

**WE HAVE THIS MINISTRY:  
MINISTERIAL EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

**PASTORS**

The 1993 Synod Convention resolved to amalgamate Dr. Martin Luther College and Northwestern College on one campus. The resolution states, "That our synod adopt and support a worker training system with...one ministerial school with separate pastor training and teacher training colleges, including other programs...all on one campus" (Proceedings 67). It further resolved, "That both the pastor and teacher tracks retain their identity and integrity in the worker training system" (Proceedings 66). Accordingly, the two colleges are not being combined, nor is one being assimilated into the other. The synod established one ministerial school with two separate colleges.

Because training for pastoral ministry has been conducted on a separate campus for 130 years among us, we will face a new, significant, and fundamental change in the way we train pastors. Some would suggest that it is about time we change a system of training that concentrates on old paradigms no longer important in our modern world. Others would suggest that we stand in great peril of losing what we have long treasured as an important form of ministry, and if we do not lose the form altogether, we will change the pastoral ministry dramatically over the course of the next 10 years even if we retain the title "pastor." Simply stated we have abandoned the concept of training pastors in an all male school dedicated only to the undergraduate formation of pastors. Some would suggest that we can no longer afford the luxury of spending so much money on the training of pastors, while others would suggest that such a system of training isolates pastors and flies in the face of our concept that all public ministry is essentially the same.

Changes in how we train pastors and teachers will come. Of course, some changes will be natural responses to the needs of our congregations. Such changes have historically occurred over the history of our synod and will continue. Other changes will occur because we have changed the environment for the training of pastors. Still other changes may occur in ways and because of forces we do not understand at this point and have not anticipated adequately. The discussion on ministry at the Western Wisconsin District is important in that it will allow us to pause and see what is different about the forms of ministry among us. God willing, that discussion will reveal what we need to retain as the changes unfold.

For these district sessions, all of the presentations on the specific forms of ministry among us occur without a thorough discussion of the concept of ministry from which they flow. Professor David Valleskey will deal with the broader concepts to some degree in his presentation. Perhaps that is as it should be since "Member Ministry" requires us to see both what is common to all public ministers and what is different about each form we

know. My assignment was to speak about the pastoral ministry and because of the changes ahead of us as a synod, I want to focus my attention on the training we provide pastors. Remember that the young men entering the pastoral training program this fall as freshmen will graduate in 2002 -- the beginning of the 21st century. The future then is closer than we imagine.

#### **ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE PASTORAL MINISTRY**

One cannot begin a discussion about pastoral training in the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod without assuming some things about the goal of that training and education--its outcome. These assumptions lead to a significantly different kind of training for pastors than for teachers or other public ministers. It seems to me that those responsible for training pastors have operated in our classrooms and outside the classrooms with these assumptions about the pastoral ministry:

1. The pastoral ministry is a ministry of the word of God. Those who occupy this form of ministry will be spokesmen of God who understand clearly and thoroughly the word of God and the doctrines it proclaims. Therefore, among other things, the pastor must know enough to handle the word of truth correctly, be apt to teach, and be an example to the church so that the message of God is not discredited. (Cf. I Timothy, Titus, I Corinthians 3-4, II Corinthians 2-6, etc.)

In some ways all public ministers of the church are to have the same characteristics outlined in the Scripture. While member ministers or staff ministers may not all need an aptitude for teaching because their role is limited to other functions by their call, nevertheless they must be an example to the church and have a clear understanding of the gospel as representatives of a congregation of God's people. Teachers, however, traditionally take on more responsibility for handling the word of God than member ministers or staff ministers. Therefore they must understand the word of God and its doctrines more deeply, handle the word of truth correctly, be apt to teach, and be an example to the church. Pastors have an even greater responsibility for using the word of God.

Clearly the function the church outlines for a specific public servant will determine to what degree he or she needs to have a clear and thorough understanding of the word of God. While all called public servants regardless of the form of their service to the church need to understand the word of God, a significant difference exists in the degree or depth of understanding they need. For the purpose of this discussion I want to look at the how we train pastors in the word of God.

No one will argue that training for pastoral, teacher, and staff ministers is significantly longer and different than for member ministers in most cases. Among those the synod trains for full time service in its congregations, not only is training for the pastoral ministry four years longer than for teachers or staff

ministers, but it is also different during the undergraduate years. The difference does not lie in the essence of service or ministry to Christ and his people but in the scope of the service desired by the people of God as expressed in their call. So we have maintained a difference in the scope of ministry and in the training for different forms of ministry.

What is different about the pastor's role that needs to be maintained in the current discussion not only about amalgamation but also about ministry? What justifies the longer training? The depth of understanding the word of God and its truths we expect from our pastors. God's people must be fed with the word. When God's hungry sheep look up in anticipation, they should receive the only food that creates and sustains faith. They must not receive wind and straw, because Satan is quietly on the prowl for "religious" souls as well as the ungodly.

Because the word is the only source of strength and truth, God's people have historically called leaders who use that word for their spiritual nourishment and growth. So we train pastors so they have the deepest understanding of the word when compared to any other form of ministry. Allow me briefly to outline the essence of that training. We ask pastoral candidates to study the New and Old Testament in the original languages so they may have a thorough exposure to the truth of God. The exposure to biblical theology begins already in their undergraduate training. To the biblical theology focus we add historical theology. A simply overview of the history of the church reveals that it is a history of controversy over doctrines of the Scripture. Our own synodical history reveals the same insight. Therefore, in the judgment of previous generations, training for the pastoral ministry also involves an in depth study of the history of the church so that candidates for the pastoral ministry might understand the truths that have been clarified through controversy and entrusted to us. Candidates also need a systematic approach to the truths of God's word. While all ministers of God's church ought to have an understanding of the doctrines of God's word, congregations expect that their pastors have a more thorough understanding of it than others. We therefore ask pastoral candidates for the pastoral ministry to study more systematic theology than those training for other forms of ministry. The final major emphasis of pastoral training provides practical instruction in applying the word of God to the needs of God's people.

Note that all of this is closely tied to the word of God as we have it recorded for us in Scripture. Every pastor has studied at least portions of several key books of the Old and New Testament in the original language by a thorough verse by verse exegesis. Every pastoral candidate has thoroughly studied at least portions of the these books of the Bible: Acts, John, I Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Romans, Isaiah, Genesis, and the Psalms. In addition he has read through every book of the Scriptures with some professor or teacher in a less intense way. The pastoral candidate studies the Confessions of the Lutheran

church, concentrating especially on the Smalcald Articles, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the Formula of Concord. In addition he studies to prepare himself to teach Luther's Small Catechism to those desiring confirmation. Of course, every professor of these courses dealing with God's word hopes that the graduate will continue to study the Scriptures and Lutheran confessions after graduation, but even if a candidate never studies the Scriptures in the original languages again -- and I hope this never happens -- he will have had the benefit of a training program that has deepened his understanding of the whole counsel of God and has impressed upon him the importance of God's word and orthodox Lutheran doctrine.

This does not mean that every pastor is deeper theologically than every teacher or every lay person -- regardless of gender -- who has not had the benefit of that training. Every pastor knows that God has given his church men and women of various backgrounds who are sometimes intellectually superior and also at times theologically superior to pastors. Nor does all the training a pastor receives imply that he is spiritually stronger, more clearly orthodox, and therefore better than others who do not have such training. Our sad experience is that such training does not prevent every incursion of false doctrine among pastors. But to suggest that we can dispense with the training or diminish it suggests that less training will produce better pastors. Try that logic at any medical school or school of pharmacy.

So if pastors will still turn from the truth even after so long and expensive a training program and if some teachers and lay people also have significant depth and insight into God's truth, what is the benefit of such training? We train our pastors so thoroughly because of what God's people have come to expect of them when they call a pastor. In the body of Christ we know as the church, pastors have a specific function -- handling the word of God. Our responsibility is to train ministers of Christ in the best way we know how. Like our own children we provide them with the best we can, once they leave the nest and get out on their own they sometimes make wrong choices and stumble along the way. Our responsibility lies in giving them the best tools we can to do the tasks before them. Our generation wants -- and I hope this is not only a personal desire -- the next generation to understand and treasure the gospel we possess. We can only train one generation; those we train today will train yet another generation. Is there any doubt that we want to give them as much as we can?

As we enter the 21st century, I know that I will not be a part of the century for very long. My task until just recently has been to train pastors who will outlive me and to whom I have helped to treasure the gospel. I desire to give another generation of pastors exactly what I have been given -- a respect for God's word, a thorough knowledge of God's word, and the depth of understanding of that word which will permit them to be the resident experts of the word in the congregations of our

fellowship. The word is everything; training in the word is everything. Pastors need greater depth in the word and the truths of the word than others do.

2. The pastoral ministry is communicating the word of God to people. Therefore the pastor must understand a wide variety of human beings, their activities, and perceptions, not just the activities and perceptions of believers.

All Christians in the church are charged with the responsibility of communicating the word of God to others. Teachers instruct children in the truths of God and the knowledge and skills necessary to be good citizens in this world. Staff ministers will take on several responsibilities perhaps in administration, music, education or something else. But the pastoral ministry as a general rule requires a formal and regular communication of God's truth to the congregation of believers. He is the public representative of the congregation. Because the pastor is the one responsible for proclaiming the truth of God Sunday after Sunday, he is the most visible source of information not only about the congregation he serves but also about the message with which he is so clearly identified.

Here too it is not a matter of kind but of degree. The pastor is the living, breathing, studying resource person for the local congregation on matters of faith and life. Of course, others believe and some may have greater insight, more tact, more courage, and deeper faith than he has. Every pastor, if he is honest, will admit that he has been strengthened by the witness of other Christians -- men and women -- whose simple trust in God's truth and courage in the face of trial have helped them on their journey through this life. Yet those same Christians will look to their pastor for direction, comfort, and instruction in the word. He simply should know more than they do and has been called to be the resident expert in the word. Again in the body of Christ among us, even teachers and staff ministers look to the pastor to regularly and formally communicate the word of God. The pastor's task is to communicate in private and public settings by writing and speaking.

It is in the wide variety of human beings that the pastor's role is different from other called servants. Generally pastors are called to serve groups of Christians and to witness to a diverse group of people outside the church. Even within the congregation the pastor will encounter diverse groups to which he needs to communicate. Some of the groups of Christians will be homogeneous in some ways, but there will be differences in age, occupation, education, and spiritual maturity. Perhaps I can illustrate the point by considering the role of a teacher whose call directs him to speak to children in and out of the classroom as well as to deal with the parents of the children. Yet the common threads running through the group addressed by teachers are children, similarity in age, as well as a desire for Christian education in varying degrees. A pastor's focus is

generally broader unless the congregation has limited his call in some way, e.g. calling on shut-ins.

We can concentrate so much on the word of God that we forget that the Christian is in a world that has a host of other information and knowledge. Christian leaders cannot be so narrow that they understand only the Christian perspective. It seems to me that pastors especially must also understand the thinking of the world around the Christian fortress so that they can critically analyze it, witness to that world, and help the Christians who called them both to cope with the outside world and also to witness to it.

Our witness to the world comes off as silly and out of touch, if we don't understand the unchristian audience that hears our witness to the gospel or the unchristian influences working on the members of the body of Christ. The literature and knowledge of the secular world "are not temptations or vanities, but useful drugs and materials wherewith to temper and compose effective and strong medicines" (J. Milton). Even the false doctrines and evil influences around us should be studied: "How can we more safely, and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading...and hearing all manner of reason?" (J. Milton). Surely every Christian needs to understand something about the world to which he or she witnesses, but a pastor needs that knowledge and understanding especially because his members will come from many different backgrounds with many different skills and ideas and they will be influenced by many of the world's ideas.

3. God has given the ministry of the word to all believers. Yet Scripture outlines requirements for leaders of believers, and God has called leaders for his people throughout history. The leader we know as pastor is a servant, a shepherd who serves under the Great Shepherd. The pastor serves first of all the Lord who calls him to a position of leadership among the saints. He also serves the believers who call him to serve them with the word and sacraments. He should have a love for people, a desire to provide for their spiritual needs, a humble attitude toward his people and his work, and a courageous heart to confront sin and proclaim God's message when it will not be appreciated.

No one ought to assume to speak in the church without being called by a group of Christians. Since everyone has the ministry of the word, it would be absolute confusion for everyone to exercise it at the same time. Since everyone has the ministry of the word, it would be absolute arrogance to assume to speak for other Christians and to other Christians without a call to do so. So any public servant of Christ serves his or her fellow Christians. The congregation of believers then has a right to assign its public servants to specific responsibilities. The role of pastor as I have outlined it up to this point is one

specific series of tasks and responsibilities. Another series of tasks are outlined for teachers. A quick look at the call document on the basis of which every called minister serves will reveal the tasks and responsibilities. The congregation of believers may also limit the role of called servants in many different ways. The church can call professors, administrators, district presidents, visitation pastors, circuit pastors, principals, teachers with specific responsibilities for grade levels, athletics and music. The list is endless and will change as the local congregation or the larger group of believers, the synod, perceives its work and how to do it.

The public ministry is not just a human arrangement for the sake of order. Of course, it is that, but so much more. Those who are called by congregations understand that their call comes from God. A congregation calls a pastor to a position of leadership among them; God asks that leader to speak for him to his people. He is more than just a spokesman for the congregation, performing ceremonial duties at gatherings of the group. He is called to speak God's truth. All other public servants should find comfort in the divine aspects of their calling too.

The difference between pastors and other called servants is not in kind or essence but again in degree. Let me illustrate. A teacher does indeed speak for God in the teaching of Bible stories, counseling students and parents, and exercising discipline in the school. But the teacher also deals with mathematics, science, history, and other secular subjects. He or she will present those things in the light of God's truth and from a Christian perspective. He or she has been called to do so. A pastor's responsibility, given by the congregation, does not have responsibility for the secular subjects. He concentrates on the word of God, and because of the importance of the word he becomes the central focus of a congregation. In a Christian context those who have greater responsibility for speaking God's word will have greater respect and honor. Without the gospel the church does not exist; it does not grow; it is not nourished. The one who dispenses the gospel most often will naturally receive greater attention.

Yet we must make a clear point here. One of the most destructive discussions in the church began already with the twelve apostles. "Who is the greatest?" The argument among the disciples began early in the ministry of Jesus and persisted to the end in the upper room on Thursday of Holy Week. No one should be surprised that the argument with its latent envy, bitterness, and strife persists among us too. Our sinful flesh loves comparisons between one pastor and another; between pastors and teachers, between member ministers, teachers, staff ministers and anyone else in the Lord's work. We value our importance to the Lord's work by our position of honor and influence. Who is the greatest? It is a frequently asked question but it is irrelevant. All of Christ's servants are a part of his body. Each part has a specific role and place. As a human hand has one important task different and distinct from the eye, so each

servant of Christ has a place in the body with a different task because the Lord has given different talents. The hand cannot say it is more important than the eye, nor can the eye say it is more important or greater than the hand. One ought to reread I Corinthians 12 regularly. Perhaps called servants of Christ should read it more often.

Therefore the church needs dispensers of the gospel in every calling who are humble, not arrogant, who can work with others who share ministry of the word in different ways, and who have a keen desire to do whatever needs to be done for the spiritual growth of God's people. Only Christ has suffered and died to win the souls every called minister of Christ serves. He is Lord, no one else. Servants are not to be lords over the flock Christ has purchased with his blood.

Yet because Christians still possess the old sinful flesh, there will be times when they will not appreciate the message of Christ. They will flinch when the law speaks harshly; because of their sinful flesh, they will not appreciate the sweetness of the gospel either. God's leaders need to understand that. Those who speak the word most frequently to God's saints will experience not only thanks from the new man but also opposition from the old flesh still clinging to Christians.

Sadly the old sinful flesh intrudes into the lives of God's messengers too. Pastors, teachers, all public servants of Christ and those aspiring to those public offices will from time to time demonstrate behavior, aptitude, and weaknesses which will disqualify them for service as public ministers. In the training of public servants we carefully screen those who are certified as fit for ministry. Such screening is best done by those who know what the office of pastor or teacher is. Those who have served as pastors should evaluate, advise, and train pastors. Those who have served as teachers should evaluate, advise and train teachers. Once called by congregations, candidates who move toward false doctrine, conduct lives inappropriate for public ministry, or are simply unfit for ministry or not apt to teach require discipline by the believers they serve.

4. His distinctive responsibilities in the church are preaching the word of God, exercising spiritual responsibility for the entire congregation both young and old, administration of the sacraments, and leading congregational worship. While his focus **must** include reaching out to those who are not believers because Christ commanded that of all his saints, his call will direct him to focus most often on the believers he serves.

Teachers and lay people preach the word of God from time to time in various situations. Congregations ask teachers to take responsibility for adults as well as children, lay people help distribute the Lord's Supper and are directed to baptize in cases of emergency, and both lay and public servants other than pastors

lead congregational worship. Yet a pastor's role in these situations is most often one of supervision. These things are distinctive of the pastoral office yet any pastor may delegate them to others. This delegation, even in the area of preaching, does not diminish the pastor's special responsibilities here. He has the responsibility for these functions in the church of Christ and is held accountable for them in most congregations. When God's people come together to worship, a spiritual leader is implied. The pastor or his representative is that leader. His call makes it so.

Note here too the importance of the word of God in all these functions. A pastor is called to preach God's word in its truth and purity. He will use the word to instruct the young and old in his congregation to strengthen their faith, deepen their understanding, and encourage them to live Christian lives as well as carry out the mission of the church in spreading the word to all the world.

While we may be frustrated by the way individual pastors carry out their ministry, nevertheless congregations generally call pastors to be gatekeepers for them, to screen what would be of great harm or little value to the flock and to allow information to flow to the members of the congregation that would be appropriate and valuable. It seems we do pastors a disservice when we carp about them doing their job as gatekeepers. Some pastors seem authoritarian and dictatorial about what they allow into their congregation and we can be frustrated with their approach, but this has been their call. They exercise supervisory functions in the church of God, a role not given to other called servants unless clearly indicated by a call.

Some congregations require their pastors to do more reaching out to the unchurched than others. Some congregations divide the work they desire of their pastor among several people either because of size or opportunity. Yet there is some tension for every pastor between reaching out and nurturing the existing congregation. On the list of priorities which every called minister has, often times responsibilities for the sick, dying, troubled, and confused force themselves to the top of the list. When that happens, then reaching out to the unchurched drops on that list.

One might wonder if we have asked the pastor to do too many things. I've wondered if congregations have delegated soul winning to the pastor and opted not to exercise their role in reaching out to others. Lay members have opportunity to witness to the people they encounter in daily life -- people to whom a called pastor or teacher would have no access. Without the witness of lay people in word and deed, it seems the congregation doesn't have prospects for growth. Much could be said here about directing and training lay people to do evangelism and other tasks as well here. The scope of this paper requires some discipline on some of these issues. But it seems to me that we have asked pastors to concentrate on the word of God and applying

that word first to the members of his congregation. That will mean mission work too, but most often in our congregations he will focus on the believers he serves.

5. A church body needs pastors who are theological leaders in their congregations and who can, at times and in various crises, do in depth exegetical studies of God's word, explore historic and current problems in the church, and prepare apologetical studies of God's truth that take into account most of what is going on both in the unbelieving world and the Christian world. This presupposes the ability to interpret the word of God on the basis of the original languages, to read many kinds of other texts with discrimination, and to think independently.

In some ways the pastor must be an independent communicator of God's truth. He should find the truths from God's word himself. Other Christians can be independent in that sense too, but many times they are dependent on the pastor for explanations of the truth of God and for insight into which ideas and concepts are threats to the gospel. A pastor should be able to judge the theological writing of other churches -- as well as those of his own church body -- and be able to evaluate what is truth and what is error.

In the congregation someone needs to be a theological leader who is not dependent on what church officials say or what seminary professors say but who can judge what is said inside and outside the visible church independently. For us that has meant that we give those who have primary theological responsibility within the congregation the skills to work through the Scriptures in the original languages. If we do not supply such a theological leader for our congregations, they will find one, perhaps one who does not share our confessional focus. Since the Scriptures are the only source of truth and God's only revelation to his church, again emphasis on the word of God compels us to provide pastors with language skills. Can theological leaders have sufficient depth and independence without language skills? Yes, but then the theological leader will be dependent upon the translation of others and the scholarly work of others. Historically, we have created an independent pastoral ministry by providing them with language skills to handle the word of truth. Not everyone of our pastors has the same skill in the languages. Yet they have worked through significant portions of the Scripture in the original while in school and can use those skills after they are called to be pastors by congregations.

Under God the training we have provided has served us well in maintaining God's truth and steering clear of evil and falsehood. I pray that it will continue to do so into the 21st century.

## EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

In order to assure the church of Christ that the pastoral ministry might continue to provide theological leadership for the saints of God I think the following principles need to persist among us and in the schools that train future pastors. These principles have been a part of our training for 130 years, and I believe we will be impoverished if we alter them or lose them.

1. Those who wish to be pastors should be trained a faculty that is predominantly pastors. This does not mean that only pastors will teach future pastors, but that those who have been pastors should form the dominant group on the faculty of the school training pastors. Northwestern College has operated with that principle from the beginning. Pastors have been called from their congregations to take up the task of training future pastors. Once they arrive on campus we send them to graduate school to learn more in the discipline to which they were called. The primary criteria is a professor's exposure to pastoral or teaching ministry not his expertise in an academic discipline. A pastor who has served a congregation of God's people will bring a pastoral perspective to his teaching and to his assigned discipline that is important.

Pastoral training is not simply acquiring academic requirements and meeting the necessary credit hours for graduation. Pastoral formation requires more than providing credits in Greek, Hebrew and religion. Pastoral candidates should receive the benefit of a pastoral perspective in other academic area as well.

2. The faculty that trains pastors should be able to meet as a group of men to discuss the progress of students who desire to become pastors. Evaluation of students is critical because they will be recommended to congregations to serve as pastors. Such evaluation will be academic, social, moral, and psychological.
3. The faculty that trains pastors should be able to meet as a group of men to discuss curriculum for those aspiring to be pastors. Curriculum development involves many facets, most important of which is the professors who have classroom responsibility for course work. Curriculum development should also involve the larger community of believers who calls the pastors and assessment of curriculum should incorporate some way that the larger community of believers can be heard. Nevertheless those who teach regularly know the classroom and the students the best. If they are also former pastors, they also have a vision of what the pastoral ministry requires.
4. The program for pastoral studies should be clearly identified. Prospective students need to know what is expected of them. It seems to me that the identification of

faculty, courses, and course requirements for pastoral students is a minimum. Students are recruited, at the undergraduate level, as potential pastors. A recruitment to ministry is too vague to be helpful to most students. They need to focus on the concrete goal from the beginning or they will either not chose to come to begin their training or they will lose focus early in the training.

5. The program for pastoral studies must have sufficient financial aid to allow students to finish the longer course without taking time off to work and without incurring crippling debt to finish. This will require some distinction between pastoral candidates and those who desire to serve in the teaching or staff ministries, who have shorter periods of training. An erosion of the financial resources for pastoral students may result in fewer candidates able to finish the course of study.

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