

**WILL THERE STILL BE A LUTHERAN MINISTRY?  
The Challenge of the "Specific Ministry Pastor Program"**

"Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord"! Thus Saint Paul greeted a young pastor in his first Epistle to Timothy. And thus I presumptuously greet all who read this paper.

It appears that the 2007 Convention of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod will be asked to consider a comprehensive change in the way in which we understand the Lutheran ministry. The "Specific Ministry Pastor Program" (SMPP) represents a considerable amount of labor on the part of a number of people. I appreciate the sincere effort to resolve a number of concerns regarding an anticipated shortage of pastors to fill current and anticipated future needs of The LC-MS. The end result is a program which is certainly creative and innovative. That creativity and innovation, however, must be carefully considered by those most affected by its potential approval; that is to say, the congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

I respond to the SMPP proposal for one reason. What is at stake here is not finally a theological institution such as the one I serve. Nor is it the "professionalism" of a theologically trained ministerium. What is at stake are the people of God. Simply put, they deserve a truly Lutheran pastor formed and shaped by the riches of the Church's theology and life. This is not about Seminaries, ecclesiastical power or money. It is about the sheep for whom Christ has died and risen. Jesus Himself personally formed the disciples (and later St. Paul) into apostles through intensive catechesis during and after His earthly ministry. They attended the best and most thorough Seminary the world has ever seen. Twelve men, empowered by Christ's own Word and Sacraments, evangelized the world.

My response is given from the perspective of a non-participant in the process. Thus I am limited to the written SMPP document made available without insights from the discussions preceding the drafting of the program. I claim a certain naiveté that will also be shared by others who have only the proposal to Synod. My comments will address what I see as unintended consequences of the program and a possible alternative. **Finally, please note that this response does not represent the views or opinions of Concordia Theological Seminary. Everything contained herein is solely my own and responsibility rests entirely with me.**

## **UNITENDED CONSEQUENCES**

### **1. A furthering of capitulation to an anti-theological spirit of the age.**

There is no question that theological thought is rejected by the general culture of our times. This program seems to be influenced by the culture so strongly that only 5 pre-ordination courses and 5 post-ordination courses are planned from the theological disciplines of Systematic, Exegetical and Historical Theology:

Pre-Ordination:                   Catechism  
  Interpretation of Scripture  
  God and Christ and the Work of Christ  
  The Sacraments  
  Introduction to the Book of Concord  
  The Conduct of Worship and Preaching

Post-Ordination:           OT Content and Theology  
                                  NT Content and Theology  
                                  Gifts of Christ  
                                  Body of Christ  
                                  Church History and the History of Lutheranism  
                                  Christian Education  
                                  Pastoral Theology  
                                  Theology of Missions

All other courses (and unspecified seminars) are "practical" courses. These are important (although the SMPP document is not at all clear about the actual content of any of the courses) but with a minimal theological basis, the end result will be more sociological than theological. In total, even if they are of comparable quality to residential M.Div. courses (which they will not be), all courses (theological and "practical") combined equal about a year of residential study!

I realize that I will be held in suspicion for the politically incorrect questioning of the value of distance education for pastoral formation. A computer screen and brief interpersonal interaction can convey *information* but cannot *form* the person. Other Christian bodies which have little or no theological education in their traditions are actually moving towards a more demanding, formal educational process. There is no substitute for "being there" and a computer screen is no substitute for the flesh and blood realities of a community dedicated to the study of God, prayer and reflection.

The members of the congregations need to reflect upon the question of whether this is sufficient preparation for their own future Pastor. The Pastoral Office is the highest office in the Church and the one from which all humanly established

offices flow (for example, the vital and honored work of a teacher, DCE , deaconess or theological professor). C.F.W. Walther wrote in Thesis VIII:

The ministry is the highest office in the Church, from which, as its stem, all other offices of the Church issue. (*Theses on the Ministry*. Saint Louis: CPH, 1938)

Why does the SMPP then have the lowest expectation for preparation for the highest office in the Church? Do the congregations, formed and shaped by the Word of God and through whom God calls His undershepherds, not want a pastor who has been thoroughly trained and prepared for the Office?

2. **A seriously weakened confessional subscription.** At ordination and every subsequent installation, a pastor will be asked to make sacred promises. The proposal states:

Ordination vows may be taken prior to the conclusion of a complete course of study provided that the ordinand has received a preparation sufficient to preach and teach the Gospel rightly, administer the sacraments correctly, and take his vows with integrity.

Under this program, he is completely unequipped to do these things. How can he confess the Scripture to be the inspired Word of God and the infallible rule of faith and practice when he has had only a class on "Interpretation of Scripture" but no study of the text and theology of the Bible? How can he reject the errors condemned by the Ecumenical Creeds when he has no exposure to either their historical development or the systematic framework in which to understand truth and error? How can he make a *quia* subscription (that is, an affirmation that the Ordinand accepts the Confessions *because* they agree with Scripture) to the Lutheran Confessions with one brief "Introduction" course on the Book of Concord and no Biblical courses to permit an informed confession of faith? All pastoral acts are theological acts. It is my opinion that the Specific Ministry Pastor is not prepared to take ordination vows and therefore not prepared for the Preaching Office.

The congregations of the Synod must seriously consider the confessional position of the man called to be their pastor. As Lutherans, they deserve and require pastoral leadership that is acquainted with and in agreement with the Biblical Lutheran faith. At Concordia Theological Seminary, pre-ordination students study Greek and Hebrew and take 3 courses on the Confessions (6 total credits), 4 on the New Testament (15 total credits), 4 on the Old Testament (12 total credits), and a quarterly New Testament Greek Readings class (9 total credits). This is in addition to the doctrinal, historical and practical curriculum! Even this simply prepares a man for a lifetime of study. Do the congregations of the Synod really want pastors who have

not engaged in a thorough study of the Scripture and the Confessions before they vow to uphold them?

3. **A second office of the Ministry is established.** The SMPP document rightly states the following:

Lutherans affirm that there is only one Office of the Holy Ministry, established by God for the public conduct of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and that all those performing the functions associated with this ministry should be rightly and publicly called and ordained into this one office (AC XIV).....

All those who serve Christ and the church in the Office of the Holy Ministry exercise *de iure divino* (by divine authority) the power to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, administer the sacraments, and exercise church discipline. There is no distinction within the one office with respect to *this* power and authority.

All this is well and good. Yet as the nature of this new office is explicated, it is clear that it cannot be perceived as the same office as a "General Ministry Pastor." The Specific Ministry Pastor is never truly the shepherd of a congregation and never will be unless he earns "promotion" to General Ministry Pastor. His "roster" status is dependent not on his doctrine, life and competence but on additional requirements. He is barred from Synodical offices (but, interestingly, may serve as "pastoral delegate" only at District conventions). These Specific Ministry Pastors will not be considered as those who hold the one office of the Ministry because, frankly, their office is defined as something very different. The idea that these two offices are in fact equal and identical reminds me of a line from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

It can be and will be argued that once a congregation calls a Specific Ministry Pastor and he fails to complete his post-ordination courses, he can later be removed from the roster of Synod but not from his call to the congregation. Two concerns present themselves here. First, is this actually going to happen? Second, if a District President did "de-roster" a Specific Ministry Pastor, is a church planting congregation ever going to retain the "de-rostered" pastor and lose its own standing and funding from The LC-MS?

Do the congregations of the Synod truly want to establish a hierarchy? At the top of the rungs will be the Synodical President and the District Presidents. Next will be circuit counselors. Then the General Ministry Pastors. And, finally, at the bottom will be the Specific Ministry Pastors and the congregations they serve. The Synod and its districts have historically received their authority from the congregations and pastors that have created the Synod. This is right and proper since it is to the

divinely established congregation that the Office of the Keys has been committed, not to a humanly established Synod. Under this program, the continuation of a Specific Ministry Pastor, called by God through the congregation, will be taken out of the congregation's hands and put into the hands of an elected synodical official.

4. **A loss of the "catholicity" of the local parish.** The Church finds its expression most fully in the congregation where the marks of the Church are present. The congregation, however, is not comprised of those who have been baptized into the *congregation* but rather into Christ and His body, the Church. Thus the local congregation is sacramentally connected to the entire Church. The Book of Concord teaches this throughout, even by placing the Ecumenical Creeds as the first of our Confessions. In this way, the Church is always "catholic" meaning "universal."

The Specific Ministry Pastor Program is rooted in contextual or parochial pastoral formation. Pastors trained in this way will inevitably have a limited picture of the Church. They will not benefit from residential education and its inherent breadth of exposure to students from around the world, faculty, field education and vicarage. This new kind of pastor will be formed and shaped by the context in which he lives and will now minister. He will not be capable of bringing to the congregation a sense of connection to anything other than itself. Is this what the congregations of Synod want for themselves, their children and grandchildren?

5. **A further splintering of the unity of the Synod.** As an outgrowth of the loss of catholicity, parishes served by the Specific Ministry pastor will be more and more disengaged from the theological life of the Synod and ultimately from the Synod itself.

Older Missouri Synod Lutherans can remember when one could visit any LC-MS congregation and feel at home with the theology and worship of that congregation. Variations in practice have always existed, of course. But the goal was always unity of doctrine. When still President of the Texas District, Dr. Gerald Kieschnick observed in a letter to the editor in the *Reporter* (August 2000), "The reality is that while our Synod appears to be, and actually is, far from united in some areas of doctrine and practice..." Dr. Kieschnick's observation is quite profound and accurate. As congregations move apart from each other with contextually trained Specific Ministry Pastors, the condition observed in 2000 by the current LC-MS President will grow.

Again, is this really what the congregations want to happen to them? The congregations served by "contextually" trained Specific Ministry Pastors will lose their sense of connection to the broader Church. Those served by "General Ministry

Pastors" consequently will lose their own connection to brothers and sisters in Christ at congregations served by contextually trained pastors.

6. **The Pastoral Office becomes a "trade" rather than a "vocation."** The SMPP document does not address the Biblical requirements for the Office (see, for example, 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1). This is a serious omission since no pastoral training program can be faithful to the Lord of the Church if His Word is not the foundation of the training process.

Nor does it have any requirements that the Church has come to expect as background for pastoral formation. There are no educational requirements, for example. No college studies are expected and, most interestingly, the Biblical languages are neither prerequisites nor part of the course of study. Theoretically, a 16 year old high school dropout could qualify for admission. In Alternate Routes programs, the 35/10/2 rule (35 years old/10years of significant parish work/2 years of college) used to be applied. Even DELTO, in its first iteration, had these requirements along with the additional requirement that the man be so necessary to the continuation of the ministry that, should he leave for the Seminary, that ministry would cease to exist. Nothing like these exceptional circumstances are part of this innovative program.

Again, is this really what the congregations of Synod want? Every Lutheran parish, as the people of God in the midst of whom He places His ministers, has a right to expect their pastor to be qualified according to God's own Word. Further, they have the right to expect their pastor to be a man who has engaged serious study both of theology and the life of the world into which the Church proclaims the Gospel. The Specific Ministry Pastor Program provides no assurance for the congregations that this is what they will receive.

7. **The Specific Ministry Pastor will face a "glass ceiling."** It is the intention of the program to open the possibility for a Specific Ministry Pastor to become a General Ministry Pastor by continuing their education either in the M.Div. or "alternate route" program. It even has the "principle" of "the potential applicability of coursework for academic credit towards an M.Div.". This indeed gives the perception of academic credibility to this program.

But is it going to happen? It is possible to give academic credit via distance education. Yet secular accrediting agencies (ATS, NCA) hold a higher standard than

this program for admission to the M.Div. Non-degreed students can be admitted but their numbers are regulated by ATS/NCA.

Even if a Specific Ministry Pastor can meet the admission requirements for an accredited Seminary, neither Seminary's curriculum has equivalency for the proposed courses. This is especially true for the new curriculum at CTSFW where a tightly ordered series of courses with no electivity now in place. For example, how will "Hermeneutical Principles" be accommodated in Fort Wayne's M.Div. curriculum? Nothing like it exists in the M.Div. and there is no available elective course for which it might substitute. I suppose that another M.Div. curriculum can be constructed for Specific Ministry Pastors, but that would aggravate the distinctions between the classes of Ordained Ministers.

8. **The problem of certification.** Currently, the Seminary faculties are responsible for "certifying" that a man is prepared to be called into the Office of the Holy Ministry and the Council of Presidents is responsible to place these certified men into appropriate calls. Before admission, the applicant must provide an exhaustive series of recommendations from pastors, lay people, and others including a district committee interview. During the student's years at the Seminary, he is evaluated on a number of levels. Certainly, his classroom achievements are taken into account. His pastoral suitability is evaluated by on and off campus observation by faculty, field work congregations and vicarage congregations. He undergoes a series of assessments and meetings with a Personal Growth Advisor. Each year, some students are counseled to enter some other field of service because they will not be able to be certified. In the end, the Seminaries are able to present the candidate to the Church having exercised great care in evaluating the man for the Office.

The Specific Ministry Program provides a three-tiered certification process. The first tier is pre-ordination:

After demonstrating competence in the pre-ordination areas (approximately a year and a half), a student may apply for an examination hearing by the seminary in order to be certified for call and ordination. Students will be evaluated on a case by case basis. The examination hearing may include a review of the student's portfolio, vicarage reports, an interview by the faculty, and recommendations by the District President and Circuit Counselor.

The second tier follows the "post-call and ordination curriculum":

Upon completion of the program, the candidate is examined by a committee of faculty, laity, and district representatives in order to be recognized as eligible for calls elsewhere within his rostered status.

Prior to ordination, the student will be examined by the faculty. That examination, however, will not have the benefit of the faculty actually knowing the pastoral suitability of the examinee. Nor will the second tier committee have a full exposure to the academic, spiritual and vocational qualifications of the man.

This becomes even more uncertain with the certification of the man to the other office of pastor, the "General Ministry Pastor", through the third tier of certification:

Students who have completed the Specific Ministry Pastor Program may decide to remain in their rostered status as "specific ministry pastor" for the remainder of their ministry or they may choose to pursue a growth path that leads to a change in roster status to "general ministry pastor." It is envisioned that most students will pursue the second path, either through a M.Div. route or non-degree certification.

Thus, they have three options:

1. They may remain rostered as a specific ministry pastor.
2. They may enroll in an M. Div. program. It is anticipated that course work done for the specific ministry pastor program may become applicable to an M. Div. determined by equivalencies.
3. They may continue their theological education and pastoral formation reaching a level appropriate to general ministry pastor without a full M. Div. (cf. current "alternate route") and then complete an interview with an examining board in order to have their rostered status changed to "general ministry pastor".

If they enter a M.Div. program, do they then go through the same process of certification as other M.Div. students? If they follow point "3" above, who is on the "examining board", who appoints them and who sets the criteria for certification?

Is this what the congregations want? I am not a lawyer but I, like you, live in a litigious society. If there is misconduct on the part of the pastor and a lawsuit is brought, can it be demonstrated that reasonable care was taken to ascertain the pastor's suitability prior to his service in the Church? Who can be held liable? The Seminary? The Synod? The District? The congregation that received the errant pastor?

Even if there are no legal questions (and I leave those to people trained in the law), there remains an ethical question. Do the congregations want a pastor who has not gone through a strenuous process of demonstrating his preparation for the Office?

9. **The loss of a vocational identity.** When Jesus called fishermen to become disciples and eventually apostles, St. Luke records that Peter, James and John "left



everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). For more than three years, they would follow Him, sit at His feet and learn. They would be tested by temptation, poverty and the blood soaked scene of Calvary. Yet in the end, they would see and hear the Resurrected Christ who commissioned them to go into the entire world.

There was a day in our Synod when most new pastors had spent their lives from their late childhood or teenage years preparing for the office. Many today are second career students. While I love and admire both, the second career men are a great example of the lived call to discipleship. In some way, God has given them such a profound sense of vocation that they, as those fishermen long ago, leave everything and follow Him. They spend years at a Seminary which, as fine as our Synod's two schools are, can in no way compare with the experience of sitting at the feet of Jesus in His own classroom.

To become a pastor through the residential programs of the Seminaries requires tremendous sacrifice. A man and his family must live by faith and not in the security of established professions, homes and communities. He will go forth as called by God perhaps to a place he never heard of before "call night" at the Seminary. But whoever receives him receives a man whose life is committed to the pastoral vocation.

I have no doubt that prospective "Specific Ministry Pastors" will for the most part be godly and pious men who want to serve their Savior. But for whatever reason they will chose to remain in their fishing boats rather than leave everything to follow him. What level of commitment to the Office do the congregations of Synod really want?

10. **A rush to fill a need that does not exist.** I would like to think that this will actually be a problem by 2017 because it would be a wonderful problem to have. *Ablaze* has set tremendous goals (like 2000 new parishes) but has yet to achieve them. Programs like *Ablaze* are notorious for their rate of failure and I certainly hope that *Ablaze* does not go the way of prior initiatives. To my knowledge the anticipated need is nothing more than a potential. This is a less than convincing reason to so radically alter the Office of the Holy Ministry and abridge the formation of men for that divinely mandated Office.

It is interesting that a need for a large number of ordained pastors is the motivation for the Specific Ministry Pastor Program. Yet, each year it is a struggle for the Seminaries' placement officers and the Synod's Council of Presidents to find placements for the graduates of the two Seminaries. Statistics can be cited in

support of just about anything and opposing projections about the future made. Any of these can be based upon the same statistics used by the opposing perspective. The fact remains that there is no reasonable expectation that large numbers of Specific Ministry Pastors will be needed even 2 years from this summer's Synodical Convention (when, presumably, the first wave of Specific Ministry Pastors might complete level one of their training).

Again, the congregations of the Synod must ask themselves if an emergency actually exists and if it requires the radical changes envisioned in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program. Are they willing to exchange the hallmarks of our Lutheran theological heritage for a ministerium that is not shaped by that heritage?

**11. The SMPP rests upon an inaccurate portrayal of the Synod's history.**

The Specific Ministry Pastor Program cites historical precedence for an abbreviated formation program:

Historically The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod and its antecedents have attempted to meet such needs by preparing men as quickly as possible to be called and ordained in order to meet the urgent mission needs of the church. Such men were prepared to catechize, preach, and provide pastoral care. Within the LCMS the need for such a track to ordination was initially embodied in the seminary begun by F.C.D. Wynecken and Wilhelm Löhe in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. However, developments in ministerial formation since World War II have effectively eliminated this track altogether.

I am not a Church historian. But it does not seem to me that the current situation of an established Synod is comparable to the frontier conditions of an immigrant Church in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have resources. We have established educational institutions. We have those very things that our forefathers sought to bequeath to us.

The SMPP cites the precedence of Wilhelm Löhe for its innovative approach. But what was the intention of Wilhelm Löhe himself? He is cited in *Moving Frontiers. Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: CPH, 1964):

It is always awkward when midwives must undertake emergency baptisms, but still better for children to be baptized by midwives than not at all. Everyone understands that. In this way one must regard also the appointment of scantily educated preachers in America. They are emergency helpers (*Nothhelfer*); they should be nothing else and want to be nothing else. And it is their duty to work with sacred self-sacrifice to the end that better times for the church might bloom over their graves. They are to inspire their congregations for the benefit of their descendents and to induce them on the one hand to nourish and improve the seminary in Columbus and on the other hand to send capable young men over to Germany to be educated at our classical and higher schools. Thereby they will gain the right

teachers for their seminary and the right men for the improvement of the church's situation. (p.98).

The students trained under Löhe's influence were not trained "contextually" but were gathered either at Neuendetelsau, Bavaria (with Löhe himself) and/or at the Seminary he founded in Fort Wayne in 1846.

We must also note how quickly the Missouri Synod sought to strengthen the formal education of its pastors. The Missouri Synod *Proceedings* of 1852 includes the following:

The question was submitted to Synod for deliberation: whether it is not necessary to raise the Fort Wayne seminary to a higher level, to broaden the objectives of the education of its students, and accordingly to lengthen the time of study, etc. The great services which this institution has provided in training so many capable young people was acknowledged with joy. But it was the opinion that since the time of the first and greatest need is now past, the obligation remains to give the students more at least in a formal way, especially and at least to help them to a knowledge of the Latin language and thereby to a better and fuller understanding of the old church literature; besides the Latin language, other subjects, such as history, geography, the English language, etc., should be pursued more diligently (*Moving Frontiers*, p.216).

The result of this was to establish a "pro-seminary" for these subjects prior to the study of theology. By 1856, there were three classes of students at Fort Wayne: the actual seminarians, the pro-seminarians and the preparatory students. The first studied theology, the second general studies and theology and the third general studies (*Moving Frontiers*, p.217).

In other words, the historic example of Wilhelm Löhe and the Fort Wayne Seminary, cited by the SMPP, does not resemble the SMPP at all. The "emergency" situation does not now exist. The *Sendlinge* or *Nothhelfer* of Löhe's missionary endeavor were intended as only a stop-gap measure, not a new and permanent alternate route as is the SMPP. The *Sendlinge* or *Nothhelfer* were trained as residential students, not the contextually based students of the SMPP. The Synod quickly moved by 1852 to make the residential program far more comprehensive than it initially had been, a move reversed by the SMPP.

Further, the SMPP states something that does not appear to rest upon all available facts, "However, developments in ministerial formation since World War II have effectively eliminated this track altogether" (see citation above). Under various names ("Colloquy" and later "Alternate Route"), the Seminaries have provided an abbreviated residential program for qualified and experienced candidates. In the early 1990's, Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne developed a "Distance

Education Leading to Ordination" (DELTO) program for a highly qualified group of students. Later, CTS was joined by Concordia Seminary-Saint Louis in providing DELTO and, as a result, the DELTO program has been greatly expanded. Ethnic specific programs, representing considerably reduced academic requirements, have also been introduced and have produced numerous pastors. The SMPP worries that programs "preparing men as quickly as possible to be called and ordained in order to meet the urgent mission needs of the church" have been "effectively eliminated" but in fact actually have been expanded since WW II.

Still, along with providing pastoral education in new and creative ways, both Seminaries have continued in the wisdom of the 1852 Missouri Synod convention by strengthening their residential academic programs. The SMPP would be more accurate if it noted that residential training has consistently improved since WW II. These have been steps forward based upon the struggles and sacrifices of the generations that preceded us.

We live in an increasingly educated but theologically challenged culture that demands a better prepared ministry than ever before. The challenges of postmodernism, religious syncretism, liberalism, fundamentalism and a thousand other "isms" to the Biblical Lutheran faith require our best efforts, not our least efforts. The congregations of the Synod need to carefully reflect upon the history of the Synod's pastoral formation programs. Historical precedence is indeed valuable for determining the on-going direction of a faith community. But we must be certain that the historical precedence cited is in fact a balanced and accurate reading of the facts.

12. **The loss of the Synod's crown jewels: the Seminaries.** The LC-MS currently is served by the two finest theological institutions in the world, Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne and Concordia Seminary-Saint Louis. As a Navy Chaplain who works closely with clergy from a large number of faith groups, I have come to appreciate profoundly the gift of God that we have been given. With thankfulness, I have come to realize that there are no other schools that offer the depth of theological reflection, pastoral formation and fidelity to truth.

The simple truth is that the Seminaries will become increasingly irrelevant to a Synod which is served by pastors without a Seminary education. It does not take prophetic gifts to see the future. Residential enrollment will decline, the competition for development dollars will increase, the necessity of campus oriented Seminaries will be questioned. Ultimately, at least one Seminary will be closed since residential

enrollment will decline dramatically. Will it be CSL with a campus reputedly valued at over \$100 million dollars? Will it be CTSFW, the smaller of the two Seminaries?

In the 1970's, the struggles of Saint Louis taught a lesson concerning the blessing of another Seminary (Springfield/Fort Wayne) that could carry the weight while CSL reorganized. The same lesson was taught in the struggles of Fort Wayne in the late 1980's and 1990's. If there is only one Seminary and it faces a crisis, Seminary education will collapse.

Do the congregations of the Synod really want to risk the loss of one or both of these institutions? It is by the selfless gifts and sacrifice of the people of God that these institutions have become what they are today. Once lost, it will be impossible to restore them.

13. **A question of finances.** Interestingly, no dollar figures are attached to the SMPP document. This is probably because no one knows what they will be. If DELTO provides any "lessons learned" it is that this is not an inexpensive program. What will be the costs of this new alternate route? Expenses will include, but are not limited to, faculty salaries and benefits, technology, technology support personnel and travel for instructors and students. Who will pay the student's tuition, books and other expenses? The student? The congregation? The District? The Synod? How much will this be and where will it come from?

Do the congregations of the Synod really want a new program training a new class of Church worker without answers to this? Good stewardship in the home, congregation, District and Synod requires financial planning.

### **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

It appears that the SMPP document will be brought forward to the 2007 Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod since a resolution has been prepared. Since it so radically alters the Synod's pastoral formation programs, I hope that a more deliberate process will be involved. This needs wide dissemination and extensive discussion before it can be intelligently dealt with by the convention. There is simply not enough time between the public release of the SMPP document and July 2007 to reflect on its long range consequences.

1. **Utilization of CRM pastors.** Although I do not have the statistics, there are literally hundreds of rostered pastors who are in CRM status. This means that they

are currently without a Divine Call. The reasons for men to be in this status are varied. Some cannot be given a call for good and valid reasons. Others are capable men who desperately desire to return to ministry either in a full-time or "Worker-Priest" status.

2. **Utilization of retired pastors.** Reportedly, there are significant numbers of pastors currently retired or soon to retire. Depending on ability and willingness, these Veterans of the Cross can be major contributors to meeting the needs of the anticipated *Ablaze* congregations.

3. **Funding serious pastoral education and formation.** Why not endow the Seminaries with the funds that would be spent on the implementation of this program so that the education of Seminarians can be funded? Either Seminary can provide a realistic per student cost for each residential student, married or single. Moreover, instead of 4-5 years for theoretical completion of the Specific Pastor Program, a student can come to the Seminary and in 2 years complete the academic requirements for Alternate Routes. He then can be assigned to a convertible Vicarage and be in his place of service.

4. **Examine historic models of ministry.** If additional manpower for missions is needed, is it really true that "this work will certainly entail *Word and Sacrament Ministry*" (emphasis added)? The SMPP document envisions "church planter, staff pastor (*sic*), and others as need arises." Do these actually require men ordained to Word and Sacrament Ministry?

If the riches of the Christian tradition are more fully considered, the historic office of deacon could be brought into the discussion. This too would be an office, like so many other "roster" categories already in place in The LC-MS, established *de iure humano* (by human authority). In fact, it could be constructed as a male equivalent to the current office of deaconess. Such deacons could evangelize, administer and serve without ordination to the Pastoral Office. In church planting contexts, they could lead a service and read a sermon prepared by a theologically trained pastor. Confession and absolution, the Eucharist and Baptism could be brought by an ordained pastor whenever needed. "Circuit Riders" (that is, a pastor who serves a number of geographically separated congregations) have a long and honorable history in the Missouri Synod.

In "staff pastor" situations, the regularly called pastor would perform all pastoral acts with the deacon assisting in ways that do not violate AC XIV. The

proposed new training program would be sufficient to prepare Deacons who do not hold or perform the role of a called and ordained pastor but serve in a lay capacity.

### **SUMMARY**

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). Such has been the prayer of the Church throughout the ages and such will be the prayer of the Church until the great and final harvest. Never has He failed to answer and never has His Church been without His blessed Gospel. Nor will the Church be deprived in the days and years to come.

I have great respect for those involved in the drafting of this Specific Ministry Pastor Program. I have no doubt that they join all the Church in prayer for laborers in the harvest. I do not believe, however, that the people of God, the royal priesthood, will be able to fully consider this proposal before the coming summer Convention. The redesign of the Office of the Ministry and the route of preparation are far too profound and complex to be adequately considered and, in my opinion, present a tremendous challenge to the future of the Lutheran ministry. At the very least, this proposal should be circulated for study and discussion and brought to the 2010 convention if there is support for it among the congregations.

One final note should be added. If this new Specific Ministry Pastor program goes forward, as I suspect it will by sheer bureaucratic power, the Seminaries will take the responsibility of designing the best possible theological education under the constraints of the Synod's mandate. This will entail the commitment of professors to a program required by the Synod we serve. I have no doubts that we will do the best that we can for the Church. But the question remains, "Is this what a Biblical and Confessional Lutheran Church really wants and needs?"

Daniel L. Gard  
Lent 2, 2007

© 2007 Daniel L. Gard. All rights reserved. Please contact the author at [garddl@aol.com](mailto:garddl@aol.com) for permission to print or distribute electronically.