

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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Photo courtesy Jayne Sheater



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THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY
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For the LIFE of the WORLD

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Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe

PUBLISHER
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EDITOR
Rev. John Pless

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
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COPY EDITOR
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ART DIRECTOR
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By Dr. Charles A. Gieschen, Professor of Exegetical Theology and Chairman of the Exegetical Theology Department at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Future pastors who want to be formed as faithful shepherds of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, do well to look and listen to Christ in order to understand who a pastor is as well as what a pastor does. . . . Through Jesus, whom we hear and see in the Scriptures and Sacraments, future pastors are formed by Him to do what He does and say what He says.

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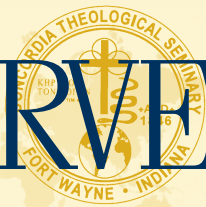
By the Rev. Robert E. Smith, Electronic Resources Librarian at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

One hundred and fifty years ago Pastor Sihler praised God for the blessings of laborers sent into the harvest field of souls. Christ, the Good Shepherd, has found His lost sheep. He has sent thousands of shepherds from Fort Wayne, St. Louis, Springfield, and Fort Wayne again. They preach His Word, share His means of grace, and faithfully guide generations into His eternal pastures.

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The great blessing of the LCMS is that both church and seminary are tied by their commitment to Christ and Him crucified. He is the ONE we preach. He is the ONE we teach. He is the ONE to whom we witness. He is the ONE by whom we care for and love the poor and the sick and the needy.



Members of many Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations love to sing robustly, “Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love;” From little on I can remember singing the hymn, and today hearing the melody only brings good memories. Christ’s love binds us together. His love is here for you.

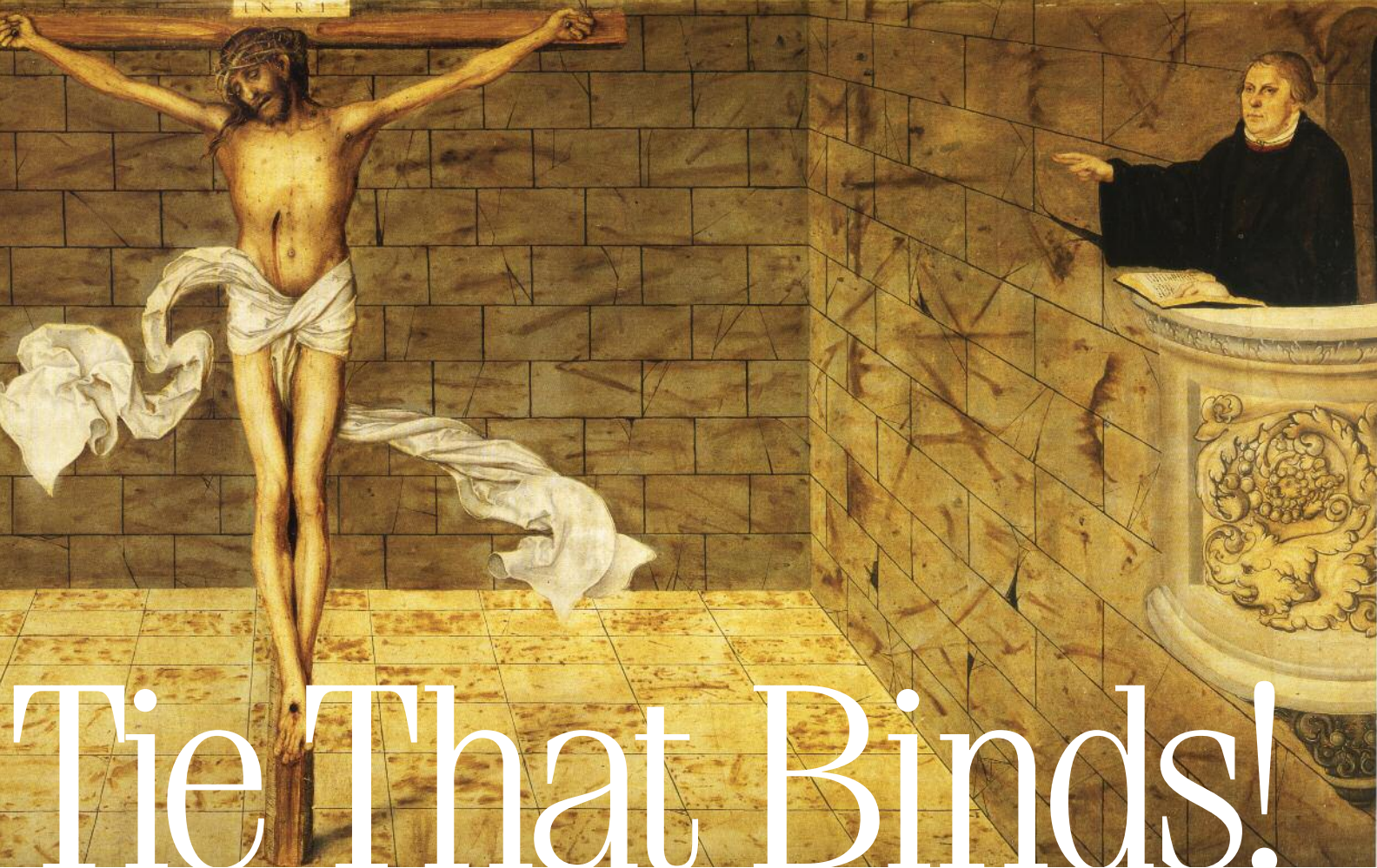
Christ’s love is seen in the church by His presence in the Word, water, wafer, and wine. His grace is abundantly given for us to behold and to receive. His grace gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. For this Christ gave His life. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (II Cor. 8:9) From Him we are nourished to be His and follow His way.

A visible demonstration of the effect of Christ’s love among us is the tie between church and seminary, between our congregations and the seminaries. As the LCMS follows in the apostolic train, with apostolic teaching promoting the unity of faith, it prepares pastors,

deaconesses, teachers, and church workers in order to aid and encourage congregations in their challenging service to preach and teach the Word, care for the sick and the poor with Christ’s mercy, and give bold witness to the world of God’s love for them in His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is an intimate history shared by our church and the seminaries. The LCMS began in 1847. One of our seminaries began in 1839 and another in 1846. Synod received the seminaries immediately, and the relationship is sustained today after 159 years. Blest be the tie that binds!

The tie that binds the church and the seminaries is Christ the Word in Scripture and Christ the Word presented in the Lutheran Confessions. Christ, His person and work, binds the two together. They



Tie That Binds!

By Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann

are ONE. Both are centered in Christ.

There is no parallel in other graduate educational arenas. Law schools did not grow out of courts or legislatures or law firms. Medical schools were seldom formed by hospitals. Few graduate schools of business were founded by corporations. But theological schools, as are our seminaries, have a one-of-a-kind relationship with the communities upon which they were established.

This tie runs deep. Our seminaries prepare pastors and deaconesses for the LCMS alone and not for a broad range of denominations as do many other theological schools. Our pastors attend our seminaries, while other denominations struggle with encouraging candidates to attend their own seminaries. Our seminaries are educationally and financially viable because LCMS members support them, while many seminaries in other denominations are increasingly dependent upon students from multiple denominations and revenue from extraneous sources.

Virtually all denominational schools have experienced a long-term decline in

denomination funding, as is true in the LCMS. These and other factors do have ways of changing patterns of relationship. The great blessing of the LCMS is that both church and seminary are tied by their commitment to Christ and Him crucified. He is the ONE we preach. He is the ONE we teach. He is the ONE to whom we witness. He is the ONE by whom we care for and love the poor and the sick and the needy.

The future in the LCMS is bright because the church and the seminaries are connected. There is a privileged partnership in their work. For this we thank the Lord!

The Synod is pastors and congregations. And the seminaries constantly keep in mind that congregations are the service centers in which church workers serve. Congregations are where people worship Christ. Congregations are where people tend to one another's lives in Christ. Congregations are where people grow in faith and love of Christ.

"They are the settings where practice has a way of redefining theory, and where contemporary life collides with timeless theological virtues," according to Daniel

O. Aleshire, Executive Director of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the United States and Canada. He notes that no one knows how many congregations there are in North America. Somewhere between 300,000 and 350,000 is a good guess. From cathedrals to store fronts, open country to small villages, suburban neighborhoods to county seat towns—congregations dot the landscape and provide the continent's most visible image of religious life.

While I am aware of how much harder congregations are working today than 50 years ago, I wonder how many are aware how much harder seminaries are working? Congregations are changing because the culture is changing, and seminaries must cope with how to educate students for a world that seems to be reinventing itself very rapidly. There are larger member congregations that need support from our seminaries for their staffs. Congregations employ a lot of people, and seminaries need to attend to the ministry needs of congregations.

And then there is the problem of religious

literacy. Seminary folk sometimes mention the limited biblical and theological literacy of entering students, while congregations find it increasingly difficult to get beyond the most simple of introductions to biblical education. One pastor told me he sometimes has to start with “this is what a chapter is, and this is a verse.” I read in a church university journal where a theology professor was telling of undergraduates who don’t know what incarnation means unless one puts a “re-” in front of it.

What’s the point? Seminaries serve the church. They do intellectual work. They listen to contexts. They identify what needs remembering. They develop talent and resources that help inform the life, work, and witness of the church. They educate for ministry.

Seminaries are doing a good job educating clergy. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching commissioned a three-year study funded by Lilly Endowment and Atlantic Philanthropies that examined how well theological schools prepared their students for the real world situations like helping people in times of birth and death, marriage and divorce, and sickness. I quote from the book, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005) by Charles R. Foster and others:

The research team discovered that while a variety of clergy education traditions contributes to the diversity of classroom and outside-the-classroom teaching practices across the spectrum of . . . seminaries, clergy educators share, for the most part, a set of intentions for student learning. These intentions include:

1. Developing in students the facility for interpreting texts, situations, and relationships.
2. Nurturing the dispositions and habits integral to the spiritual and vocational formation of clergy.
3. Heightening student consciousness of the content and agency of historical and contemporary contexts.
4. Cultivating student performance in clergy roles and ways of thinking.

These intentions lead to distinctive pedagogies of interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. They are so persistent and cross so many boundaries, that when taken together, they may be considered what [Carnegie President Lee S.] Shulman calls a “signature pedagogy” or teaching practice directed to developing in seminary students the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and habits they will need in their professional roles.

Our seminary graduates, through assessment procedures by the seminaries, report a very high rating for their seminary education. The only areas they report wanting more resource is in management, administration, and finance roles.

There is ONE mission—to seek the lost for Christ. There is ONE message—Jesus is the Savior of the world. There is ONE people—united by God’s love in Christ. Blest be the tie that binds! Our church and seminaries were born together. They exist to proclaim and teach the Gospel, the good news that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (II Cor. 5:19).

The tie that binds our seminaries and church forms the foundation for the LCMS Board for Pastoral Education (BPE). Begun in 2004, when the Synod dissolved the Board for Higher Education by forming two boards, namely, the Board for Pastoral Education and the Board for University Education (BUE), the BPE “serves to advocate and coordinate the formation of pastors, missionaries, and other church servants to fit the mission and ministry needs of Christ’s church.” It coordinates seminary education. It stands as the connection of church and seminary, serving the church by coordinating pre-seminary education programs, seminary education, and post-seminary continuing education. It does this by providing advocacy for pastoral education within the church and by serving the seminaries in the ful-

fillment of their mission to prepare pastors, missionaries, and deaconesses. This nine member board, elected by the church in convention, meets three or four times a year to conduct its work. They meet once a year with the BUE and once a year with the two seminaries’ Boards of Regents. You can see how integral is the work of coordination even by way of its meeting jointly with other boards. All in all, the BPE wants the best men and women to serve the church in a relevant way in order to reach today’s people with Christ.

The ATS began a targeted study in 2000 of the fundamental patterns of relationships between theological schools and their respective religious communities. The study recommendations are expected in 2007. The principal assumption of the project is that a viable relationship between the seminaries and the church is absolutely necessary for the institutional vitality and educational integrity of theological schools. Both seminaries and the church are important in identifying potential candidates for ministry. And, since the revenue needed for our seminaries comes mostly from individual donors, they are the people in the church who care about faith and the quality of leaders for the church. Finally, seminaries and church need to be connected to discern a foundational part of the seminaries’ agenda, namely, the preparation of workers for kingdom expansion.

There is ONE mission—to seek the lost for Christ. There is ONE message—Jesus is the Savior of the world. There is ONE people—united by God’s love in Christ. Blest be the tie that binds! Our church and seminaries were born together. They exist to proclaim and teach the Gospel, the good news that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (II Cor. 5:19). Our church and seminaries remain united in Christ. Thanks be to God!

Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann is the Executive Director of the LCMS Board for Pastoral Education, St. Louis, Missouri.

