

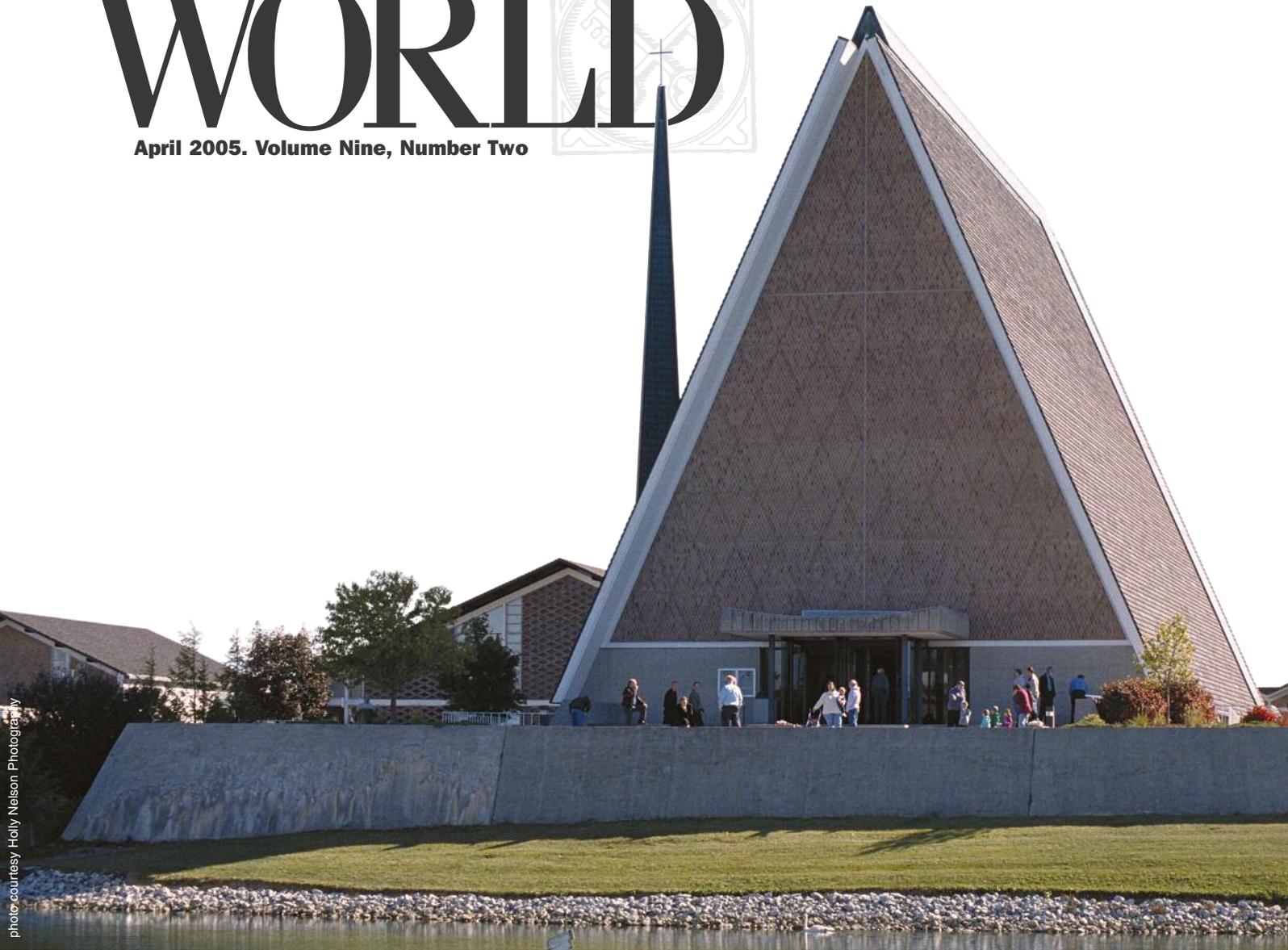
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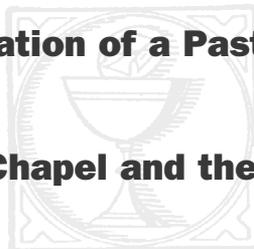


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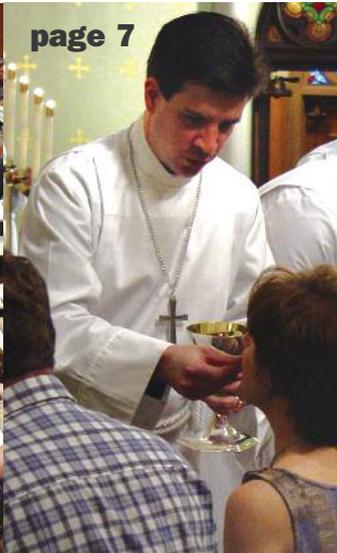



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By Jonathon J. Bakker, Fourth-Year Seminarian, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

It is no coincidence that the things that make Lutherans Lutheran are the things that Lutheran seminarians learn most in seminary: Jesus Christ as the center of the Scriptures and theology; the proper distinction of Law and Gospel; and the centrality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to name a few.

7 Serving While Learning

By John C. Bestul, Fourth-Year Seminarian, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

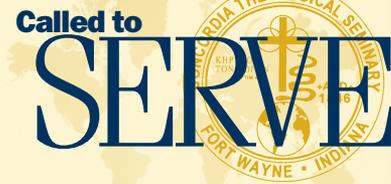
As the church prays that our Lord would send men into His vineyard, may it also pray that through congregations and pastors He provides those men opportunities to serve. For it might be said that the seminarian serves while he learns in order that he might best learn how to serve.

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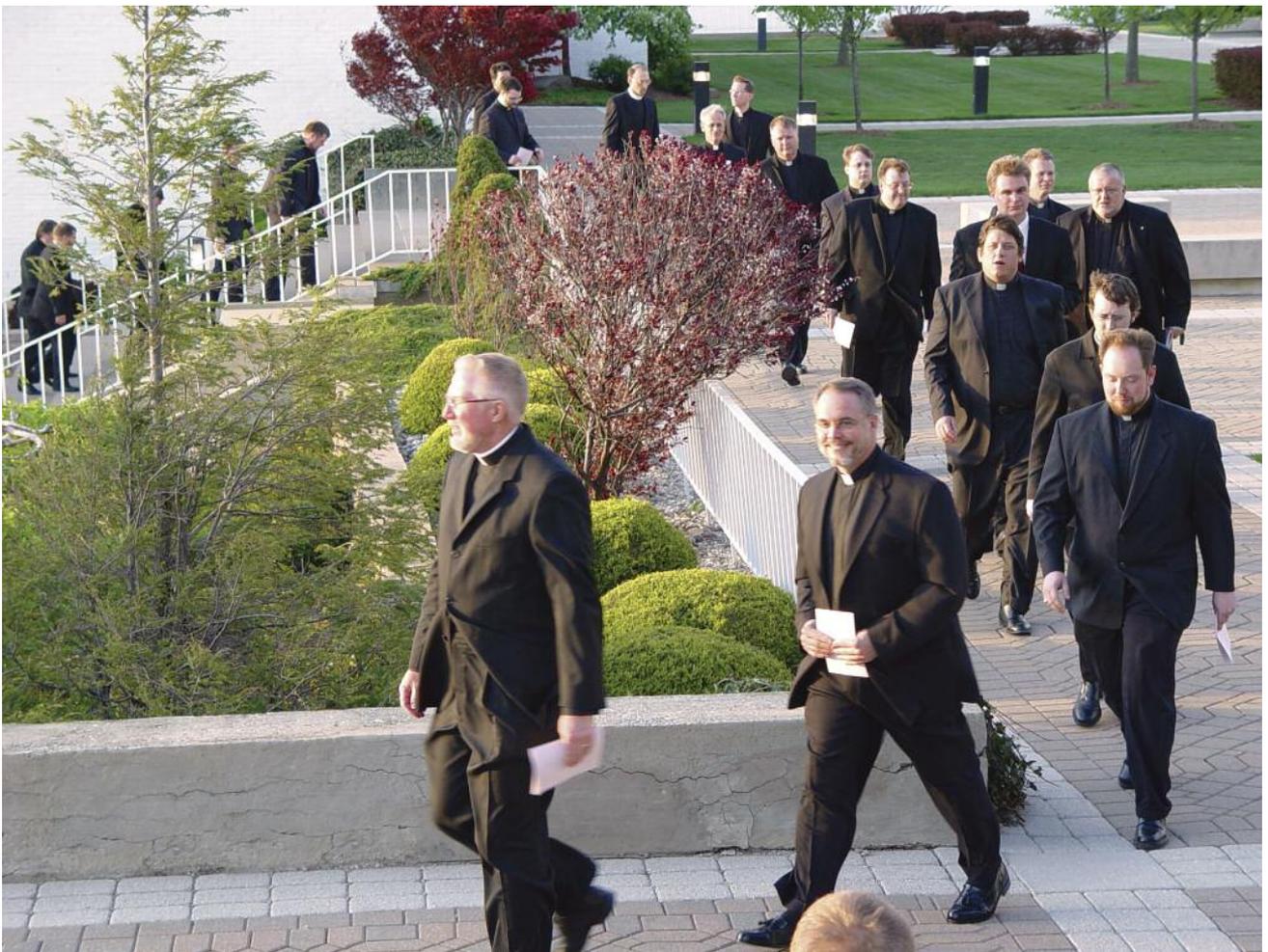


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Formation of a Pastor:

Classroom — to — Church

By Jonathon J. Bakker



Future pastors are what they eat, so to speak, and nourishing seminarians with the finest food encompasses what seminaries do in forming pastors. Each day at the seminary students attend classes and chapel, and interact with one another in the cafeteria, in the hallways, and in the library. The hours spent in study, discussion, and in the classroom will translate into educated, articulate, and informed pastors for the church. At least that is the prayer of every seminary professor.

Sometimes things can be lost in the translation, however, and seminarians (as well as pastors) can find themselves at odds with each other over seemingly simple things. This is where the time students spend at the seminary, and in particular in the classrooms and with each other, is so valuable. If becoming a pastor were as simple as imparting information and filling the brains of the students with facts and answers, it would be far easier to stay home and read the books. While that may be a lot cheaper and more efficient, isolation is no way to train a pastor, nor does the seminarian learn what he needs to learn.

The professors feed seminarians good “food” in the classroom. Tests, assignments, and projects may be necessary for grades, but they are not the chief means of forming future pastors at the seminary. All of those things help, but it is the interaction with professors, fellow students, and most of all with the Son of God as He comes to us daily in the chapel that prepares seminarians to be pastors.

Seminarians are formed into undershepherds of the Good Shepherd so that just as they have been fed, they will also feed others. In the classroom, professors teach students the language and the content of the Christian faith from the unique perspective of the Lutheran Church. It is no coincidence that the things that make Lutherans Lutheran are the things that Lutheran seminarians learn most in seminary: Jesus Christ as the center of the Scriptures and theology; the proper distinction of Law and Gospel; and the centrality of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection to name a few. It may be surprising to hear at first but those Lutheran teachings are also the basis of the pastoral care, counseling, preaching, teaching, leading worship, and everything else that a pastor does. In truth, it should be more surprising not to emphasize those Lutheran teachings in the seminary, not only because they

come from Holy Scripture, but also because they deliver Christ and His gifts most purely.

When a Lutheran pastor visits a family in an emergency, he has been prepared to give pastoral care that is grounded in Holy Scripture, he has been prepared to give the Lord’s body and blood to those hungry for salvation, and he has been prepared to comfort the distressed with Jesus’ victory over sin and death. That care, which proclaims Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection against the powers of this world, is first learned in the seminary classroom. The professors feed the students the same food that the students themselves, in turn, will feed to others as pastors.

One of the benefits of such learning at the seminary is that the students are not alone as they are trained. Seminary students are fed good food when they are engaged in learning together. The community at the seminary fosters this learning by ensuring that it happens both in and out of the classroom. What the professors teach in class is refined in the dormitories, the hallways, the library, and in the cafeteria. One of the most pleasant aspects of studying theology at Concordia Theological Seminary has been the regular contact that students have with the professors outside of the classroom. The opportunity to sit with and discuss theology with a professor while enjoying a meal assists future pastors as they make connections between what they have just learned, what they already know, and what



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they will soon face as servants of the church.

Interactions with classmates are another facet of understanding what happens in the classroom and how what the seminarians learn there will be of aid to future parishioners. While it is not exactly the same as discussing a difficult question with a professor, working through the issues among classmates is just as important. It teaches future pastors the invaluable habit of cooperatively thinking and learning with others who are either struggling with the same matter or have had previous experience. This practice prepares seminarians for what will take place throughout their own lives as pastors. Once a student has been on vicarage, he knows and understands that the problems that arise in the parish go beyond most of the hypothetical situations considered in the classroom. The network of fellow pastors in the circuit and pastors throughout the district and Synod is a priceless resource to fresh seminary graduates who have learned to work with others in finding appropriate responses to complex situations. The nature of community learning which begins at the seminary translates into a nature of community among pastors who, while serving their own parishes, assist one another in faithfully serving their Lord and His people.

The formation of future pastors goes from the classroom to the community, but it does not stop at that point. The ultimate reinforcement of what happens in the classroom and in the community at the

seminary takes place every day in Kramer Chapel. Seminary students are fed not only good food, but also the best food as they worship, daily hearing Jesus' death proclaimed from the pulpit for the forgiveness of sin and partaking of His precious body and blood given at the altar.

The academic instruction and discussions among professors and classmates all lead into the corporate worship of the seminary community. Future pastors are finally prepared for service to their future congregations in the chapel. The basic concepts given in the classroom take on flesh in the chapel as the professors and other guest preachers proclaim the forgiveness, life, and salvation which is given for all in Jesus. The questions and concerns that seminarians talk about outside of the classroom give way to prayer and singing in the chapel as the Triune God serves and strengthens the community in the Lord's Supper.

Grounded in this life, the seminary sends forth seminarians to the church who will shepherd as they have been shepherded, teach as they have been taught, and finally feed as they have been fed. Future pastors are indeed what they eat, and it is for the life of the church and for the life of the world that seminaries are dedicated to nourishing students with the very best food: their Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jonathon J. Bakker is a fourth-year seminarian at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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