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Presidential Search Underway

Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr., president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), announced September 28, 2023, that he is retiring from the presidency at the conclusion of the 2023–24 academic year. He will continue to serve CTSFW as a faculty member. To read the full news release, visit ctsfw.edu/news.

A call for nominations for the Seminary's 17th president will be available this November in Synod publications and at ctsfw.edu.

For the Life of the World

PUBLISHER

Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr.
President

PUBLISHER ASSISTANT
Carrie M. O'Donnell

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Colleen M. Bartzsch

EDITOR
Kristine S. Bruss

ART DIRECTOR
Steve J. Blakey

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

FEATURES

4 Virtues of the Pastoral Office

Geoffrey R. Boyle

We want our pastors to be good, Christian men. And our pastoral ministry students at the Seminary want to be such men. They pray for it, confess their failures, and strive for it again and again. But there's more to being a pastor—more virtues specific to this calling and this office. I've tried to sum up various lists of virtues—both general virtues of the “good man” as well as those specific to the pastoral office—into three somewhat provocative admonitions for students: Don't be weird. Don't be weak. Don't be a jerk. The guys get it.

7 Called to Trust His Word

Daniel P. Fickenscher

We're not called to be indifferent. (The concerned brother of Matthew 18 is far from that. Perhaps just as great as his desire to protect his brother's reputation is his persistence.) But we are called to trust that the Word of the Lord will not return to Him empty. It's not our word. It's not our wit. It's not our personality. It's the Lord who is going to bring sheep back to His flock, souls into His kingdom. Resting on this truth pastors are free to be self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, sober, gentle, and so on.

10 Celebrating Twenty Years of Deaconess Formation

James G. Bushur

Every human being is created to share in the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for his Father. We are made to be loved and to love. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God . . . because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Built on this foundation, deaconess formation boils down to certain fundamental questions. How do we prepare deaconess students to facilitate the bonds of divine love that bind the church together? How do we form students to love the person in front of them no matter the context or the circumstances?

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Celebrating Twenty Years of Deaconess Formation Following the “More Excellent Way”



Photo: Erik M. Lunsford/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Like any vocational program, the formation of deaconess students demands attention to both knowledge and skills. Deaconesses need to understand the doctrinal foundations for the church’s confessional, ethical, and moral life. They also need the practical skills required for visitation, counseling, catechesis, leadership, and community building. Yet while knowledge and skills are important, formation for service in the church demands something more. In addition to the instruction of the mind and the training of the hands, there is the need for the formation of the heart. Thus, deaconess formation at CTSFW gives attention to the formation of divine virtues. As Peter exhorts us, “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue” (2 Pet. 1:5).

For twenty years, Concordia Theological Seminary has trained women for service in the church as deaconesses. As director of deaconess formation, I have grown to appreciate the distinctive character of the deaconess vocation and the unique formation it requires. The deaconess vocation is oriented toward a different purpose than the pastoral office. Pastors bear the special responsibility of confessional oversight. They are trained to proclaim the true faith as confessed in the creeds and confessions of the Book of Concord. The deaconess vocation, on the other hand, seeks to facilitate the bonds of fellowship and love that integrate many members into the one body of Christ. “A new commandment I give to you,” Jesus says, “that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). This commandment represents the singular purpose of the deaconess vocation.

The claim that love is the purpose of the diaconal vocation may invite the charge of idealism. In our context, love is immediately associated with certain romantic ideals that only exist on the movie screen or in popular novels. This idealism is appealing to some precisely because it offers an escape from the cold, harsh reality of this fallen world. For the skeptic, love seems too naïve to deal with the world as it is and too weak to defend itself against real evil. Turning the other cheek appears to be a vain strategy in a world that takes pleasure in violence.

However, for Holy Scripture, true love is neither naïve nor given to a dreamy idealism. Love is not defined by

romantic fairytales but by the biblical narrative of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Early Christians often praised God as the *philanthropos*, “the lover of mankind.” God’s philanthropy is first expressed when he creates male and female in his own “image and likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Being created in the divine image means that the mystery of God’s philanthropy is hidden in our humanity. The Son is the perfect image of his Father, and humanity was created to be in the image of the Son. This mystery is unveiled in Jesus Christ, who embodies the Father’s love for mankind. God sends his own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” St. Paul writes, so that we might “be conformed to the image of his Son”

Oneness Formation

“Lent Way” (1 Cor. 12:31) **James G. Bushur**



Photo: Erik M. Lunsford/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

(Rom. 8:3, 29). To be in the image of the Son is to be loved. Thus, Paul concludes that nothing can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). Similarly, Maximus the Confessor, the seventh-century defender of the Nicene faith, simply concludes, “Love alone, properly speaking, proves that the human person is in the image of the Creator.”¹

Every human being is created to share in the Father’s love for the Son and the Son’s love for his Father. We are made to be loved and to love. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God ... because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Built on this foundation, deaconess formation boils down to certain fundamental questions. How do we prepare deaconess students to facilitate the bonds of divine

love that bind the church together? How do we form students to love the person in front of them no matter the context or the circumstances?

Like any vocational program, the formation of deaconess students demands attention to both knowledge and skills. Deaconesses need to understand the doctrinal foundations for the church’s confessional, ethical, and

moral life. They also need the practical skills required for visitation, counseling, catechesis, leadership, and community building. Yet while knowledge and skills are important, formation for service in the church demands something more. In addition to the instruction of the mind and the training of the hands, there is the need for the formation of the heart. Thus, deaconess formation at CTSFW gives attention to the formation of divine virtues. As Peter exhorts us, “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue” (2 Pet. 1:5).

To speak of “virtues” may bring to mind the philosophical virtues promoted in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Ancient philosophers taught the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. These virtues arise from the philosophers’ interest in the best way to govern the ideal city. Wielding civic power begins with wisdom and the rational deliberation of the mind. Yet the mind is often clouded by the impulses of our passions and desires. The passion of fear, for example, seeks to avoid labor, suffering, and conflict. Courage is the virtue that answers fear and gives the capacity to endure difficulties, confront challenges, and defend against threats. The desire for pleasure, prosperity, and power is countered by the virtue of temperance, which gives the capacity to restrain one’s selfish desires and govern for the good of the city. The final aim of all virtues is justice. The wise use of reason and the virtuous management of the passions work to enact justice for the city.

These philosophical virtues are concerned with the best way to rule the world; they are the virtues of the elite and the powerful. For the philosophers, all the virtues are rational and seek the goal of justice, which is defined as each receiving what he deserves. Within this perspective, love and mercy are not virtues. Clemency may be a virtue when it is shown to one who deserves it. However, mercy toward the undeserving or love for the unworthy is irrational, unjust, and immoral.

The Christian approach to the virtues is quite different from ancient

philosophies. Rather than ruling the world, Christians are interested in building the church, and the church is not to be a kingdom “of this world” (John 18:36). “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship,” Jesus tells his disciples, “but not so with you” (Luke 22:25–26). Jesus builds the church to be a fellowship of love and service. “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one




Photo: Erik M. Lunsford/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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who serves” (Luke 22:26). Thus, for the church, all true virtue originates not in our use of reason but in God’s philanthropy embodied in Jesus Christ, who is among us “as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). Each virtue is simply a different form of God’s love that is needed at a specific moment. To the

victim on the side of the road, Jesus is compassionate; to the Pharisees, he is a defender of the Truth; to Zacchaeus, he is hospitable; to the sinful woman, merciful; to his persecutors, patient; before his Father’s will, humble.

For the Scriptures, the virtues are like genetic traits inherent in God’s own being. God is love. His virtues are living powers passed on to his children through Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the virtues of Christ are at work in the church, preparing us for the good works he calls us to perform. For deaconesses, God’s call to service arises from the needs of the neighbor. Christ is in the hungry calling for our mercy; he is in the prisoner calling for our visitation; he is in the stranger calling for our hospitality; he is in the sick and the suffering calling for our kindness and compassion; he is even present when persecution comes calling for our patience and long-suffering.

For ancient philosophers, virtues aim at the just and equitable exercise of power, but for Christians, the virtues are forms of God’s great *philanthropia* and therefore give us the capacity to love the one in front of us no matter the context or the circumstances. This year we celebrate two decades of deaconess formation. It has been my delight to see our graduates grow into a community of mercy that facilitates the bond of love that “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). While the world seeks power, let us seek “a still more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). 

Dr. James G. Bushur
(James.Bushur@ctsfw.edu) is
The Carl and Erna Weinrich
Associate Professor of New
Testament and Early Church
Studies and director of Deaconess
Formation programs at Concordia
Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.



1 Maximus the Confessor, Letter 2: To John the Cubicularius, in Maximus the Confessor, translated by Andrew Louth (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 86.