

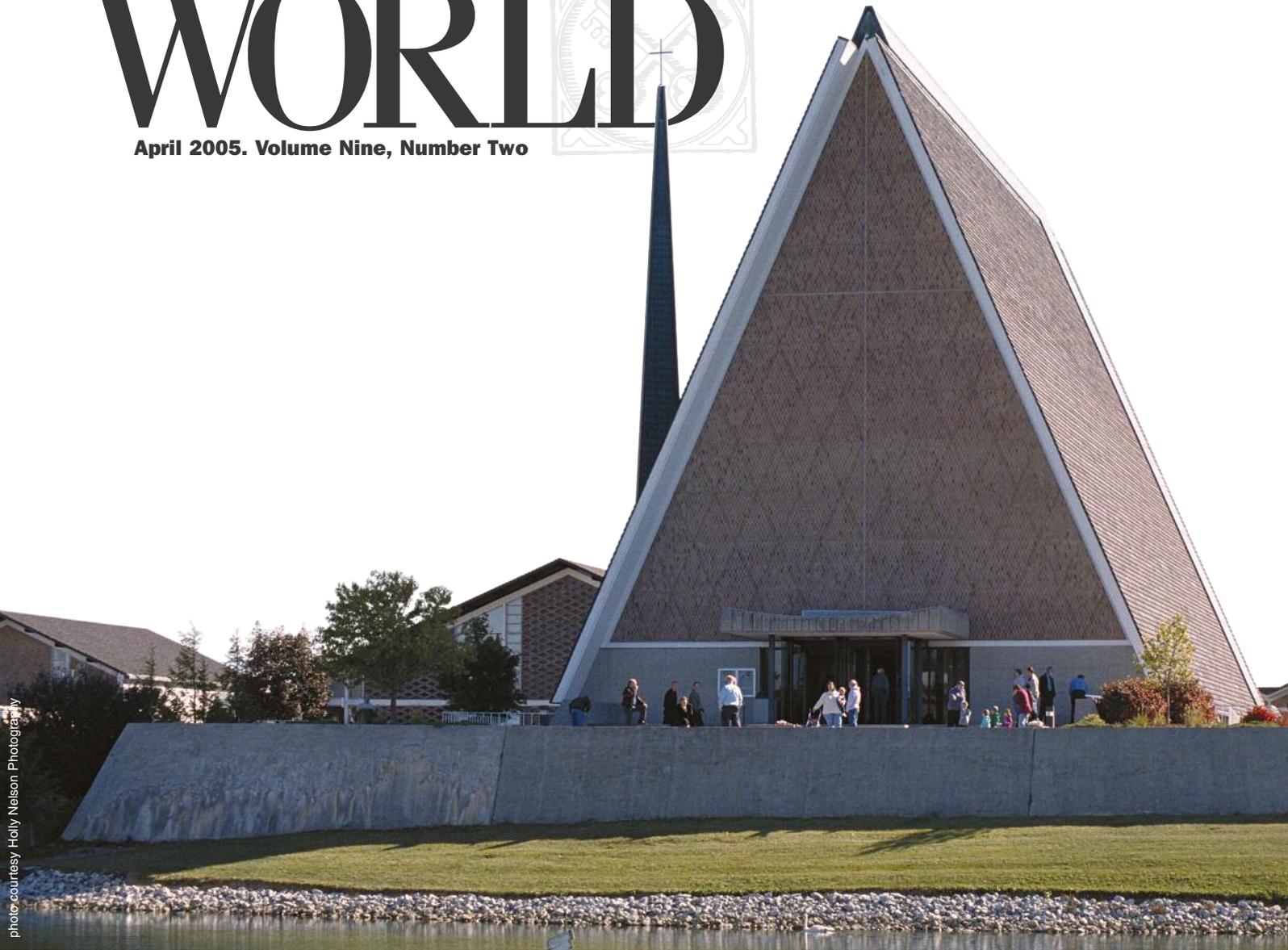
For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

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photo courtesy Holly Nelson Photography

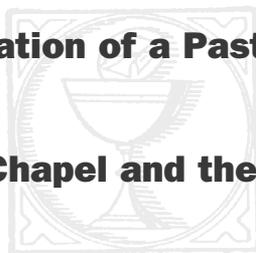


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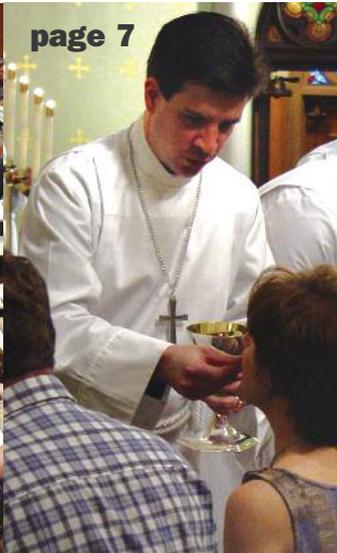


  
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THEOLOGICAL  
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## FEATURES

### 4 Formation of a Pastor: Classroom to Church

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

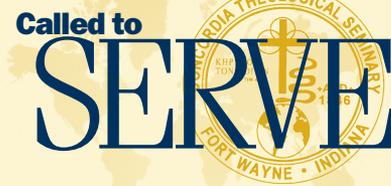
As the church prays that our Lord would send men into His vineyard, may it also pray that through congregations and pastors He provides those men opportunities to serve. For it might be said that the seminarian serves while he learns in order that he might best learn how to serve.

### 10 Chapel and the Formation of the Pastor

By Gifford A. Grobien, Fourth-Year Seminarian, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

The chapel services are the services the seminarians will be praying in their own parishes in a few years. They are learning by doing; learning to pray for their people by praying in the chapel.

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# Serving While Learning

By John C. Bestul

Conventional wisdom tells us that practice makes perfect. While no pastor would claim perfection, most will affirm that practice is an indispensable component in the formation of any man who is being prepared for the Office of the Ministry. As a seminarian is trained, he is not only equipped with the body of theological knowledge appropriate for a man whom God will place among His people to teach and lead them (orthodoxy), but he is also taught the skill, or art, of rightly applying his knowledge (orthopraxis). In other words, by scholarship and study the student obtains the tools a pastor must have; practice teaches him how best to use them.

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**Within the classroom setting and without, seminarians are given opportunities to gain this much-needed experience by serving. From among the variety of opportunities geared toward outfitting the man-in-training with good pastoral practice skills, two stand above all the rest as invaluable opportunities to learn by serving: fieldwork and vicarage.**

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It is practice at being a pastor—otherwise known as *pastoral practice*. Within the classroom setting and without, seminarians are given opportunities to gain this much-needed experience by serving. From among the variety of opportunities geared toward outfitting the man-in-training with good pastoral practice skills, two stand above all the rest as invaluable opportunities to *learn by serving*: fieldwork and vicarage.

Only weeks after beginning the first year of study, each seminarian is assigned to a supervising pastor and congregation so he may begin to “get his feet wet” doing those things that, in time, will become second nature. The seminary’s fieldwork coordinator carefully selects the area’s pastor/congregation that is best able to suit each student’s needs and effectively shape him. The assignment will take the seminarian (and family) on a Sunday morning drive lasting anywhere from five minutes to one-and-a-half hours plus (which is rare). There is no standard profile for fieldwork congregations, but they vary in age, form, and size almost as much as the students who are assigned to them. Some churches are in rural locales and stand solitarily above harvest-ready fields; other churches stand almost anonymously amid high-reaching buildings and inner-city, metropolitan activity.

Generally, the fieldwork experience will be the student’s first exposure to the role of leadership in the worship service. Very quickly he begins to serve in a number of capacities. As the lector, he will read the appointed Scripture for the day. He is given the responsibility of assisting with the distribution of the Lord’s body and blood in Holy Communion. He may be asked to lead portions of the liturgy, such as the “Opening Sentences,” or to offer up the “Prayer of the Church.” Usually it is after he has become accustomed to the routine and the expectations that he will spread his wings a bit more and begin to participate in the preaching and the teaching. Depending upon the needs of the congregation and the decision of the pastor, a fieldworker may be more or less involved in weekly duties. In whatever he does, the man in training has the assurance that he will be under the watchful eye of the ordained pastor with whom he serves.

The fieldworker serves for six academic quarters, the equivalent of two years. Many relationships are formed and long-lasting friendships built because of the presence of the fieldworker in the midst of the people he serves and with whom he receives the gifts of Him who serves them.

Whereas the phrase “getting your feet wet” aptly describes service as a fieldworker, “immersion” perhaps is most indicative of the seminarian’s experience of vicarage. After completing the required classroom work, generally over the course of the first two years, seminarians are sent “abroad” to begin an internship, or an apprenticeship, called “vicarage.” In most cases, a vicarage assignment won’t be overseas, but it will bring the seminarian to most any state within the continental United States, and in some cases Canada. For one year the student works alongside a veteran pastor, daily interacts with the life of the congregation, and participates in the duties of the called pastor(s).

The word “vicar” means “substitute,” and the title holds true as the vicar often acts in place of the pastor—visiting members who are sick or infirm, teaching members in Bible classes, preaching, and representing the pastor or called staff members at board meetings. While he stands in for the pastor, the vicar also





remains under the pastor's supervision and tutelage; for he is yet to be ordained and, therefore, lacks the full authority of one who has been called by Christ to serve as a pastor. Because the vicar learns by serving in the place of the pastor, it is common practice that the pastor review and approve much of what the vicar will be preaching or teaching. For example, a vicar is to expect that the sermon he prepares will be reviewed and authorized by the supervising pastor before he enters the pulpit to wield a powerful double-edged sword: the Law and Gospel of God's Word.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "know" (*yada*) means more than a mere head knowledge; it means to know and understand something by experience. For most seminarians their service as a vicar affords them the kind of knowledge that no lecture can adequately teach. It is only after having first grown to love the individuals of the congregation that a seminarian can truly understand the mutual bond that exists between the long-time member and her pastor, and to appreciate the high honor it is to stand at her bedside as she lies dying and speak to her the very words that Christ Himself would speak had He not put you there to do it for Him. It is only after having become intimately familiar with the lives—scarred, pained, and troubled by sin—of those who sit before you that a seminarian can fully know the joy it is to stand before them and preach God's complete forgiveness on account of Christ. It is by first being acquainted with a man's long and winding road that the seminarian can know what it must mean for the man to realize that Christ brought that road to His altar where the man now waits on bended knee to receive what has been given and shed for him.

Experience is often the teacher's finest tool. This is especially true in regard to pastoral formation. Christ Jesus Himself was not about to train His pastors without ensuring them a bit of field experience. As professors and seminarians are known to joke: even Christ sent His disciples on a vicarage (Luke 10). Seminarians, past and present, are indebted to the congregations and pastors that have received them and provided an environment in which budding seminarians could hone the skills of pastoral practice. 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.

*John C. Bestul is a fourth-year seminarian at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*

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