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For the Life of the World

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

Cover image: Fourth-year student Anthony Keilani rings the Springfield Bell after completing his final class, a longstanding tradition on the CTSFW campus. Keilani has been called to serve Redeemer Lutheran Church in Sidney, Ohio.

FEATURES

4 Formed to Care: The Role of Lutheran Hymnody Kevin J. Hildebrand

In our life together at CTSFW, we rejoice and celebrate the great variety of hymnody that the church sings. We teach about hymns in the classroom, we live with them in chapel, and we share them with the church and the rest of the world. All the while, these hymns of the church form our students into servants who are equipped to live out the Seminary's motto: to teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all.

7 Formed to Care: Confessional Theology as Framework Brian T. Stark

The essential role of confessional theology as the underlying framework for pastoral ministry, care, and practice in our churches cannot be overstated. Pastoral ministry never takes place in a theological vacuum—if confessional theology isn't supplying the framework, some other theological (or business!) method or model will. When we understand that the goal of pastoral ministry is to teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all, the necessity and practicality of having confessional theology at its center becomes clear.

10 Formed to Care: The Mentoring Community Todd A. Peperkorn

Part of my work as a professor at CTSFW has included serving as a mentor to some of the fine men who will be pastors in Christ's church someday. Each person's challenges are different. Some struggle with academics. Others with field education. Still others with balancing school and home. Regardless of the challenges, Christ is with them, and by demonstrating genuine care and mercy toward them, mentors can model how to be a pastor, and what that looks like through the good and the bad.

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Formed to Care: Confessional Theology as Framework

Brian T. Stark



“A pastor is a shepherd of sheep who need to be shown the way to good pasture. A deaconess is a mercy worker who serves and ministers to those same sheep. In a parish setting, a pastor and a deaconess can model the mercy, the love, the joy, and the peace of Christ to people who desperately need it.”

Rev. David Nehrenz, sermon at the Vicarage and Deaconess Internship Assignment Service

What the church needs now more than ever are confessional pastors, that is, pastors firmly rooted in the theology of the Lutheran Confessions as they carry out the tasks of ministry. Confessional pastors boldly embrace Lutheran identity and the beauty of confessional theology with the conviction that, in these, we have what the world is looking for and what the faithful so desperately need: authentic Christianity in an age when the church can hardly be distinguished from the gnostic culture in which she lives.



On April 24, the Rev. David Nehrenz, president of the LCMS Oklahoma District and pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Norman, addressed second-year students who were about to learn where they would be placed as vicars and deaconess interns. In his sermon, Nehrenz described a world filled with “scattered sheep,” people who are lost, overshadowed by darkness, starving, injured, and weak.

“The Lord will use YOU to guide them on the right path,” he told students.

He returned to the plight of the sheep. “You are being brought into the midst of parishes filled with people who are inundated with horrible, Satanic worldviews that bring only doubt, depression, desperation, and death. These four walls hem them in. They have no escape. How can they be reborn and renewed in such dire straits? Only by Jesus, the Son of God, who makes us sons of God in our Baptism.”

His sermon was a textbook display of the confessional theology at the heart of worker formation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and at the heart of pastoral care in the parish.

The Need for Confessional Pastors

We often hear the lament that the church needs more pastors. While that sentiment is true, it is also incomplete. What the church needs now more than ever are confessional pastors, that is, pastors firmly rooted in the theology of the Lutheran Confessions as they carry out the tasks of ministry. Confessional pastors boldly embrace Lutheran identity and the beauty of confessional theology with the conviction that, in these, we have what the world is looking for and what the faithful so desperately need: authentic Christianity in an age when the church can hardly be distinguished from the gnostic culture in which she lives.

The essential role of confessional theology as the underlying framework for pastoral ministry, care, and practice in our churches cannot be overstated. Pastoral ministry never takes place in a theological vacuum—if confessional theology isn’t supplying the framework, some other theological (or business!) method or model will. When we understand that the goal of pastoral ministry is to teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all, the necessity and practicality of having confessional theology at its center becomes clear. It’s a bold statement, to be sure, but confessional theology means successful ministry.

This is true for many reasons. The most significant is that confessional theology clearly defines who pastors are and what they are called to do. A military officer cannot succeed without clearly defined mission parameters. The same is true for pastors. What is the objective of pastoral ministry? How do I go about achieving it? What does success in pastoral ministry look like? These questions are determinative—when we get the answers right, our foundation for effective ministry stands secure; when we get them wrong, we are destined for failure. Confessional theology gets the answers right.

Confessional theology is pastoral theology—theology that equips workers to be faithful shepherds of their flock. The Lutheran Confessions not only establish the mission parameters of pastoral ministry and equip pastors to perform the tasks of ministry with distinction but also serve as a safeguard against all ministry trends and fads that obscure the Gospel.

This is true, in the first place, because confessional theology is biblical theology. Confessional pastors “believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged” (Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Rule and Norm).

Second, with the foundation of Holy Scripture firmly in place, the Lutheran Confessions define the Gospel, that is, the doctrine of justification by faith, upon which the church stands or falls: “Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight [Rom. 3-4]” (Augsburg Confession IV).


Confessional pastors take Luther’s words to heart: “Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, ‘There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ [Acts 4:12]. ‘And with his stripes we are healed’ [Isa. 53:5]. On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory” (Smalcald Articles I).

Finally, the Confessions provide pastors with a clear answer concerning the specific task to which they are called: “In order that we may obtain this faith, God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel” (Augsburg Confession V).

Confessional Formation

All of this is to say that confessional theology provides the roadmap to faithful and effective pastoral ministry that eternally blesses both the faithful and the lost. The pastor’s doctrine and practice, what he preaches and teaches and the worship he conducts, are always determined by and based in the means through which the Spirit creates saving faith in those who believe the Gospel, namely the Word of Holy Scripture and the Sacraments. Instilling a working knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions is therefore a primary focus of our Seminary’s curriculum. By it our students enter the parish equipped to proclaim to all people that, with the church of all ages, this is what we believe, teach, and confess.

Men choose to pursue the Office of the Holy Ministry at Concordia Theological Seminary for many reasons: our world class faculty, our emphasis on the historic liturgy of the church and the central role of Kramer Chapel in pastoral formation, our close-knit seminary community, and even the serene beauty of our campus. But most of all they are drawn by the fact that, from its inception, no other institution has embraced confessional theology and Lutheran identity as boldly and consistently as Concordia Theological Seminary.

The church needs confessional pastors now more than ever. They are formed at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. 

The Rev. T. Brian Stark is an Admission Counselor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. He also serves as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Corunna, Indiana.



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