

RISE AGAIN, YE LION-HEARTED! STRATEGIC PLAN 2024–2029

By Jon S. Bruss

Last November, the Board of Regents of Concordia Theological Seminary adopted a strategic plan designed to help CTSFW thrive well into the future. The plan's overarching goal: to ramp up the formation of utterly faithful confessional Lutheran pastors and other church workers, adequate in both quantity and quality, for the thousands of ministries and missions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS).

Of course, the making of a pastor isn't a simple thing. It requires the right kind of spiritual, intellectual, personal, and physical space that not only allows for but engenders and fosters the creation of what the old Lutheran theologians called a *habitus theologicus*—a “theological habitude.” Since 1846, CTSFW has specialized in this work. From its founding until today, nine generations of pastors have been sent from this seminary to church and world determined to know only one thing—Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the salvation of the world.

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Their tool set? The means the Lord has given: His Word and blessed Sacraments. Undergirding this work? A deeply formed theological habitude. By Word constantly read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested; by Word preached and heard daily in our chapel and regular reception of the Sacrament of the Altar; by the daily drowning of the Old Adam through God's Law that the New might, by His Gospel, arise; by the “mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren” (SA III 4)—and all of that by design—CTSFW students are shaped into and take on the theological habitude that will carry them and their ministry from ordination to retirement.

The key ingredients for the formation of this theological habitude are a font, altar, and pulpit, where the Christian life is sustained; the intensive teaching and study of God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions; an inspiring physical space where this can take place; and an intentional community that lives from font, altar, and pulpit, singularly focused on the development of this theological habitude.

It's with those key ingredients in mind that we designed—and the regents adopted—our strategic plan. The plan has five major objectives.

1. Recruit the very best students we can who are capable of our robust education and formation—men of faith in Christ, of character and integrity, of intelligence and commitment to the people of God (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:6–9).
2. Cultivate a talented faculty. We're going to double down on what we've always done, improving what we do day in and day out, year in and year out. We'll be looking for the very best faculty to replace those retiring and engage in strengthening our pedagogical chops.
3. Adjust our curriculum to foreground even more a deep conversance with God's Word and our confession so that our students leave ready, by God's Word and our confession, to address the challenges the church and her mission face today.
4. Improve our aging campus to make it an inspirational place to grow in Christ and learn theology.
5. Support these efforts with a more efficient administration and the strategic use of the generous gifts of our supporters.

Students and Space

The challenges of ministry and mission in the twenty-first century are enormous: they are cultural, spiritual, economic, social, technological, and demographic. The devil has successfully convinced even some of the faithful of the weakness of the church. The students who come to us should relish the moment, for God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). And they must be able, in facing all these pressures, to “preach the Word in season and out” (1 Tim. 4:2). In the words of the wonderful hymn, “Rise again, ye lion-hearted!” (TLH 470).

Here, the church plays a key role—you play a key role. CTSFW can never send out more pastoral candidates than the church sends to us. And while we can mold and shape raw material, we can never change the underlying material. CTSFW needs the church's best—but only because the Bride of Christ deserves the best.

The formation of the theological habitude takes place best in a communal setting. Anyone in higher education will tell you that the single greatest influence on a student's educational and formational success is the peer group. But this community needs the kind of space that inspires



Call candidates enter Kramer Chapel at the opening of the Office of Vespers with the Distribution of Calls into the Holy Ministry on Wednesday, April 27, 2022, at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

mutual education and formation. As our once state-of-the-art campus now reaches seventy years of age, we need to make significant adjustments to our campus and buildings to create the space the inspires iron to sharpen iron—new housing for students; revamped classrooms to accommodate vigorous instruction; inviting places where students can receive the material support of the church (such as our Food and Clothing Co-op); spaces interior and exterior that invite long conversations over God’s Word and our confession.

Curriculum and Faculty

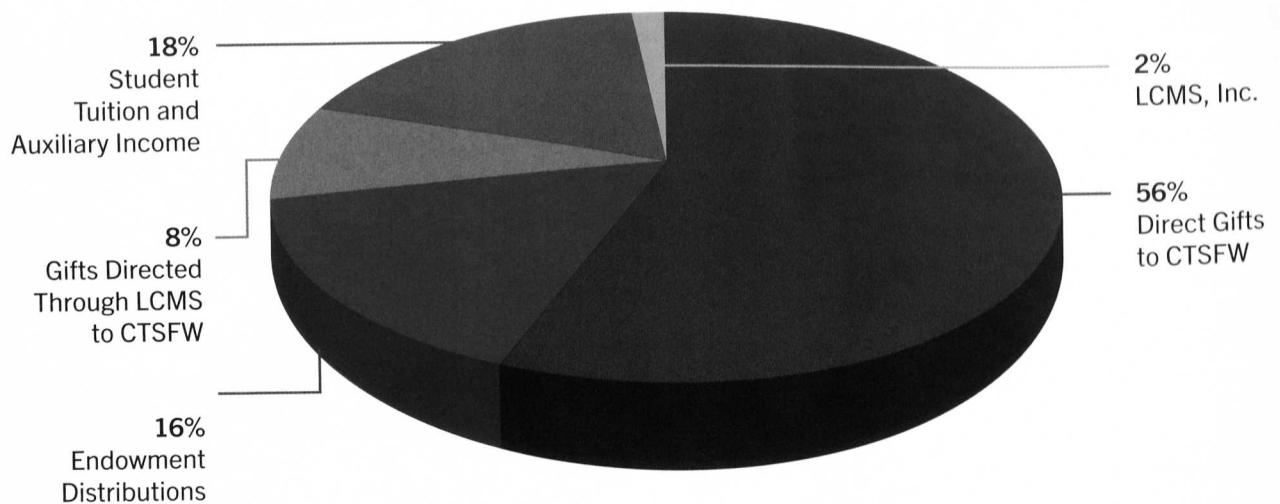
Already, our students take forty-one credits that involve reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew—and this, only after they’ve proven capable of Greek and Hebrew and demonstrated a thorough acquaintance of the Bible in English. They take three classes in the *Book of Concord*, another three in Christian dogma, and closely examine a major work of Luther for a total of twenty-one credits. Fifteen credits are devoted to understanding the course of the Gospel in history. Along the way, students learn orthodox answers to myriad heretical questions, confirming the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). In fifty-one credits students take all they’ve learned in these other courses and apply them in their own teaching, preaching, missionizing, evangelism, and every aspect of pastoral work. Needless to say, if all pastoral work is to reflect the teaching of Scripture and our Confessions, these fifty-one credits are deeply and prayerfully ruminant on God’s Word and our Lutheran teaching—even more,

on how to wield these things in faithfully applying God’s Word to sinners desperately in need of Christ.

These courses are taught by a highly qualified faculty with over 226 cumulative years of successful called pastoral ministry. Our faculty members have been church planters in North America and around the world; missionaries and theological educators on all continents but one (Antarctica); pastors of small congregations, mid-size congregations, and large ones. They’ve led evangelism in their congregations, helped form partnerships between congregations, and helped congregations recognize when their time of fruitful ministry was over. They’ve supervised vicars, served as circuit visitors, knelt at hundreds if not thousands of death beds in prayer. They’ve baptized, married, and buried. They’ve dealt with the joy of new birth and the tragedy of suicide, and preached tens of thousands of sermons on Sundays, feasts and festivals, mid-week gatherings, weddings, and funerals. All this, at the ready disposal of every student on our campus.

They also have over 500 years of cumulative experience in forming pastors. They’ve written dozens upon dozens of books, hundreds of articles. They’ve encountered every type of student and made adjustments in their approach to class time, assignments, and evaluation to help their students grasp the Bible and our theology at their Gospel core. They’ve helped students through vocational, personal, and spiritual highs and lows, and shaped new generations of pastors who leave CTSFW with the unchanging Gospel but enter a world that is anything but. Their graduates have become parish pastors,

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international missionaries, and domestic church planters; ecclesiastical supervisors, professors of theology, and church revitalizers.

Building on these strengths, our plan calls for the recruitment of new faculty who embody this fine tradition, renewed zeal for teaching and formation, and leveraging our curriculum to enhance our students' steeping in the Word.

Efficiency and Resources

Achieving these objectives requires efficient governance and adequate funding of pastoral formation. Even as we are always looking for operational efficiencies, we plan to seek significant outside consultation to help us operate even more efficiently.

Many remember the "old days" when corporate Synod underwrote a major proportion of our colleges' and seminaries' budgets. Those days are decades in the rearview mirror. Today, 2% of our annual \$17,310,173 operating budget comes directly from corporate Synod. A sixth is underwritten by distributions from our endowment. Another sixth comes from auxiliary revenue and costs assumed by students. Fully two-thirds of our budget comes from the direct giving of individuals, foundations, family trusts, and gifts that pass through corporate Synod at the direction of individuals. Our students, faculty and staff are deeply grateful for this tremendous support, as is the entire church: your gifts to the seminary ensure a constant stream of men into the ministries and missions of the LCMS.

The execution of our plan will require significant additional funding. We need to do two things in particular. First, we need to raise the funds that will enable us to

pivot away from the precarious funding model in which two-thirds of our annual operations come from gifts. To that end, we would like to increase the unrestricted endowment significantly. Second, we also need to raise funds to underwrite the major building and campus projects that will ensure that we can continue to provide a suitable and inspiring environment for the study of the Word that lies at the heart of our communal residential theological education and formation.

A Final Word

That, after all, is why CTSFW was founded and still exists. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession juxtaposes Lutheran pastoral formation with that of the Church of Rome. The latter, said Melancthon, "ordain rude asses," the result of admitting "all kinds of persons indiscriminately" (Ap XXVIII 4). Not so the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which has always followed the Bible in "not laying on hands hastily" (1 Tim. 5:22) but has insisted on instilling in our clergy the theological habitude, one marked by a "learned and eloquent piety" (so Melancthon).

That's not an aesthetic nicety. Those whom Christ has redeemed—simply because He has redeemed them—deserve to hear the Gospel full-throated. Our pastors must simply be determined to know in church and world nothing but Christ in all His fullness (1 Cor. 2:2; John 1:16) *so that in all His fullness He may be grasped by you in faith* (John 20:31). 🏹



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