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Volume Twenty One, Number Two



## For the Life of the World

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*For the Life of the World* is mailed to all pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States and Canada and to anyone interested in the work of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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# **The Importance of Excellence in SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

**By Peter K. Lange**

I had no idea how fundamentally Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW), Fort Wayne, would change me. I remember commenting to my family, sometime near the end of my first quarter, that I felt like I was in an entirely different world and that my thinking and world view were being reshaped to the very core. It was much more than academics, newly acquired knowledge, tools and skills for my eventual ministry. It was that, without even anticipating it or realizing that it would happen, I was being drawn into a much deeper thirst for God's Word and a stronger desire to be immersed in His Word and worship as much as possible.

It's not that a life grounded in God's Word and worship was new to me. I had been blessed with wonderful and pious parents, grandparents and extended family who were members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). I grew up in a home where we attended church every Sunday and on many other occasions as well. I attended 17 years of Lutheran schools prior to seminary where I was also blessed to be formed spiritually, along with the spiritual formation worked through my parents, pastors and fellow Christians.

Yet my new life at CTSFW was something different, and Kramer Chapel was at the heart of that. To see the whole campus pause every day at mid-morning; to see so many professors take a break from their important teaching, writing and other duties; to see people from every level of seminary staff come together daily for 20-25 minutes of Scripture, hymns, homily and prayer—planned and led with the greatest of care—these things were deeply impressive to me. There I learned to appreciate daily prayer in a whole new way. And the modeling of worship that I observed on a daily basis became a very formative part of my own attitudes and approach to worship as a parish pastor.

But it wasn't daily chapel life only. There were the special weekend and evening services where folks from miles around would come to hear God's Word set to some of the most beautiful Christian music ever written. There was the Kantorei, in which I was blessed to sing, where I was further formed

by daily rehearsals under the humble and able leadership of Kantor Richard Resch. And there was life in two local congregations, first as a fieldworker and later as a student member.

But neither was my spiritual formation only worked through worship, music and congregational life. Certainly also through the great amount of reading required for classes—because it was theology, the study of God and His self-revelation to the world—certainly this academic reading also contributed tremendously toward my spiritual formation, as well as toward my knowledge and understanding of our Triune God. Even outside of class—through daily conversation

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**One of my greatest joys as a district president is to attend the annual spring Call Service at each of our seminaries and to witness the announcement of the divine calls extended to so many, and especially to those who will be entering the Lord's harvest field in my own district. As I welcome new pastors into the Kansas District, I give thanks not only for the education and tools for ministry that they have been given, but for the spiritual formation that has been worked in them by the seminary—a formation that equips them to be not mere technicians or dispensers of God's Word, but caring undershepherds of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.**

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*Final-year students waiting to process into Kramer Chapel for the Candidate Call Service on April 25, 2017.*




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**Even outside of class—through daily conversation with fellow students, faculty and staff, through the modeling by faculty and staff that I observed, and through dorm and personal devotions which became increasingly a part of my daily routine—in all these ways, and more, I was not only educated, but shaped and formed into a pastor.**

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with fellow students, faculty and staff, through the modeling by faculty and staff that I observed, and through dorm and personal devotions which became increasingly a part of my daily routine—in all these ways, and more, I was not only educated but shaped and formed into a pastor. That is, into a servant of Christ and His people who recognizes and confesses his sinful unworthiness, but lives from the Gospel, with a compelling desire to handle the Word of truth rightly for the benefit of those entrusted to his care and for all who don't know Jesus.

Fast forward then to the morning after my ordination. The spiritual formation that the Lord had worked in me prior to and at CTSFW allowed me to begin Day One of my ministry with a *habitus* and a firm grounding in the things most essential. St. Paul wrote to the Colossians in chapter three of his epistle, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” And I thank God that as the stresses, pressures, demands and burdens of the ministry gradually descended upon me—as the blissful life that I had known in the seminary of being able to focus primarily on filling my well with God’s Word and theology, suddenly shifted to a vocation of giving out those divine gifts that I had been taking in—I thank God that from Day One of my new calling I

had the blessing of an enduring spiritual formation to keep me grounded in the Word of God, to keep replenishing the well from which I was now continually giving to others, and to give me a framework and perspective from which to consider each new issue that arose in pastoral ministry.

That was 27 years ago. And after 25 years of serving as a parish pastor in two successive congregations, the Lord saw fit to give me the new vocation of president of the LCMS Kansas District. Now even more in this work of oversight which is vital for the Church but regretfully, so often today, less tied to pulpit and altar and the daily giving out of Christ’s gifts—now more than ever I am thankful to have the grounding of a spiritual formation wrought through the seminary and others—a formation which the Lord nurtures each day by the continued giving of His gifts.

One of my greatest joys as a district president is to attend the annual spring Call Service at each of our seminaries and to witness the announcement of the divine calls extended to so many, and especially to those who will be entering the Lord’s harvest field in my own district. As I welcome new pastors into the Kansas District, I give thanks not only for the education and tools for ministry that they have been given, but for the spiritual formation that has been worked in them by the seminary—a formation that equips them to be not mere technicians or dispensers of God’s Word, but caring undershepherds of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. I give thanks for the various provisions that are available to continue nurturing this spiritual formation—resources such as Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS), the blessing of a father confessor, of circuit conferences and study groups—whereby the excellent spiritual formation shaped during the seminary years can continue to be a blessing to the Church throughout each pastor’s ministry. 🏡

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