

Wednesday of Lent IV, A.D. 2013
March 13, 2013

Dear Delegates and Members of Synod,

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus.

In January 2012, I asked three very competent individuals to serve on a task force to provide information and a thorough evaluation of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program at our two seminaries. The members of the task force are Rev. Dr. Ray Hartwig (Secretary of Synod, and thus very knowledgeable about the history of convention action on this issue, and related issues); Rev. Randy Golter (former District President of the Rocky Mountain District and now Executive Director for the Synod's Office of International Mission, with significant experience managing the SMP program from a district president's perspective and a keen interest in mission); and Rev. Timothy Mech (who brought invaluable experience as an SMP mentor). Rev. Dr. Glen Thomas, Executive Director of the Synod's Office of Pastoral Education, provided a great deal of staff assistance.

On the first page of the report you will find the questions I originally posed to this working group. The report is thorough and well-documented. The conclusion of the report is that we need the flexibility that the SMP program provides but must take some care in keeping it focused on "specific ministry" contexts. The report provides honest critique and praise for the program by all parties involved. There are surprises along the way and many suggestions for improvement.

My main concern in forming the task force was that the SMP numbers had risen so dramatically in a brief period, that I wondered about the future ability to sustain residential seminary education. (The report notes that in 2011 the ratio of residential to SMP students was 4 to 1 at Ft. Wayne, and 3.1 to 1 at St. Louis.) I was also concerned with the potentially very high percentage of the pastorate that would eventually not have had the benefit of a full residential education and its many blessings. These concerns remain. However, it is clear that there are contexts well served by the program and its dedicated students and graduates.

This will continue to be a challenging issue. Please give your careful attention to the report. I hope we can find a middle road which we can all affirm so that we can have the flexibility to place men in situations where the Gospel might not otherwise be delivered, or the church nurtured and grown, and still remain overwhelmingly committed to the fine manner of seminary education which has marked our entire history with such blessings for the sake of the Gospel all over the world.



Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison
President



VI. Recommendations

As tasked by the President of the Synod, the task force herewith offers a list of recommendations to make the existing program better.

1. Retain the SMP Program

Special circumstances (e.g. small parishes which cannot afford a pastor) exist. Flexibility is vital as the church fulfills her vocational calling to preach the Gospel to everyone everywhere. While the church cannot maintain her theological integrity, fidelity, and courage in these bewitching times unless she has an overall well-trained and doctrinally steeped ministerium, special circumstances warrant less-trained pastors so the means of grace can be delivered by a called and ordained pastor. Therefore the task force recommends the retention of the SMP program for special circumstances.

2. Narrow the Specificity of the SMP Program

According to Res. 5-01B of the 2007 convention, the SMP program is to address the needs of congregations and/or mission settings which cannot support a full-time pastor or missionary. Additionally, other categories included “church planter, staff pastor, and others as needs arise.”

The breadth, rigor, and depth of theological training by residential seminaries cannot be equaled. For larger congregations who need staff pastors and for engagement of the mission field through church plants, residential training is the first and best way for the benefit of the whole church. The SMP program must not become the mainstay for theological training in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Therefore, the task force recommends limiting the use of the SMP program for men who will serve small congregations who are not able to support a full-time pastor and for ethnic ministries, and not using it for the planting of churches or for staff pastors.

3. Conduct a Study of the Alternate Routes to the Pastoral Ministry

Presently, there are eight routes to ordained ministry:

a. Residential

1. Master of Divinity
2. Certificate Route

b. Distance routes:

3. Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS)
4. Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT)
5. Specific Ministry Pastor Program (SMP)
6. Deaf Institute of Theology (DIT)
7. Cross-Cultural Ministry Center (CMC)
8. Colloquy of a Ten-year Licensed Deacon

Therefore for the sake of clarity and simplicity, the non-Master of Divinity routes could be reduced. The task force recommends a study of the non-Master of Divinity routes to the Pastoral Office.

4. Add Greek to the Curriculum

For the sake of the congregations that will be served by SMP pastors, as well as the lost, original language skills equip the pastor for clear and concise proclamation and application of Law and Gospel. Therefore, the task force recommends Greek as a prerequisite for or as a basic requirement of the SMP program.

5. Maintain a Level of Enrollment that Protects Residential Seminary Formation

Residential seminaries may not be able to do everything, but they are the best and most formative places for the essential learning that is necessary for preparation for the Pastoral Office. They provide hybrid formational centers that combine classroom, chapel, and offsite training in congregational settings by a constellation of mentors, faculty, and pastors. Men who are to preach with the prophetic voice of Christ's Word need time and training to develop a beginning and continuing *habitus* for theological reflection and contextual engagement. They need to learn to read and practice not only the sacred text but also how others read, learn, and apply it as well. Theology is ever practical, for it has as its purpose the application of Christ to the sinner. Robert Preus (*Preaching to Young Theologians*, pp. 65–66) writes:

Our theology is always practical, practical for many reasons, but chiefly because its goal is practical. Its goal is the Christian life, the life hidden with Christ in God, the life of faith and hope and joy in our Lord, the life of obedience and love. We study and work and speak that we might have direction for this life, comfort for our faith, power and insight for our calling. And our final goal is life eternal. What could be more practical than that?

The Church must continue to train her men primarily the residential way. Thinking like a Lutheran pastor takes a long time, a lifetime; it takes a village and more to shape a faithful ministerium for the sake of the Triune God's mission.¹ Therefore, the task force recommends maintaining a SMP seminary enrollment at a level that does not threaten residential seminary formation as the primary route into the Office of the Pastoral Ministry.²

6. Continue to Provide Appropriate Paths to Certification as a General Pastor

SMP students need the opportunity to increase their theological skills for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. Advancement through the rigors and joys of additional studies which lead to the certification as a General Pastor will not only be of benefit to them but the whole Church. Therefore, the task force recommends that the seminaries continue to provide appropriate paths to certification as a General Pastor.

VII. The Best Way Forward: A More Acceptable Outcome

As the task force went about its business, it was clear the SMP program requires adjustment, not only for clarity on its specificity (*i.e.*, a narrower scope of work for its graduates), but also a careful maintenance of its enrollment in light of the seminaries' enrollments in residential seminary training. The above recommendations

¹ "Strong pastors make strong Christian families, and strong Christian families make strong pastors. What is good for the family is good for the church. Out of the fertile ground of the family arise budding pastors. What can a church do to provide ministerial development and training for these 'early bloomers'? It is the God-given responsibility of the church to make them into pastors." ("Who Makes a Pastor? *Concordia Journal* 26 (2000), p. 291)

² The task force extensively discussed the possibility of placing a certain percentage restriction of each year's entering class, e.g. Ten percent, but decided against such a recommendation.

begin to address this, all for the sake of a faithful ministerium for God's use. But the task force has come to believe that there is a need for one final recommendation:

7. Conduct a Feasibility Study for an Ordained Diaconate

There is always more than enough work to do as God exercises His lordship to redeem and save everyone everywhere. Currently, laymen (licensed deacons) who are not in the Office of the Holy Ministry are conducting Word and Sacrament ministry, contrary to our public doctrine (AC XIV). They should follow the churchly order of *rite vocatus*: examination, certification, call, and ordination. The large majority of the SMP student body as staff pastors reveals another pressing need of the church as well. Could an ordained diaconate be of help to the church at this present time, for both situations? Should they be placed within the Pastoral Office but with distinctions and limitations made by human authority (*de iure humano*)? Perhaps they could preach and baptize but not consecrate the elements. How might this be of help or hindrance to the church at this present time? Theological engagement and study are needed.

For engagement of the mission field, the first and best option is a well-trained pastor.

Distinctions within the Office are by human authority (*de iure humano*) while the Pastoral Office is by divine authority (*de iure divino*). Certainty is most crucial for the Church—not only for those who are called as they do His speaking but also for those who hear as they receive His Word. The divine call remains a necessity for those who are sent by Him to exercise the Office of the Keys (AC XIV, XXVIII).

For these reasons, the task force recommends a feasibility study for an ordained diaconate.

Conclusion

The church lives in and for Him, as He leads her to live and exist for the world. His call of the church also invites and privileges her to join the cooperative work of fidelity to doctrine and its distribution to anyone who has ears to hear, the whole earth. According to His instruction, He has so ordered faithful men to fill and exercise the Office of the Keys on His behalf and that of the church. The church can do no other, as she marvels at the sheer generosity of the Father revealed by the Spirit in the preaching about His Son.

This is clear: The Lord is always in motion toward the lost,³ leading the way, bringing His church along as His privileged coworker in mission. Christ Himself extends His gracious Lordship through the church as He calls preachers to herald His one and alone saving Gospel.⁴ Integrity and credibility of her pastors are most important,

³ Wilhelm Loehe writes: "For mission is nothing but the one church of God in motion, the actualization of the one universal, catholic church. Wherever mission enters in, the barriers which separate nation from nation fall down. Wherever it comes it brings together what previously was far off and widely separated...Mission is the life of the catholic church. Where it stops, blood and breath stop; where it dies, the love which unites heaven and earth also dies. The catholic church and mission--these two no one can separate without killing both, and that is impossible." Wilhelm Lohe, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. and ed. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969) p. 59. Reprinted by permission of Augsburg Fortress Press, Concordia Seminary Press, Fort Wayne, IN, 1989).

⁴ "The early Church did not understand mission as merely human action done in response to the good things God had done. Mission was perceived christologically—as God acting for the salvation of fallen mankind, but God acting only in union with mankind. The early Church understood mission to be the very expression of the Lordship of Christ in the Holy Spirit." William C. Weinrich, "Evangelism in the Early Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45 (April 1981), p. 62.

for the proclamation of His Word without adulteration, dilution, or boundary is of divine requirement. Pastors “play God,” that is, by their faithful repetition of His Word, God kills and makes alive.⁵ The conversation then of the faithful formation of the men preparing for the Pastoral Office by God through His church is no small matter.

A severe threat to the faithful formation of the church’s ministerium is a compromised ecclesiology, whereby everyone does his own thing. As the church is never the mere addition of individuals, congregations, circuits, and districts but a totality of one,⁶ so she is in her work—one work—for the faithful formation of some men to be preachers of His cross. Her catholicity—or lack thereof—is put on display for all to see in everything she does.

According to the Lord’s assessment, the fields are ever ripe for harvest. Therefore, the church gladly goes forward in the confidence of the Holy Spirit until He ushers in the Final Day.

It is the prayer of the task force that this document will benefit the church as she engages in lively conversation regarding the faithful formation of her pastors as applied to the SMP program.

Raymond Hartwig, *Chairman*
Timothy Mech, *Secretary*
Randall Golter

⁵ “If it is God’s Word that accomplishes the death and resurrection of the elect, the Word must be proclaimed so that it can do in the *here and now* the killing and the resurrection, the electing, which God has determined. It means that the *biggest challenge* for pastors is to *play God*, to kill and raise people ahead of time, to make them Israel, God’s chosen people, in the present time. Through the promise of God’s Word, pastors are to resurrect God’s chosen ones out of the deadness of their sin. They bring about the death and resurrection of God’s children.” Timothy Saleska, “Pastors Who Play God,” *Concordia Journal* 31 (2005) 24. The Confessions state: “Christ orders him to feed the flock, that is, to preach the Word or govern the church by the Word,” (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. *Book of Concord*, 30).

⁶ See Bo Giertz: “The Church, too, appears as a totality, not a sum of individuals. She is *one* body, and Christ is the head, the will, the source of life, and the power of all growth,” p. 22. See also pp. 70-73.