

Inside This Issue

Theological Education for Pastoral-Missional Leadership

Pastoral formation and theological education remain crucial issues for almost all church bodies. It has always been so, but the dramatic decline in seminary enrollment corresponds to a similar decline in church membership and attendance.¹ What is important to the mission focus of this journal is the fact that many of the same social, cultural, religious, and economic factors that are affecting the institutional church structures in decline are also opening up a vast mission field, filled with opportunities and challenges.

Many of these challenges present themselves in a much different cultural context and religious milieu than just a generation ago. Polls confirm, at least for the Western world, an increasingly unchurched society dominated by the rise of either the “nones,” who have religious inclinations but little interest in traditional institutions, or true unbelievers, many of whom are unaware and even hostile to the church’s message. For many congregations, this is no longer simply a matter of bringing in the church seekers or even the “churched” from other denominations, moved by the Holy Spirit to grasp the strength of biblical doctrine as understood by the Lutheran Confessions. It is much more a matter of presenting the fundamental realities and divine truths of Law and Gospel to a culture that barely cares to understand the notion of “god.”

On the other hand, much of the non-Western world, particularly the global South, is experiencing some spiritual revival. Several Lutheran churches are thriving, and countries that those in the West once thought of as mission fields are sending missionaries, evangelists, and ordained pastors into our communities. Some of them have been formed in ways quite different from our traditional models yet display an urgency and skill in witness and outreach that may often be lacking in those who are formed within the presumed “gold standard” of a formal Master of Divinity degree.

So, not only could the challenges of enrollment be addressed in new ways, but even the substance and focus of seminary education may need to be evaluated and, if helpful, reshaped as needed. The theological foundation and biblical and Confessional substance dare never change, but the context in and for which seminary education forms pastors may need to be reframed. Additionally necessary is the multiplication of new methods, especially new means and modes of delivering education, all of which can be tried and tested and put to appropriate service. All of this underscores the theme of this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters*, “Theological Education for Pastoral-Missional Leadership.”

The focus is on *pastoral* formation. That is not to ignore the actual end goal of pastoral ministry, which is to empower the entire people of God to *be* the people of God, not just within the safer space of Christian fellowship, where they are strengthened by God’s gifts, but also to engage the world outside—even just outside—our doors with the saving message of God’s gift of true life and salvation through Jesus the Christ. But at the heart of that mission are the Means of Grace and the pastoral office entrusted with stewardship of those means.

In fact, this end goal gives focus to the second aspect of this theme, *pastoral-missional* leadership. The hyphen is intentional. The editorial committee wanted to highlight that this is a tandem pair, not simply a series of otherwise independent adjectives that a comma might suggest (“pastoral, missional . . .”). We intend to suggest that “pastoral” leadership includes “mission” leadership appropriate to the context of today’s church together with our Savior’s own end goal as the true Son of Man to embody the new creation under His grace-full lordship, where all authority is given to Him, and then, receiving the first fruits of that new life, for His followers to make disciples, yes, of all nations.

So what—and how—are we doing in our current pastoral formation to meet the mission needs of today’s world? How are the current curricula, surrounded by all the factors of formation that are not measured by credit hours or exams, actually functioning to prepare pastors for mission leadership in current mission contexts? Are we meeting today’s challenges, and, if not, are we considering changes that might be tested and proven helpful? The essays offered here are provided as humble contributions toward investigating and answering such questions. This is an ongoing journey, entrusted to various entities in the church, which, in turn, are surrounded by a continuing conversation that must engage the whole church. Among these essays are various analyses of what is happening in pastoral formation and how well it engages these mission challenges. Others offer critiques that question not only current practices but also some of their underlying assumptions and foundations. Some attest to the positive results of new means and modes. The attentive reader will be able to trace some common threads throughout all these essays. At the same time, a good deal of disagreement and even interrelated criticism and correction can be tracked. This is all much intended in the interest of healthy discussion and debate, as iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17).

Few people read a journal like this from beginning to end, in either a comprehensive or serial manner. When editors respond to the content that a call for papers elicits, anything more than a random selection is usually more accidental than can be credited to good planning. But the essays that follow offer a wholesome and varied spectrum of perspectives and viewpoints. The reader can also track a logical progression through them from start to finish. After several introductory essays that offer an overview of our topic, a second section focuses on what might be summarized as “current practices.” This is followed by a final section dealing with “current

9 Inside This Issue

possibilities,” most notably some experimentation and evaluation of distance learning and other variations on traditional and residential models.

A. Introduction and Overview.

We begin with words of encouragement and a mission challenge to one recent class of seminary graduates, the class of 2022 at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO. These words helped foster and shape this entire issue of *LMM*, as several members of the editorial committee were in the audience as it was given by Dr. Patrick Ferry, retiring president of Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor, at Commencement Exercises last May (2022). As a lifelong runner, Dr. Ferry used the phrase, “ready, set, GO,” with the reminder that our Lord’s mission in today’s world calls us to *go*—out of the usual comfort zones, especially in a church culture that can easily become inwardly rather outwardly focused. Due to the typical formalities and constraints of such a setting, his address spoke in general ways, and the decision was quickly made to follow up with some interview questions to help clarify, expand, and flesh out the details and specifics of his important words.

Then, Dr. Richard Carter, now in “retirement” from a lifetime of service in pastoral and educational ministry (though he has recently returned with missionary and life partner Miriam from mission service as a theological educator at Concordia Theological Seminary in Hong Kong) sets the table in an exercise of thinking seriously about what we understand by “theological education.” He invites us to reflect on our understandings of both “education” and “theological,” especially in light of biblical models and Lutheran theological accents, all seasoned with a personal and intellectual humility.

B. Current Practices

Dr. James Baneck, Executive Director of the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education, begins with a foundational presentation of the biblical and Confessional principles that underlie pastoral formation in preparation for today’s mission challenges. He reminds us of the breadth and depth of such formation and of the role and responsibility of the entire church in raising up the next generation of pastoral leadership.

This is followed by a survey of current practices along with some observations gleaned from conversations with various leaders of four North American seminaries as summarized by your guest editor, who adds some personal reflections and comments from his own experiences in seminary administration and synodical service.

Moving outside of North America, two insightful essays provide perspectives about the *missio dei* in a worldwide context, first “under the southern cross” as presented by Dr. Acir Raymann, recently retired after many years of service as professor and academic dean at Seminário Concórdia, the seminary of Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brazil. Then, Dr. Christu Das, Principal of Concordia

Theological Seminary of the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, offers his insights into the work of another church where the seeds of missionaries have led to the seedbeds that are locally owned and operated seminaries. Both colleagues trace the interesting histories of these seminaries, discuss how they have come to be what they are, and how they are facing the challenges within their own current mission contexts.

C. Challenges, Changes, Current Possibilities

This section begins with a critique of residential education that reflects the significant discussion that has taken place over the past fifty-plus years. Dr. William Utech's analysis is further supported by his own background and life experience, which involves time as a parish pastor, seminary faculty member, and district mission executive. His essay evaluates the "end" or goal of seminary education against the realities of congregational life in our current mission context. He concludes, negatively, that residential education has certain weaknesses along with the usually recognized strengths, and, positively, with some personal "sanctified suggestions" for reflection and consideration.

Dr. Douglas Rutt, himself a missionary, seminary professor, executive director of the international division of Lutheran Hour Ministries, and, most recently, retired provost of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, offers his careful and fair-minded analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, pros and cons of distance education. His conclusion assumes that such new models are here to stay and that they can and will find their helpful and useful place when utilized in a responsible and effective manner. God's church should make use of all modes and means for raising up pastors and mission leaders.

What follows are two collections of experiential anecdotes from students who have engaged in two new models of theological education, and who are already employing that education in mission contexts in North America. The first comes from Dr. Glenn Fluegge, director of the Cross-cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University Irvine, who provides a short description of the center's work and then presents the personal reflections provided by two recent graduates of that program. They share the challenges of their current ministries and how their time in the program helped prepare them for the mission contexts in which they now find themselves.

Secondly, Dr. James Marriott reflects on his experiences as a regular instructor in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program of the LCMS. This program was approved at the 2007 convention of the LCMS with goals that included "an increase in pastoral ministry to meet such needs of the church, especially in light of the mission challenges of today's world."² With an overview of the program as conducted by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, from director Dr. Mart Thompson, Marriott documents responses from four recent participants in that program, each of whom is engaged in a unique missional context. Both of these contributions give a window into how creative and responsible new programs can serve the formation of pastoral-missional leaders.

Three book reviews round out this issue, one by Miriam Carter, on *WE ARE NOT THE HERO, A Missionary's Guide for Sharing Christ, Not a Culture of Dependency* by Jean Johnson. The book deals with the challenges of cross-cultural missionary work that seeks to understand the culture into which one shares the message of God's love in Jesus to people without losing their culture in order to worship God. This study is truly sensitive to the needs for indigenous theological responses and to avoid developing dependencies.

Daniel Mattson reviews *Teaching and Learning Theology in the Online Environment* by Matthew C. Ogilvie. This study discusses the advantages and disadvantages of both residential and distance education and notes the needs for both models, especially in light of different learning styles and personal characteristics and circumstances. Noting that the need for ministry is not negotiable but that the means of preparing pastors *is*, Mattson commends this book as a helpful appraisal and tool for making use of surrounding resources and opportunities.

Finally, I provide an "extended bibliographic notice" on a book from 1975 that has very significant implications for mission conversations even today. Based on extensive research and analysis, Herbert Zorn's *Viability in Context, The Theological Seminary in the Third World—Seedbed or Sheltered Garden?* presents an understanding of the cultural and financial realities of exporting models and means of theological education that are still needed to counter the lingering problems of colonialization and financial dependencies. While providing a summary of some of the important research, I call attention to the more comprehensive review already published in the predecessor to this journal, *Missio Apostolica*, in 2015.

As stated, this issue is intended to provide perspectives and various positions toward the ongoing conversations that take place in congregations, conferences, and even conventions. This discussion must continue, and it must be informed by all the various stakeholders across the church. Our hope as those responsible for making these essays available is that they will serve as a modest contribution to such a common cause of raising up pastoral-missional leaders for today's mission context.

Andrew H. Bartelt
guest editor

ENDNOTES

¹ I do not know if this statistic exists, but I suspect there is a somewhat constant ratio of denominational membership to seminary enrollment, although that would be affected also by the age of a denomination, as the pool of potential seminary students interested in pastoral ministry is likely dependent on the number of young men who are confirmed and entering the recruitment years.

² “Resolution 5-01B,” *2007 Convention Proceedings*, 63rd Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church Missouri—Synod, Houston, TX, July 14–19, 2007 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 136, 5th “whereas” statement. “Such needs” refers back to the previous “Whereas” statements that include the need to “provide ordained pastoral service to congregations that cannot support a full-time pastor, ordained pastoral service to contexts where English is not spoken, ordained missionary personnel where finances and/or conditions do not permit calling a full-time missionary” and “needs for providing pastoral ministry in specific and specialized situations where a traditionally prepared seminary candidate or pastor is not available continue to multiply.” The following “whereas” notes that “our Synod has resolved to plant 2,000 new congregations by 2017, for which a net gain of 2,000 pastors will be needed.”