

WHO WILL TEACH OUR FUTURE PASTORS? IDENTIFYING FUTURE SEMINARY FACULTY

By Charles A. Gieschen

Many of us have heard about the shortage of Lutheran pastors and school teachers in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). More pastors are retiring each year than the number who are completing pastoral programs at both LCMS seminaries. Many more requests for Lutheran teachers are being received by our LCMS universities than the Lutheran teacher graduates who are available for placement each year. *Set Apart to Serve*, the concerted effort across the LCMS to recruit future church workers and create a church worker recruitment culture, has certainly helped make congregation members in our beloved Synod

aware of these challenges so we all can be part of the solution by intentionally encouraging individuals to enter these important and blessed vocations.

What some in the LCMS may never have heard about are the challenges surrounding the identification and calling of seminary professors. We all know that congregation call committees sometimes have

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unrealistic expectations, such as wanting to call a pastor who is an energetic young man with 25 years of parish experience who is married to a wife who can serve as organist and Sunday school superintendent while raising their four small children. So what are the expectations that make the calling of seminary faculty challenging?

When calling a seminary professor, we are often looking for a pastor in his 30s or 40s who has demonstrated excellent academic skills in both his undergraduate studies and in his Master of Divinity program, has five to ten years of full-time parish experience as an exemplary pastor, has great teaching skills, and has completed a doctoral degree at a high standard (e.g., a Doctor of Philosophy in theology or adjacent disciplines such as biblical exegesis, church history, systematic or practical theology, classics, history, or rhetoric) or a Doctor of Ministry degree if he will be teaching pastoral ministry courses). A PhD program usually takes five or more years to complete as well as significant funding; a DMin can often stretch over four years and be completed while serving as a pastor. There are times when we will call a pastor while he is still in his doctoral program, and then he completes it after he begins teaching at CTSFW.

On top of all this, we expect this pastor to have already published some of his research in articles or a book, have some administrative skills and experience, have very strong relational skills to work well with both colleagues and students, and be open to a call to the seminary when we need him to come aboard. Given these qualifications, the pool of LCMS pastors prepared and available to meet the need of our seminaries for future faculty in the formation of faithful Lutheran pastors and deaconesses is somewhat limited. So what do we do?

The number one thing we do to cultivate future faculty is encourage talented MDiv graduates to consider advanced graduate work immediately following their seminary graduation or soon thereafter. If an academic doctorate is not completed before the age of 40, it often becomes more challenging to complete because of a



Dr. Todd Peperkorn, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, Vice President of Spiritual Formation, Director of Residential Formation Programs, and Director of Vicarage, talks with students at lunch.

pastor's commitment to his congregation and family, including extended family as his parents and in-laws get older and need more assistance. In encouraging advanced study, we want to both cultivate more highly educated pastors serving LCMS congregations and have pastors with advanced degrees prepared to teach at our LCMS seminaries or universities in the future as the need arises. When promising students begin a doctoral program, we track their progress and stay in communication, especially as the need for additional seminary faculty arises. We also seek to be aware of scholars in international Lutheran partner churches who may be open to teaching at an LCMS seminary in the United States.

Sometimes talented seminary students who plan to pursue doctoral studies wonder what area or field they should study. The field of study should be related to present or future needs in the LCMS for seminary and university professors. The Synod regularly needs teachers of Hebrew, Greek, Old and New Testament exegesis, systematic theology (also known as dogmatics or biblical doctrine), historical theology (i.e., church history), and practical theology (e.g., homiletics, liturgics, pastoral care, and missiology). In addition to selecting a field of study based on needs in the LCMS, it is vital that

the student has a passion for the selected field of study that will motivate him to learn and achieve through the rigors of a doctoral program.

Another important question for those pursuing graduate studies is where to study. As long as the student has a strong theological grounding, there can be benefit in doing graduate work with important scholars in his selected field at major universities across the United States and world. CTSFW has faculty with doctorates from schools such as the University of Durham, the University of Notre Dame, Harvard University, the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Minnesota, the University of Toronto, Eberhard-Karls Universität Tübingen, Marquette University, and Vanderbilt University. One challenge in studying at universities like these currently is that it can be difficult to find doctoral supervisors who will support the kind of theological research that does not militate against Confessional Lutherans' commitment to Scripture and the Confessions. In light of that reality, we expect that we may call more faculty in the future who have completed their doctorate at CTSFW or Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Besides the unwavering commitment to Lutheran doctrine and practice that we expect of every LCMS pastor, a primary quality that we look for in a future



Dr. Walter Maier III, Professor of Exegetical Theology, teaches Hebrew Readings during fall quarter.

seminary professor is a profound dual commitment to being both a vibrant, faithful Lutheran pastor who loves parish ministry and a rigorous, scholarly theologian who loves learning and teaching. Because seminary professors are mentoring future pastors, it is vital that they not only have pastoral experience but that they also love and model the pastoral vocation. It is also important that they are leading scholars in their field committed to lifelong learning and helping students to learn.

The seminary faculty is a team, so it is necessary to have the right mix of ages to provide experience and continuity. With administrative positions like Director of Placement and Director of Vicarage, it is necessary to have professors with longer parish experience. Our current professors in these positions each have over 20 years of parish experience. Continuity is cultivated with a mix of experienced and younger professors. It is also important to have the right combination of professors in various

theological disciplines—exegesis, dogmatics, history, and pastoral ministry—in order to be able to teach the courses required in the curricula of our various programs.

Jesus calls us to pray that the Lord of the harvest send workers out to the harvest field (Matt. 9:38). We pray for these workers because our primary focus at CTSFW is forming future pastors and deaconesses for the LCMS. In that process, we also pray for, identify, and encourage some of these future pastors to continue their theological studies in a graduate program so that some of them will one day be the professors that the Lord of the church will use to continue to prepare more workers for the harvest. ▲



Dr. Charles A. Gieschen is Provost and Professor of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.