

Tools of Discernment

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Me, a pastor? This is the question that begins the process a man will undergo to decide whether he will attend the seminary to study for the pastoral ministry or not. This question tends to point a man inward—to his feelings, to his thoughts.

The Admission Department has developed two tools to aid in this discernment. It brings together both the internal discernment (feelings and thoughts) and the external (counsel from close friends, mentors, family, etc.). The first is the application and the second is the campus visit.

By filling out and sending in your application you are not signing your life away, nor are you making any obligations for matriculation. The application serves a dual purpose. First, it gives the Admission Department permission to begin contact with the applicant's district to help in setting up the district interview. That is really all we get out of it. The rest is for your benefit. Here is how.

First, the application asks you for a number of personal references and a pastoral reference. By asking your pastor and your friends to fill out these reference forms, you are allowing them to inquire into why you seek to be a pastor. Their external questions help to bring out what you think and feel internally. This serves as a way for you to help narrow down what you are thinking and feeling while you go forward with applying.

Second, the application also asks that you answer several questions. These needn't be long expositions, but short, coherent, and articulate statements of your beliefs. This helps you to take all those thoughts and feelings out of your head and put them on paper. Once they're on paper, you can see if what you've written expresses what you're really thinking and feeling. It allows you to look at and deal with something that is internal as if it were external. Now this won't be completely objective, but it is slightly more objective than if it were simply to stay in your head or in your heart. This aids in discerning where you see yourself in the future, and how important it is to you.

Third, the application asks you to write an autobiography. Again, this does not need to be too detailed. This is simply here to give a history, a certain humanness to the paper file. It should discuss your influences and why they were influential. It should discuss things that you have a real passion for. This helps you, again, to look at yourself with a little objectivity. It allows you the opportunity to sum up your life in a five-paragraph essay. This is a humbling task, but, in so doing, you learn those things that matter most in your life and what goals you haven't attained yet, and why.

So that's how the application helps in discernment, but what about the campus visit? When you visit CTSFW's campus, you live in, indeed become a part of, our community for your stay. You aren't an outsider but one of us—a brother. You will be brought into the rhythm of our days, weeks, and years. You will, for that time, be formed as a servant in Christ Jesus. You will sit in class with learned faculty who consider you not only students but also future colleagues, future brothers in the office. You will see that what is taught in class comes alive and is put into action in the chapel where Christ himself has promised to meet his people and feed them. You will engage in robust theological discourse with faculty, staff, and students over lunch, after chapel over coffee, and at *Gemütlichkeit* over some barley sodas. And through this you learn if this place can truly be home. But much more, you learn if studying to be a pastor, coming to the seminary to be formed as a pastor of Christ's flock, is for you.

The application and the campus visit are touchstones of sorts—they help you to discern this question: Me, a pastor? You don't have to figure this all out on your own, in fact, we wouldn't suggest that. Let the process help you figure out what you want to do and how you want to serve.

So what do you say? Come visit. Fill out and send in your application. You won't regret it because it will give you the certainty you're looking for in discernment.

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