical injunction is made concrete in a synodical objective as follows:

To recruit and train candidates qualified for full-time ministry and provide for their continuing education so that the Word of God is proclaimed faithfully and effectively in accord with the Lutheran Confessions.²

That injunction guides the synod’s long-range planning as reflected in the second synodical emphasis: “Emphasis on training and supporting those called to proclaim God’s Word publicly.”³

Although this objective and emphasis find concrete expression in experiences in homes, congregations and schools throughout this church body, the WELS concentrates its efforts in its worker training system. That system is not particularly noteworthy to disinterested observers of the multitude of educational institutions in America. Although the collegiate programs have received positive ratings by the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, the worker training schools are small and are narrowly focused in their work. Some would even perceive these schools to be aloof from mainstream American education. They might be tempted to regard them as anachronistic, a throwback to an earlier stage of private educational development.

Yet distinctive. The system provides a program of ministerial education integrated to a degree unusual among church bodies, involving formal training on three levels: secondary, college and seminary. It utilizes about one-third of the regular synodical contributions of congregations in the WELS, also unusual among church bodies. Under the direct supervision of the synod the system includes three preparatory schools, two colleges, and a seminary. Its work is complemented by other schools within the fellowship, notably twenty regional Lutheran high schools on the domestic scene, and by mission schools and seminaries serving mission fields abroad. All these efforts involve the preparation of full-time called ministers of the Word.

It is that focus on preparation for public ministry that provides a useful distinction among the stateside schools of the Wisconsin Synod. The typical WELS elementary school and area Lutheran high school has been

² 1993 *Book of Reports and Memorials*, 209

³ 1993 *Book of Reports and Memorials*, 211

operated locally to provide general Christian education for members' children preparing for a wide variety of occupations. Wisconsin Lutheran College similarly provides a Christian focus to preparation for a variety of occupational goals.

In contrast, the synodical schools have as their purpose preparation on behalf of the entire WELS constituency for the public ministry. School programs and policies are geared to a narrow focus on the church's public ministry, thereby encouraging students to prepare for a profession in the true sense of the word, a calling which allows candidates to join their life's work with their Christian confession. They appreciate the privilege that their future profession by its very nature intimately involves their own personal profession of faith.

In one sense, the area Lutheran high schools work at bridging this gap by including an element of ministerial education in their school programs. They attempt to provide preparation for a wide variety of occupations while providing also a concurrent focus on forwarding students to the worker training colleges—in a word, common purpose schools. In this they have succeeded, especially in their teacher-training tracks. Overall they have succeeded to a degree well beyond that of similar schools in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, where there is no preparatory school system as an alternative.

By assignment, the focus in this presentation will be on the synodical schools, their organization, their past blessings and their prospects. At the surface that system consists of bricks and mortar on five campuses. But the locations and buildings are not as important as what goes on there. Unlike the buildings, that work is not free-standing. At each location the activity in room 101 relates to the activity in room 112; and what goes on in Prairie du Chien is to be integrated with what goes on at New Ulm, Watertown, Mequon and Saginaw. They are bound together by purpose and synodical direction from level to level. All the schools are complementary in terms of the types of ministry being prepared. The sinews of integration involve fellow Christians, both professors and students, united in a perspective on life and calling, with the ideal constituting a coordinated whole. At least, that is what we all want the system to be.

II: A View to the Past

The worker training system puts much stock in history, and the history of the worker training system is highly instructive.

The system bears the marks of past synodical priorities and rich divine blessing. The system in its structure has the history of the church body embedded in it, reflecting the development of its three predecessor synods as they developed in the upper Midwest. Watertown, New Ulm and Saginaw were the original centers of ministerial education for synods bearing the names of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan in their nineteenth century origins. The more recent locations of Prairie du Chien and Mequon reflect efforts to modify the structure to satisfy changing needs.

Synodical amalgamations of a century ago, however, do not reflect a more important historical perspective in terms of the types of schools these are.

First, in regard to the subtler historical influences, these bear the markings of the liberal arts heritage, placing our schools squarely in the tradition of the most significant and lasting educational developments over the better part of the millennium now drawing to a close. The term *liberal* here is in the old sense of the word: *freeing*, and *providing freedom*. The focus is broadly liberal in order to know well our times and their origins, but at the same time sufficiently independent of them to be able to evaluate them critically. We are free to know them and we are free to judge them. Long before our colleges considered accreditation they framed their curricula on the western liberal arts standard, which finds echoes throughout American education, particularly in quality private colleges. The prep schools share in this liberal arts orientation with their emphasis on languages, arts and sciences. At Northwestern College that tradition is reflected in the emphasis on languages and history. No less evident is the influence at Dr. Martin Luther College, which in its core curriculum has much greater emphasis on the traditional liberal arts than is the norm among teacher education colleges.

The freedom presumed in liberal arts is placed under a significant restriction at both prep and college levels. The gospel is to serve as the norm, in accord with the principle asserted by Paul: "We take captive every

thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10: 5). This subjection to Christ, ironically, is the only source for the freedom sought in the liberal arts. As Christ himself commented: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8: 32). Anything other than the gospel of Christ leaves people in slavery to sin, death and hell. But in the gospel is to be found that freedom provided in the redemption and reconciliation of Christ. This puts us in the mind of God and attunes us to his gracious will for us and all people. It is that gospel alone which provides the world-view enabling one to come to know and judge all learning, to know and evaluate the culture of “every nation, tribe, language and people.” In making our young disciples of Christ perceptive of the worlds in which they will serve and live as his representatives, the red thread of the gospel knits the curricular pieces together and becomes their standard of judgment, all with the purpose of providing that insight needed for carrying out their future ministries.

A second historical, pervading influence is the German flavor still evident in the system, ranging from an appreciation for German *gemuetlichkeit* to the influence of the German *Gymnasium*. Our attention is attracted to the latter. It stands in contrast to the same term among Americans where gymnasium denotes a place to exercise the body; among Germans the *Gymnasium* was a structure of education to develop the mind.

WELS worker training bears the marks, though muted, of the German *Gymnasium*. Only this makes sense out of the reverse Latin numbering of classes at Northwestern Prep, starting with six and ending with three (*sexta* through *tertia*), all the while bearing the implications of what Americans would call the first two college years, “second” and “first.” More significantly the *Gymnasium*, provided a rigorous pre-college and university level training for those entering the professions. A unified *Gymnasium* approach to secondary and college training is the historical heart of the system known as WELS worker training, in contrast to what developed on American soil as general purpose high schools and separate collegiate institutions.

In its structure Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary shows on the surface less influence from the German *Gymnasium*. Indeed, on German soil seminary training took place in one of those professional schools for which the *Gymnasium* provided rigorous preparation. The seminary developed four divisions of theological study: exegetical (direct study of the Scriptures) systematic (doctrinal approach to scriptural truth) historical and pastoral theology. At this point helpful digression is provided to note a trait unique to our seminary’s training. Dubbed “Wauwatosa theology” from the seminary’s location early this century, this distinctive characteristic is better understood as an emphasis on an historical and exegetical approach in religious studies. It is in contrast to a systematic or dogmatic approach. In brief, rather than focusing on a logical, systematic approach to the doctrines of Scripture, the basic approach is to the Scriptures themselves understood first in the historical context in which God provided his Word. This will help explain, for example, why seminary professor John Meyer hesitated to write a textbook on doctrine, out of concern that future generations would go to John Meyer for points of scriptural truth rather than to the Scriptures themselves.

In turn this helps explain the heavy emphasis on the biblical languages in the pastoral training track. Every parish pastor should have the capability of approaching the Scriptures directly, studying them in the language in which God gave them. In this way a unique trait of the seminary strongly influenced the supporting curricula of collegiate and secondary training, though these were in their structure influenced by the *Gymnasium* in a way the Seminary was not.

A second characteristic distinguishes our seminary from the typical seminary, reflecting a ministerial focus for the entire system:

The specific purpose of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is to offer theological training for men who desire to enter the public ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod or of churches within its confessional fellowship. It is not established or maintained to serve merely or in part as a school of religion furnishing opportunity to anyone for specialized study in various fields of theology.⁴

⁴ *Catalog*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1993-94, 3.

Its purpose, along with that of the other schools in the system, is not to serve as a school of religion, but solely to provide those candidates that district presidents welcome each May.

Now, back to those German influences the schools have in common. More significant even than the impact of the *Gymnasium* is the reformation heritage made easily accessible through German culture, particularly the German language. At the same time that culture provided a certain theological insulation from religious trends sweeping American churches, as for example emphasis on social gospel beginning early in this century. On the other hand, that culture made us more susceptible to other problems, notably the influence of German pietism engendering problems in practicing Christian liberty in certain matters of adiaphora (that is, matters neither directly commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures), as for example issues involving use of life insurance. Our noteworthy religious heritage came with German packaging—mostly a plus, but occasionally a minus.

The WELS constituency as a whole was rooted in German culture. The WELS system of ministerial education served first primarily an immigrant church. For half our synod's history the reaching out was largely to the waves of immigrants needing pastoring and schooling, but immigrants retaining their distinctiveness. Our schools served them with the gospel and served them well in their cultural uniqueness. But the boats are no longer coming. That has implications both for the dominance of that Germanic heritage and the kind of reaching out appropriate for a church body entering the last half of its second century.

The dominance of that culture has faded among WELS constituents. Today predominantly we reflect another nation—the American one. That German language has been supplanted by that of another culture. American English is spoken here. It was more than a generation ago that the theological journal published by seminary professors quietly changed its name from **Quartalschrift** to **Quarterly**.

In its second century the WELS system of ministerial education has taken on more of the attributes of American educational institutions without betraying its confessional basis or its ministerial purpose. Non-German names are more frequent in our student body listings. Observing us, a bystander would categorize our schools sociologically as WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, and “protestant”) rather than German. It is true that our schools have ready access to German culture, with Watertown and Mequon within two hours of Germanfest, with New Ulm the Location of Heritagefest, and with Frankenmuth's Bavarian Days only fifteen miles from Saginaw. But these provide mere nostalgia trips; they no longer reflect our essential culture.

Especially in the last fifty years we have gone beyond the locations of German immigration and have become a nation-wide American church. Even in the upper-Midwest, WELS heartland, our agrarian is American rural, not European, and we live comfortably in American urban and American suburban settings.

Our packaging the gospel will come with American wrappings. We will gain from American cultural strengths; we will need to struggle with its limitations and weaknesses. We will reflect its egalitarianism; we will struggle with its materialism and its declining moral tone. What, more specifically, are these? I invite you to spend a little time before your television set and develop your own specific list of American cultural strengths and limitations.

That prompts a return to the return to the concept of liberal arts, the curricular heritage embedded in our worker training system. In bringing “all things into subjection of Christ” the gospel becomes the only true liberal art, the art that frees. Indeed, it has its own biblical culture, always unchanging and appropriate, and stands in judgment of German culture, American culture and every other culture. To help students understand the biblical culture, to express its gospel truth appropriately in their own culture and that of others its graduates may serve is the responsibility of the worker training system. Having come to understand culture in this way, the candidate for ministry, particularly in cross-cultural ministry,

must then translate the unchanging message from the biblical culture into that of their hearers without attaching unnecessary or inappropriate elements from their own culture. Christian

witnesses must be able to distinguish the unchangeable message from culturally conditioned ways of expressing faith and devotion.⁵

That is a major task for worker training.

III: The View Ahead

Having explored briefly who we are and where we have come from, we next need to note what it is we face. The historical perspective is highly beneficial, but it will not do to drive courageously into the future with only a view to a splendid past. Issues of note lie ahead; they may be seen as problems or opportunities, depending on perspective. Usually they are at the same time some of both.

A major challenge flows out of trends evident in our country over the past century and mentioned in the previous section. Those first students coming into our system were cross-cultural. Both they and the people they were to serve were both German and American. Now the vast majority are entirely American, broadly understood. New elements within American society, however, are increasingly significant. The landmark desegregation decision of the Supreme Court in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*, directly involved a public school. That decision, however, symbolizes profound cultural changes at work in our society, with implications for our synod and its schools.

Demographics are changing also. Statistics indicate a rebound in the number of births in the United States last year to the levels of the early 1960's, the latter stages of the baby boom. But WELS baptisms have not rebounded proportionately. WELS was in the middle of the population explosion following World War II; it is not today. The candidates currently in the worker training system and eventually to be assigned to California will still be a part of what could be called the majority culture in America as they will begin their service. They will, however, find themselves outnumbered by the combined "minority" groups, notably Hispanics, blacks and Asians.

Increasingly our candidates will need to be knowledgeable and comfortable communicating the gospel to people of other mindsets. Communicating the gospel has often had to surpass cultural boundaries. In the past that also has been true in our synod and in its institutions for ministerial education. The language shift from German to English is obvious. That required patience and understanding. Future generations of candidates will need to broaden that to sensitivities to matriarchal tendencies in black and Hispanic societies. This does not mean surrendering timeless principles on the role of men and women, but it does mean utilizing these principles with understanding and tact appropriate to the setting in which the candidate serves. Taboo will be such expressions as "a yellow cowardess" or "black as sin." Such broadened awareness will develop new mindsets with the ability to use language and imagery for such a broad range of cultural groupings and as diverse as the yuppi in Orange County, the Hispanic in Miami, the black in Milwaukee's central city, and the farmer in Black Creek.

Our system indeed is a reflection of educational developments over the better part of a millennium, and yet our system has stood aloof. Appropriately so. Earlier in our century American education embraced science and the scientific method as the all-sufficient foundation for knowledge. Fact reigned supreme, individual human concerns were ignored, God was excluded, and atheistic evolution was granted the status of assumed truth. With biblical insight our schools consistently spoke in opposition, questioning scientific analysis as the road to truth.

But the emphasis in Academe today is changing—from a base in atheistic scientism to a base in atheistic humanism. We will welcome the move away from the dehumanizing worship of objective fact (in scientism) to an appreciation of human beings (in humanism). After all, the gospel is intended for human beings in need of salvation. But we oppose humanism's subjectivism as we did scientism's objectivism. We will resist just as vigorously humanism's worship of the human being. We will oppose making man the measure of all things with

⁵ John F. Brug, in "Sharing the Gospel across Cultures," one in a series of articles on cross-cultural ministry to be published in the *Northwestern Lutheran*.

just as much effort as we did resist scientism's worship of the thing. Both displace God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. For us the gospel and the Scriptures and the Confessions are the bedrock upon which we build our educational house (Mt. 7:24-27). Like Paul, we sense at times that our contemporaries in American education look at us—our schools and our goals—and apply the label: foolishness. Though that makes us feel lonely at times, we also share Paul's confidence that in this divine "foolishness" called the gospel we have the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:21-25). We in worker training have a job to do in continuing to make this "liberal art" the measure of all things. That job is going on right now. For example, our gospel insight alerts us to the tendency in the church growth movement to attempt measuring statistically the work of the Spirit, an undue reliance on the statistical bent which is a part of scientism. Similarly, humanistic concerns have diverted some Christian groups from the real spiritual work of the church to liberation theology and social gospel, essentially a this-world focus on social and political matters.

Other challenges are upon us. Our culture has been termed a post-Christian society. One might challenge the "Christian society" concept and bring into question whether American society in its essence ever reflected gospel principles. But this much can be said: in the past the mores of American culture were more in tune with a surface Christianity; divorces were infrequent, marriage was a prerequisite for living together and abortion was a crime. Not so today. This leaves our schools and our church with a challenge. The surface Christianity in American society is fast fading. Candidates for ministry will have a tougher job relating to couples who find no problems of conscience in living together with no regard for God-instituted marriage.

On the other hand a post-Christian society provides challenge with opportunities: joining a church today may be more than adding a comfortable cultural variant to one's social agenda, one easy motivational factor in prior years to join a church. With that factor lessened, church membership will likely reflect more accurately the repentance which is a part of one's relationship with God. The numbers may come with greater surface difficulty, but we count our results in repentant believers in Christ, not the numbers comfortably tallied on church roles; these may not always be the same.

We face a changed economic setting in addition to the demographic shifts mentioned previously. Changed economics and demographics affect both the synod and the schools the synod operates. The 1960's and the 1970's are sometimes evoked with nostalgia. No less so in our schools for ministerial education. We in worker training recall with fondness the building boom in the post-World-War-II era. We recollect the cry for increasing numbers of candidates. We remember the growing financial resources which enabled new buildings and growing student bodies. To expect and demand a return to the dynamics of that time at best suggests wishful thinking and at worst provides deception. We would do better to resist evaluating God's blessings in the nineties on the basis of the statistics of the seventies. Our Christians today may be just as committed, but it may be that their disposable resources are not increasing annually at the rate they were twenty years ago, and it may be that they are giving greater attention to local and area programs, and it may be that they are required to put a great deal more into staffing benefits merely to keep their current local programs afloat. This is not intended as an providing an easy excuse to give church-wide mission efforts a lower priority, but we do need to recognize that difficulties in funding synodical programs today may be for reasons other than a lessened level of sanctification among the WELS membership.

Similarly, it may be a fond wish to be graduating sixty pastoral candidates and 130 teacher candidates; it may be a fond wish to have a teacher training college with eight hundred students; it may be a fond wish to return to combined prep school enrollments of a thousand. The fact is that the pool of young people from which we draw our students is not as large as formerly, and even if we could draw them—which may indeed be possible with all-out recruitment efforts—we in all probability will not be able to assign them, either in the teaching or pastoral ministry. To have a grateful regard for the blessings of the past is certainly appropriate, but to judge our success through a mere comparison of numbers with twenty years ago is not appropriate.

If the changing times prompt us to think of operating on a different scale, those same changing times give us an opportunity to think of operating in new ways not possible twenty years ago. We are living in the midst of a technological revolution. In some respects it rivals the printing revolution of Luther's time. Implications for communicating the gospel are immense and the potential for use in our system of ministerial

schools is great. Johann Gutenberg did not give Martin Luther a new gospel, but his inventing the printing press did present the reformer with a new way to share Good News.

This fall from this location in Saginaw a pilot program will be undertaken to teach a foreign language to students in Westland, Michigan—at the same time and in the same course with students in Appleton and Phoenix. It is only a beginning. This tentative step into distance learning will feature two-way audio, with telephone hook-ups during instruction, but the video will be just one-way through pre-recorded video tapes. Even this small beginning was not possible twenty years ago prior to the development of video technology and reduction in the cost of telephone hook-ups.

Other advantages come apace. Access to library resources has been expanded so that a student at one of our worker training colleges will be able to access technologically the library resources of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, of the University of Chicago and of Columbia University in New York. As these technologies become more sophisticated and as their cost becomes affordable—previewed for us in the computer revolution of the past decade—so also our system of ministerial education will be in a position to utilize them in the interest of the gospel.

The need for our students to become sensitive to the cultures of other peoples in other places has been noted. Technology will help that happen. Already that is possible to an amazing degree through the audio and video resources not available to an earlier generation. At the cutting edge today—almost certain to be an available tool within two decades—is the development of so called “virtual reality” and “telepresence,” technological simulations of living as other people in other places. Such tools will go a long way to help meet the demonstrated need that the candidates of tomorrow bridge cultures in ways not possible for previous generations.⁶

Some of these capabilities by current candidates are both possible and needed now. If the congregational service folders useful a generation ago are still being run on now-antiquated mimeograph machines, they take on the appearance of unattractive, print-heavy tomes. Expectations today assume the capabilities of software and hardware available to those who have joined the computer generation. Obviously these tools are no substitute for the gospel itself. But their lack may become an impenetrable barrier in merely gaining the attention of the potential gospel recipient.

Our candidates will have a power that the graduates of a previous generation could only dream of. They will work with a PC in addition to and even instead of a pen. They will work with a telephone that becomes a more effective tool through the addition of a modem and a fax machine. These new communication devices, in both parish and its school, will be cost permissive and communication effective. But there will be the prerequisite investment of dollars on all levels: synodical, congregational, and personal.

An improvement in recent years is the increasing contacts with the student's future field of service. We need more of the same and the financial support to sustain it. Student teaching is of long standing and was expanded in DMLC's “new” curriculum of twenty-five years ago. The vicar program at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has been in operation for nearly a half century. The preparatory schools have instituted “taste of ministry” in the last decade and have exported the concept to the area Lutheran high schools. In these the student potentially going on to the teacher- or pastor-training college will sample the work of that calling through a few days in the classroom or a weekend in the parish. Student exchange programs and cross-cultural programs give students an awareness of foreign missionary service. Northwestern College has recently developed summer evangelism programs. DMLC recently brought classroom immersion into the first years of college through its program in Early Field Experience. In its current self-study, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is considering closer student identification with local parishes and their programs throughout the first two seminary years, prior to the vicar year. Consequently, our schools properly are becoming less the “ivory tower” experiences long associated in America with residential schools. They are increasingly becoming the kind of workshop of the Holy Spirit which in work in the field will provide the candidate a measure of experience increasingly expected of candidates. In these areas, too, the future is now.

⁶ R. Bowen Loftin, “Forward to the Future through the Past!” Commencement address at Wisconsin Lutheran College, May 15, 1993, 2-5.

IV: System and Structure

One last matter to be addressed in terms of the challenges and opportunities we face involves the structure of the system.

This is approached last, and somewhat briefly at that, because of the greater importance of the matters previously cited. Whatever the structure of our schools, their number and location, we will need to provide the educational experiences necessary and appropriate to our time.

As noted by Committee Five on worker training at the last synodical convention, it is important to distinguish between **system** and **structure**. Please note that here is no suggestion here to change the system; there is, however, a compelling rationale that the structure be appropriate to the dynamics of our time and the foreseeable future. While the specifics properly await the report of Committee Five later at this convention; some general observations about principles at this point are appropriate.

The system in its current structure already is making accommodations for varied ministries. Our strength in ministerial education has been to provide sound generalists. There is a growing need to accommodate specialties within that provision for generalists. Those specialties are present in the teaching ministry, as is shown in the addition of a program for secondary education. Before this convention is the proposal to provide for early childhood education. Similarly, the last convention authorized the development of a staff ministry program, most facets of which are associated with aspects of the pastoral ministry.

Continuing education has been provided for many years, but its provision is being expanded now. Summer school at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has been joined by parish ministry enhancement, a week-long program bringing first year pastors back to the Seminary for in-service. Just as in the past there was an increase in the numbers of graduates returning to the schools for study, more recently there are signs that the schools are traveling to their graduates. DMLC service programs are held in congregations throughout the synod in summer. In this regard, distance learning, with sites at WELS concentrations throughout the synod, will profitably become a part of the worker training system, first for continuing education and later perhaps for regular coursework. Whatever the structure, these system refinements must be accommodated.

There should be no apology for the portion of synodical resources dedicated to worker training over the years, so long as these resources are well spent and do not undermine balance with other synodical programs. The system is unique and has served the synod well in providing a reliable flow of well-prepared candidates. Nonetheless, restructuring our schools at this time gives us the opportunity to size our institutions for efficiency in operation, to address the stewardship of our resources and to provide kingdom balance.

A key consideration in planning the structure is to provide 103 teacher candidates and 52 pastoral candidates annually. Such sizing will help reduce the excess of capacity currently in the system and allow some funding for technological advances and for program development the system will need to institute in the future. At the same time, such sizing will also help maintain the kind of balance which guards against one program of the synod moving ahead at the expense of another. In short, whatever the revised structure we may use, it needs to retain the same system with a flexibility and efficiency which will allow some resources for the educational opportunities and challenges before us now and in the years ahead.

That prompts us to consider how we will face these challenges and opportunities. We will be grateful for the treasure passed down to us by our forefathers and we will work at maintaining the benefits received.

More significantly, we are grateful for the hand of God behind that history. The church is his, and Objective Five in the synod's Mission-Objectives-Vision statement reflects the effort of his people in the WELS to arrange an educational system supportive of the great commission.

In facing these challenges and opportunities we are to distinguish carefully the core from the trappings in that heritage. At heart, the system is responsible for preparing the "someone preaching." That, in turn, causes us to focus on the final product. The various elements in the process are means to that end. Those means may have variations, some larger, some smaller. Those variations may occur in terms of school curriculum and school structure. Yet, constants do exist. Obviously that curriculum, regardless of its organization, will give

authority to the word of our gracious God. Christian judgment will be used to shape that curriculum to serve best this church body at this time.

We do need to be mindful of the changing times. Adjustments should be made when they are beneficial. Such positive changes are apparent at crucial moments in the history of the system. One hundred years ago the structure of the system was altered as the synods forming the WELS came together. Also at the individual schools such wholesome change is a matter of record. The first language change at Northwestern College was from English to German, when English, surprisingly, was the language of instruction among the German-speaking campus family. The change was undertaken not so much to regain the flavor of German scholarship as it was to reinforce the culture in which the candidates would serve.⁷ Later, the move early this century at both colleges from the *Gymnasium*-type curricular organization to a secondary-college articulation more typical of the American scene forestalled a more difficult transition of the type experienced traumatically in the Missouri Synod during the years following World War II. Indeed, the earlier and more timely transition in the WELS seems to have enabled a sound worker training system to flourish, helping it retain more easily the core of the heritage within an adjusted form.

Finally, to return to the thoughts of the district president cited early in this presentation, what essentially matters is the product at the end of the system. Eager anticipation for service surfaced in the candidates at both Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Dr. Martin Luther College again this spring. That Christian anticipation manifests a wholesome idealism rooted in faith. One to five years later some of that idealism may be tempered as these gospel workers carry out their public ministry in the real world of sweets and sour, grace and sin. But we pray that the core idealism will still be there and that it will persist with sufficient depth in scriptural knowledge, with the same gospel focus on life and work, and with skills now honed in the performance of ministry. The foundation, however, will be the shaping and growing carried out in that workshop of the Holy Spirit known among us as the worker training system.

Insofar as this will occur, the synod and our Lord will be well served.

⁷ Erwin E. Kowalke, *Centennial Story: Northwestern College, 1865-1965* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1965), 61.