

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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The establishment of the Publications Fund in 1956 permitted the inauguration of a series of Graduate Studies. The first of these studies was entitled *The Survival of the Historic Vestments of the Lutheran Church After 1555*, by Arthur Carl Piepkorn (1955; second edition in 1958; third edition and a translation into German in publication). A doctoral dissertation written by Henry P. Hamann, *Justification by Faith in Modern Theology*, was published in this series in 1957. In 1958 the 356-page book *What, Then, Is Man?* was published by Concordia Publishing House. This study of man as viewed in theology, psychology, and psychiatry was a team product in which Paul Meehl of the University of Minnesota, Kenneth Breimeier

and Martin Scharlemann of Concordia Seminary, and Richard Klann participated. Other works published in this series have been *Caspar Schwenkfeld on the Person and Work of Christ*, by Paul L. Maier; *Qumran and Corinth*, by Martin H. Scharlemann (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962); and *Yahweh and Baal*, a study of the conflict between the worship of Baal and Yahweh in the early history of Israel, by Norman C. Habel. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964)

The constantly growing enrollment in the School for Graduate Studies makes it very evident that it is destined to play a key role in developing men for a more excellent ministry.

The Fieldwork Program at Concordia Seminary

By KENNETH H. BREIMEIER

In a sense, there has always been fieldwork at Concordia Seminary. Ever since the beginning of the school, students have been preaching, teaching, and generally exercising the skills of the pastoral ministry. In another sense, the beginning of the fieldwork program might be reckoned from the inauguration of the required year of vicarage, or internship. In the early 1930s Synod asked the class that would have returned for its senior year to stay out for one year to work in the parish. The reason behind this plan seems to have been the need to cut down on the oversupply of pastors during the depression years. Students benefited so much from

this extra year, however, that the vicarage has ever since been required of all students for graduation.

In a stricter sense, though, the concept of fieldwork is of more recent origin and, in its full development at Concordia Seminary, is almost unique among theological schools. Fieldwork generally came into its own around the time of World War II. At Concordia Seminary a compulsory summer fieldwork program was instituted during the war. First a part-time and later a full-time fieldwork director became part of the staff. Thereupon followed a more systematic introduction to hospital calling and required experience in local parishes.

The early program built on the work of the student Mission Society. By the end of the 1940s, the fieldwork program was well established.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The purpose of the fieldwork program is to provide those opportunities through which students may learn the skills of the pastoral ministry. These skills include the obvious ones of teaching, calling, and so forth; but also involved are the more basic matters of attitudes, motivations, and understanding of the basic theology of the Christian ministry.

The rationale of the fieldwork program is based on the model for learning a skill. Fieldwork builds on classroom instruction, in which the student learns the abstract principles. In the fieldwork setting, then, he first observes an expert perform this skill. The next step is the student's own rudimentary efforts at doing it himself. This is followed by evaluation, the last step in the model. The student analyzes his own performance and also works through an evaluation with the supervisor.

In every specific fieldwork experience, then, there is an attempt to include the basic ingredients of observation, performance, and evaluation. This cycle is repeated over and over in the learning of a given skill, such as preaching. There is also built into the seminary curriculum one major cycle, in which the first two years provide the chief academic background; the vicarage offers the opportunities for observation, performance, and evaluation; and the senior year is a return to an intensive study of principles on the basis of the major trial run of the vicarage.

Since this model implies the close co-

ordination of class and fieldwork, an attempt is made to accomplish a tie-in wherever possible. For example, the academic instruction in teaching is coupled with a practicum in which the seminary students teach religion units in the local Lutheran schools.

STRUCTURE

There are three major divisions to the fieldwork program: resident, summer, and vicarage.

The resident program itself has four chief sections: parish, hospital, institutional, and the teaching practicum.

About 70 churches in the St. Louis area cooperate in the parish fieldwork program. From four to six students (more in a few special instances) go to a given church.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the student's association with his fieldwork parish in his first two seminary years stems from the opportunity to belong to a congregation as a lay, participating member. Because of circumstances, most students before enrolling in the seminary have not fully engaged themselves in the life of one congregation. Since these men intend to be parish pastors, this parish association provides some necessary orientation.

Moreover, in his fieldwork church the student practices many of the skills of the parish pastor. Students teach, preach, make calls, work with the young people of the parish, meet with committees about church programs, conduct the worship service, and so forth.

The student also begins to learn some of the basic attitudes required of the parish pastor. For example, he is at first likely to be disillusioned by the apathy of the people. They do not immediately respond

to his enthusiastic proposals. The parish is not as perfect as he thinks it should be. It is not run as ideally as the professor may describe it in the classroom. In this early confrontation between the ideal and actuality, the student must learn some of the basic traits of the parish pastor — love, patience, and willingness to understand and work with people as they are. In this process the student is helped to build and rebuild by the seasoned pastor-supervisor.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FIELDWORK

In connection with a required course, *Principles of Clinical Work*, each second-year student makes hospital calls one afternoon a week for one quarter. Following the calls, he discusses his clinical work with a staff chaplain. The purpose is to help students learn to bring the Word of God to the specific needs of patients. In so doing, the student also gains some insights into his own pastoral abilities.

Whereas the hospital program involves the student in relationships with single patients, the institutional program gives the student experience in working with groups, particularly groups of unusual types. In this section students teach the retarded, work with underprivileged children in low-income sections, conduct Bible classes for the aged, or carry out activities with emotionally disturbed children. The purpose of this program is to introduce the students to subcultures different from their own and to help them go beyond such stereotypes as "Negro" or "poor white" to an interest in the individual, despite what stereotyped subgroup he might belong to.

TEACHING PRACTICUM

Now going into its fourth year, the teaching practicum has proved to be an excellent opportunity for students to observe and teach under careful supervision. About 12 Lutheran schools are assisting by providing classroom situations in which the student first observes the religion instruction by the teacher and then teaches for one week. It is a minimal experience, but it does give the student the chance to see the principles of learning put into practice concurrently with the course, *Principles of Teaching*. Since a third or more of the students have not had any teaching experience before coming to the seminary, the teaching practicum takes on added importance.

A secondary benefit has come from the teaching practicum, a benefit that was rather unanticipated. Many students have developed a new respect for the task of the Lutheran elementary school teacher.

SUMMER FIELDWORK

The summer fieldwork program is now voluntary. Each year about 50 to 60 students, mostly men who have finished their first year, serve in parishes, camps, institutions and hospitals, and special ministries in the national parks. These brief excursions into actual ministries accomplish many things. The student's motivation is strengthened because he has had the chance to do what he has been preparing for so many years. The student learns what to look for in his next academic year because he understands the ministry a little better. His academic work takes on more relevance because he can apply the abstract ideas to what he encountered the previous summer.

VICARAGE

The climax of the fieldwork program is the year of vicarage. The student is assigned to a parish in the United States, Canada, or (infrequently) in other countries. He works full-time for 12 months in a parish with a supervising pastor. His work involves all facets of the parish life, with a few exceptions such as the celebration of Holy Communion, the imparting of Holy Absolution, and the administration of Holy Baptism.

The students grow pastorally during this year, many of them dramatically so. Preaching becomes less academic and more related to people, as the student becomes more and more involved in their lives. Teaching is less a matter of putting across information and more a matter of motivating and appealing for the fuller Christian life. Since counseling, pastoral care, sick calls, and all the personal work is done with people to whom the student has grown fairly close, the whole meaning of the student's pastoral work changes, with the result that he understands more fully what it is to be a minister to people.

Most students are confirmed vocationally by the vicarage; a few find that the parish ministry is, after all, not for them. The most significant growth, however, is theological in nature. In a way, the vicarage is the most convincing exegetical-systematic-practical course there can be. Many students report being awed by the signs of the power of the Gospel. Before the vicarage they had not had the opportunity to see the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of so many people, often in very critical personal situations.

The vicarage is limited to parish situations because the parish is considered to

be a basic experience prerequisite for other ministries, such as teaching and hospital work. If a student wishes to get experience in other types of ministry, he is encouraged to do so after completing the normal B.D. course.

STRENGTHS OF THE FIELDWORK PROGRAM

The first strength of fieldwork at Concordia Seminary lies in the cooperation of over 270 supervisors serving in one or the other phase of the program. Their willingness to work with the student in his weaknesses and his strengths is an incalculable contribution to the ministry of the church. Concordia Seminary is fortunate to have a good number of well-staffed churches, schools, and hospitals within a short distance of the campus.

Another strength of the program is that the students have a relationship throughout their schooling with a practicing minister. These men are available to answer the "how-is-it-really-done" type of question and also provide a neutral counseling resource for students with personal questions. During the seminary years a student has contact with as many as five different supervisors. From observation of the strengths and weaknesses of each one, the student can learn much about how he wishes to conduct his own ministry.

Although there are some disadvantages, one of the good points of the resident fieldwork program is that students are working in congregations directly with pastors, not in small, isolated, pastorless congregations sometimes at a considerable distance from the school. Thus the student can get better supervision. The potential disadvantage to this seminary's approach

is that the need for help is not always acute, and the student thus may find it more difficult to get deeply involved.

Finally, there is a service rendered by the students while they learn. It would be difficult to calculate the extent of the ministry of all of the seminary students in any given year, but it is a ministry, not just a matter of using people as subjects while the students learn. In fact, unless the student goes at his fieldwork with a sense of wanting to serve as his first motive, the very essence of the experience is destroyed.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

To a certain extent some parts of the fieldwork program came into existence for reasons not entirely related to meeting the objectives of the training program. The vicarage is an example. As a result, there needs to be a continuing effort to modify parts of the fieldwork program to coordinate them more closely with the overall thrust of the curriculum. In the case of the vicarage, for example, the idea must be developed that it is a training experience, and not only a source of help to given congregations. As the concept of the vicarage changes, however, it is important not to lose the service aspect; that is, it must continue to be a real ministry necessary for the welfare of each of the various participating congregations, as well as a source of training for the student.

As in any practical training program, the supervisor is the key to success. Therefore in this fieldwork program there needs to be a continuing emphasis on better supervision. This development, in turn,

depends on knowledge of how the supervisory process works. Basic research in this area still needs to be done.

Furthermore, as the church develops new forms of ministry, the seminary must devise ways of teaching the new skills required. For example, with greater demands on the pastor for personal counseling, a program must be developed to provide pastors with special knowledge and skills in counseling.

To push back even further, however, there must be more research into the basic questions of how students learn the skills of the ministry. What is it that accelerates learning? What is it in a student that impedes his learning? Which students need special instruction, and what kind of instruction should it be? These and a multitude of similar questions need intensive study.

CONCLUSION

The fieldwork program at Concordia Seminary provides opportunities for learning the skills of the parish ministry through experience in pastoral work of many varieties. Since no professional skill can be learned without actually practicing it, fieldwork offers an essential service to the seminary student.

At the heart of the fieldwork program is a large group of supervisors who both make experiences available to students and also work with the students in improving their subsequent performances.

The future development of the fieldwork program will be tied in with experimental efforts to establish more definitively how a student best learns these skills and how the supervisor can best teach him.