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## For the Life of the World

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# Pastoral Com

Paul J. Grime



*Above: Shepherd of the City Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, CTSFW Vicar Jonah Domenichelli shares with VBS kids about Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross.*

A century or more ago, what expectations did congregations have of their pastor? He needed to be able to preach, of course, and to visit the sick. Very often, however, he was not only tasked with duties in the church, but also required to teach in the school, including many subjects beyond religion. He might have to stoke the wood-burning stove each morning, clear snow away from the door, and complete whatever else was needed before his pupils or parishioners arrived.

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Times have certainly changed. Or have they? In many ways it seems that a pastor must be a jack-of-all-trades—and we'll put aside such mundane things as turning up the thermostat on a cold morning or starting the coffee for Bible class. Pastors, it seems, need to be ready and able to do just about anything. They still have to be able to preach. And teach. And balance multiple schedules. They provide direction to all sorts of groups within the congregation, giving guidance to the altar guild, shaping and molding members of the board of elders, engaging the youth, visiting the sick, comforting the dying, providing counsel to the emotionally distraught, preparing couples for marriage, helping moms and dads through the challenges of parenthood, supporting couples in marital discord, visiting the unchurched, encouraging both young and old to consider vocations of service within the Church.

The list is never ending. While he isn't responsible for the congregation's finances, he needs to know how to read a budget. He has to have a knack for recruiting volunteers in the church to teach Sunday school, to serve on boards and committees, or to sing in the choir. In addition to Sunday and midweek sermons, he has to be able to pull together funeral sermons with little advance notice. And it goes on.

How does the Seminary prepare future pastors for such a wide array of expectations? There are plenty of things that need to be taught, as our students can attest from the many hours they spend in class and an even larger number of hours hitting the books. But many of the skills that we want our pastors to possess aren't taught so much as "caught." While some of that can happen through study, more

often than not a future pastor is molded and shaped by observing and doing.

These skills are what we call the pastoral competencies. Within our program of formation, seminarians participate in many ungraded activities that we have categorized into six broad areas: 1) worship, 2) teaching, 3) preaching, 4) evangelism and outreach, 5) spiritual care, and 6) administration and leadership. Our goal over the course of a seminarian's four years of preparation is to bring him to a level of competence that will allow him to hit the ground running; not as an expert, to be sure, but as someone who can competently serve the people of God even while knowing that he still has a lot to learn.

How is this done? As soon as our students begin their studies, they are assigned to a local congregation where they will carry out some of the competencies for their first two years. We have developed a graduated approach that allows the students to move slowly through their experiences in order to build both their competence and their confidence. The goal is that, by the end of their second year, they have had enough experiences to equip them for their vicarage year.

Normally, the third year of studies is spent in a vicarage congregation, which can be located anywhere in the United States (and even occasionally overseas). The intention of this year-long internship is to give the man a thorough grounding in the pastoral competencies, helping him both to broaden his experiences and to attain higher levels of achievement.

Upon his return to the Seminary for his fourth and final year of studies, a careful debriefing by the vicarage supervisor allows the Seminary to



**Above:** *Serving the needy as part of Lutheran Church of the Redeemer's ministry outreach in Baltimore, Maryland. CTSFW students (l-r) Tim Steele II, Daniel Wunderlich, Austin Meier took part in a nine-day Urban Immersion Experience in the city hosted by the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer and Martini Lutheran Church, in conjunction with the Wyneken Project.*

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determine whether the vicar had sufficient exposure to the broad range of experiences and demonstrated an expected level of competence. If there are a few areas that are lacking, the Seminary can ask the student to gain exposure in these specific areas in his final year. The goal, as said earlier, is to send out a soon-to-be pastor who is ready to serve the people of God, who recognizes the myriad tasks that lie before him and is ready to continue to grow in these competencies.

One final component of the formation of future pastors that the Seminary has focused on in recent years concerns his spiritual and personal growth. In addition to a deep study of the Scriptures and the doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church as drawn from those Scriptures, it is also important that a student get to know himself better, to understand what makes him tick and how he relates to others. Because the very essence of a pastor's calling is the need to work with people, day in and day out, it is important that we help our students—your future pastors—to develop their relational skills as well.

In recent years, our faculty has begun to shift from a role as academic advisor to that of mentor, recognizing that we have a unique privilege to walk alongside these men as they prepare for the Office of the Holy Ministry. Sharing our own experiences—our successes as well as our foibles—helps them to see that proclaiming the grace of God to His people is an art, not a science, one that is learned over many years and often through much adversity. Yet it is by that very grace of God that we step forth in faith and joy to serve His people the gifts of God for their salvation.

Preparing servants of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century is as complicated as ever. We at CTSFW are honored to join with the whole Synod in carrying out that task for the sake of the Gospel. 🏳️

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serves as Dean of Spiritual  
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**Right:** CTSFW seminarian Jonathan Olson (pictured third from left) with youth members of Shepherd By the Lakes Lutheran Church, Syracuse, Indiana, at the Chicago Right to Life March.

