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## Three Overtures of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

Article III of the Constitution of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (III.3) lists as one of the objectives of its existence the training and continuing growth of its pastors, and the synod has committed this responsibility, above all, to the two seminaries of the church. The synodical bylaws, in a related way, include the faculties of the institutions of education of the synod among those entities from which overtures may be received by a synodical convention (*Handbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1992 Edition, 3.19.a.2*). The *Faculty Handbook* of Concordia Theological Seminary stipulates, accordingly, that the faculty "by its very nature considers it a duty as well as a privilege" to provide the synod with advice by means of its overtures—as well as by other means (1990: 2.04.2).

In the course, therefore, of its meeting of 9 March 1995 the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne resolved to address to the synod in convention the three memorials printed on the pages which follow. (While these two introductory paragraphs are the private composition of the undersigned, his signature as secretary represents, as in the *Convention Workbook*, the requisite testimony to the action of the faculty stated here and below.) The Resolution 3-01B to which the first overture refers in its first whereas-clause was entitled "To Adopt Recommendations of Lay Worker Study Committee Report as Amended" and may be found on pages 111-114 of the *Convention Proceedings: Fifty-Seventh Regular Convention: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: Wichita, Kansas, July 7-14, 1989*. The overtures below, then, have already been submitted to the Fifty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod which has been summoned to assemble in Saint Louis (Missouri) in July (15-21) of this year. All three proposals, in consequence, will appear, of course, in the forthcoming *Convention Workbook* in the several locations allotted them by the secretary of the synod. The overtures of the faculty are, however, hereby (as on previous occasions) submitted in addition to the consideration and evaluation of the esteemed readers of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*.

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Secretary of the Faculty  
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I. AN OVERTURE CONCERNING  
THE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION  
OF LAYMEN LICENCED TO PERFORM  
FUNCTIONS OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE

*Whereas* Resolution 3-05B of the Fifty-Seventh Regular Convention of the synod authorized district presidents to license certain laymen to perform functions belonging to the pastoral office—preaching, leading in public worship, and administering the sacraments—under the supervision of an ordained pastor in circumstances where no pastor is available; and

*Whereas* any man who is performing functions of the pastoral ministry should be called by any congregation which he is serving and ordained into the pastoral office (or, as in the case of field-workers, vicars, or special colloquy students, he should be preparing to receive such call and ordination); and

*Whereas* laymen licensed to perform functions belonging to the pastoral office desire and should receive the theological education necessary to carrying out these duties; and

*Whereas* the seminaries of the synod are prepared and desirous to provide these men with such theological education and so to prepare and certify them to be called and ordained into the pastoral ministry of the synod; therefore be it

*Resolved* that any layman who is now licensed to perform pastoral functions under the guidelines of said Resolution 3-05B be required (if he wishes to continue preaching and leading in public worship) to apply for admission into the pastoral ministry of the synod in accordance with the following process:

- (1.) the applicant follows a procedure similar to that outlined for colloquy applicants in Bylaw 6.93 of the synodical handbook with the additional requirements (a.) that he receive endorsement from the congregation which he is serving and (b.) that he and his district president or supervising pastor attend a preliminary interview with a committee (specifically designated for the oversight of the training and theological examination of such applicants) of the

seminary to which he applies—to determine his present theological and pastoral ability and his further educational needs;

(2.) the seminary committee establishes a specific course of study (tailored to the needs in theological education of the applicant) to be completed through ministerial experience, academic training (the majority of which could be conducted through extension classes), and a student-mentor relationship with the supervising pastor;

(3.) the applicant continues to serve (where appropriate) his congregation or mission-station as a vicar with the same responsibilities and restrictions which other vicars, field-workers, and special colloquy candidates have in similar situations—this service running concurrently with and for the duration of his educational program;

(4.) upon completion of the prescribed program of theological education (or in some cases at an earlier time deemed appropriate by the seminary committee and the supervising pastor) the seminary committee interviews the vicar, focusing on theological orthodoxy and ministerial competence; after passing the interview, the vicar is certified for admission to the pastoral ministry by the seminary faculty and so becomes eligible to receive a call and ordination;

(5.) it is recommended (and in some cases required) that the new pastor continue taking courses offered by the seminary in a program of continuing education; and be it further

*Resolved* that one or both of the seminaries establish a program of theological education which would enable a layman licensed to perform functions of the pastoral office to be trained and certified for a pastoral call and ordination without unnecessary interruption of ministerial responsibilities in his congregation or mission-station; and be it finally

*Resolved* that any layman now licensed to perform pastoral functions who declines to apply for admission into the pastoral ministry be commended for his dedication by his district president,

that his decision be honored, and that accordingly his license be allowed to lapse.

## II. AN OVERTURE CONCERNING THE RESOLUTION OF THEOLOGICAL DISPUTES

*Whereas* since 1992 the dispute resolution panels described in chapter 8 of the synodical handbook are, when an opinion of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations on "a specific question of doctrine or doctrinal application" has been obtained, bound to that opinion, so that it "must be followed" in the final ruling or decision (*Convention Proceedings: Fifty-Eighth Regular Convention: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, July 10-17, 1992*, p. 144; *Handbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1992 Edition, Bylaw 8.21.i*); and

*Whereas* the Church of the Reformation recognizes no infallible spokesmen able *ex officio* to issue doctrinal pronouncements, but rather is solemnly pledged "to regulate all religious controversies and their explanations" according to the divine biblical truth as confessed in the Book of Concord (Preface to the Book of Concord; *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], p. 14); and

*Whereas* the chief purpose of "proper judicial process" in the church is to safeguard sound evangelical teaching and practice, and without this vital function "the churches are not able to remove impious teachings and impious forms of worship, and countless souls are lost generation after generation" (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 51; *Book of Concord*, p. 329); and

*Whereas* the summary and divided action of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in a sensitive and controversial matter, as published in the *Reporter: News for Church Workers* of December 1994, does not improve the case for even occasionally exempting the opinions and decisions of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations from critical examination in the light of Scripture and confession; therefore be it

*Resolved* that Bylaw 8.21.i of the synodical handbook of 1992 be

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amended to make it clear that dispute resolution panels may receive and consider any theological advice they wish, but are, individually and collectively, bound to decide only according to that "single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine which all our evangelical churches subscribe and from which, because it is drawn from the Word of God, all other writings are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 10; *Book of Concord*, p. 506).

### III. AN OVERTURE CONCERNING THE CONTINUING EDUCATION OF PASTORS

*Whereas* the circumstances and needs of people in our congregations and parish communities are far more diverse and subject to rapid change than ever before, requiring pastors who can communicate the gospel and care for souls under many conditions, while developing and employing all their God-given gifts; and

*Whereas* a good deal of pastoral understanding and skill is acquired through a combination of formal instruction and experience in the parish (course-work, field-work, and vicarage already being integral parts of education in the seminary); and

*Whereas* our pastors, nevertheless, frequently encounter new circumstances and perceive lacunae in their competencies for ministry; and

*Whereas* our pastors can, therefore, profit from continuing education employing various methods of formal instruction and mentoring contacts with fellow-pastors, district personnel, and others, in order to sharpen their skills and adapt to new cultures and circumstances; therefore be it

*Resolved* that the Standing Committee for Pastoral Ministry of the synod study the matter of continuing post-seminary education; and be it further

*Resolved* that said committee present to the convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1997 a plan designed to involve relevant resources (e.g., local pastors, district personnel, and seminary faculty) in a program of continuing post-seminary education.