

# The Mission of the Church and Pastoral Formation

James A. Baneck

How is The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) intentionally preparing men to be pastors for the mission of Christ’s Church, that is to shepherd those “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9)?

The mission of the Church belongs to Christ and begins and ends with Him, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*. Luther writes,

The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:24–25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29), and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all (Is. 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works or merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Rom. 3:23–25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit . . . Nothing of this article can be yielded or surrendered.

Upon this article everything that we teach and practice depends (SA II I 1–5).<sup>1</sup>



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Christians who hold to the Lutheran Confessions teach, believe, and confess that the Church stands or falls on the article of justification.

The mission of the Church is about the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the administration of His blessed Sacraments, by which He comes to His people in His very presence for eternal life and salvation. There is nothing in all creation, from eternity to eternity, that compares to God's plan for the salvation of the world through the incarnation, blood, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus says in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations," and Matthew 28:18–20, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Through these words, Jesus teaches the mission of the church, which is to "preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23) for the salvation of the world.

What is the greatest need of Hispanic parents? What is the greatest need for the husband addicted to pornography? What is the greatest need for the homeless veteran? What is the greatest need for the Ukrainian refugee? What is the greatest need for the local Hmong community? What is the greatest need for the young man wrestling with his sexual identity? What is the greatest need for the rural family engaged in farming and school sports? What is the greatest need for the aged widow in assisted living? What is the greatest need for all God's people in all circumstances? The greatest need is *eternal salvation through Jesus Christ!* This does not exclude the Church's acts of mercy done in faith toward God and fervent love toward neighbor.

Each generation believes their time is the worst of times. Through the ages, the Church has confessed that *now* the time of mission is greater than ever before. Hermann Sasse served as a pastor during some the darkest days of the last century under the Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler. The day before the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps opened at Buchenwald, Sasse spoke:

So today Germany stands before the great decision that God has placed before her in history. Yes, seriously, the hour of decision has come upon us, and so the task of missions will be greater. Today, home mission and international mission, inner and outer mission move together. Never before has the task of missions been greater. If we despair, it is because we do not know that the work is not ours, but his alone. The prophesy of the Lord still rings over our people and our church: 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come' (Matt. 24:14). . . . By this Word he calls us anew to his service, us sinners, us weaklings, us of little faith: 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you' (John 20:21).<sup>2</sup>

The words of Sasse ring true for every generation, even as St. Paul's words are proclaimed and believed:

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom 10:13–17).

## **The Mission of the Church**

Before we address how to prepare men to be pastors for the mission of the Church, let us first address the mission itself.

### *The mission of the Church is Christ-centered*

In his treatise on the Church, Bo Giertz contemplates the significance of church buildings with high steeples and crosses that point toward heaven. While this architecture makes a statement, it doesn't tell the whole story. Sasse comments that the world understands the Christian faith as one religion among many others: "People have so many different languages, different forms of government, and different cultures. Why shouldn't they have different religions?"<sup>3</sup> Who is to say that the steeple with the cross represents the only religion? What about a building with a moon and star on top? Or one with a gold Moroni? Or one with an eight-pointed star?

The topic of cultural context and the mission of the Church is not new. Sasse addressed it in the early twentieth century. He writes,

[The world] can only see in the best intentions of Christian mission nothing other than the propaganda that one of humanity's religions uses to propel itself, and its natural limits are reached when it runs up against the propaganda of another faith to which it is opposed. We have no human means to teach the world better. No evidence of the side effects of mission, or on the cultural meaning of the mission work, or the indisputable blessing that the medical mission brings will make friends of mission out of enemies of mission. This is the particular meaning of the present hour for mission that is so important for Christian that one must concentrate only on that which propels the Church's mission. Mission is not about any cultural values. We are not driven to mission out of a desire to force our worldview on others. Rather the Church of Christ is driven to mission only because Jesus Christ is Lord [Phil. 2:11], to whom all authority on heaven and earth has been given. And he

has given his Church the command to preach his Gospel to all peoples to the ends of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Sasse defines the mission of the Church with great clarity—all the while surrounded by pressures of culture, context, tolerance, and persecution. In the middle of the static, Sasse speaks these clear and poignant words:

The Church is driven to mission because she believes in [Jesus Christ] . . . The gospel is not just a religious message like so many others. It is not a teaching that says there is a God who forgives sins and someday will erect a kingdom. The gospel is much more the message that God has come to man. It is the message that there is a Savior of sinners, who calls men from all races and peoples to himself . . . The Gospel is the message of Christ himself . . . The world is outraged by this “boring” message that never changes. But the Church cannot change it. Yes, because it is not her message, but Christ’s message.<sup>5</sup>

The person and work of Jesus Christ is in His crucifixion, death, and resurrection, which stand at the very core of everything in all creation, in all history, in all time, in all existence. The mission of the Church is to proclaim and teach Christ for the salvation of God’s people. Giertz concludes, “The Church is where Christ is . . . Being the vehicle for this all-embracing salvation, the Church must reach out to all people everywhere and in all times to be what she truly is. And that is catholic.”<sup>6</sup>

*The mission of the Church is “whole”*

The one holy Christian and apostolic Church is one “whole.” Giertz writes, “If the Church is the true Israel, then she is from the beginning designed as a totality, and indivisible unit, which came about through an election and an act of creation by God Himself. Any individualism and sectarianism are excluded. One cannot be an Israelite on one’s own.”<sup>7</sup>

As we are baptized into Christ, we are not baptized as “individual churches,” but baptized into the one true “whole” Church. All Christian congregations are a part of the one true holy Christian Church. He writes,

The essence of the Church lives also in the smallest of her parts, just as the same blood flows through all the parts of the body. This does not mean that each individual congregation would be independent or autonomous. Rather the opposite: after all, it lives indissolubly grown together with other congregations. This organic unity is bound to become organizational as well.<sup>8</sup>

We hold to this same understanding in the LCMS. While we hold that every congregation is self-governing, we do not hold that every congregation is autonomous.

While congregations of the Synod are self-governing (*Constitution of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Article VII*), they, and also individual members, commit themselves as members of the Synod to act in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod under which they have agreed to live and work together” (Bylaw 1.3.4.1).

Concerning the mission of the Church, the LCMS bylaws state,

Committed to a common confession and mission, congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod join with one another in the Synod to support one another and to work together in carrying out their commonly adopted objectives (Bylaw 1.1.1).

The above is consistent with the doctrine of the church in the Lutheran Confessions. The Apology states, “The Church is people scattered throughout the whole world. They agree about the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions . . . (Ap VII & VIII 10–12).

Giertz expresses concern over the Lutheran Church of Sweden:

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, splitting up in sects was already well advanced. But he only had to ask them, “Is *Christ divided?*” (1 Cor 1:13) to make obvious the total absurdity and culpability of such division. Is Christ divided? Facing that question was enough for the splitting forces to unite again. Either unity in Christ or no Christianity at all . . . The terrible conclusion today is that a divided church is not a true church any longer, at any rate not a sound and vigorous church. Acknowledging the Bible’s view of the church, all of Christendom is today called to confess this sin of division.<sup>9</sup>

### *The mission of the Church is changeless*

The mission of the Church never changes because Jesus Christ is changeless. Scripture states, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

Whether domestic or international, the message of the Gospel does not change. Yet the Church prays for wisdom and seeks knowledge in how best to teach the Gospel. What is the age of the hearer? What is the language of the hearer? What is the hearer’s current knowledge and understanding of God’s Word? What is the ethnicity and culture of the hearer, and how might these affect the way the teacher will present the Gospel?

Klaus Detlev Schulz, who served as an international missionary and often teaches internationally, acknowledges that while the mission is the same, one particular structure or model of mission may change depending on the circumstance: “Mission is volatile, always on the move and continuously in the process of restructuring.”<sup>10</sup>

However, with all his mission experience, Schulz writes, “All these stations in life have deepened my conviction that mission strategy and practice must be guided by a serious engagement with Scripture and theology.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet the role of culture in mission is a complex matter. Schulz notes,

In fact, the late Lesslie Newbigin observed that ‘there can never be a culture-free gospel.’ Christians ought to contemplate Newbigin’s observation carefully, as his insight may free up all those who serve in cross-cultural witness. Christians come to grips with their own cultural setting and thus avoid potential mistakes and misunderstandings as they witness the Gospel in varying contexts.<sup>12</sup>

Giertz offers an example of mission and cultural context concerning language. He writes,

Finally, Luther’s remarkably sensitive views on customs and cultures ought to inform the modern Church’s attempts to bring the gospel to diverse groups of people the world over. Not only should the Gospel be taught and preached in the indigenous people’s language, but the newly converted should also find their own expression of faith within their particular cultural context. . . . A good preacher and missionary must take great pains in his choice of words by mingling with his audience and watching them closely.<sup>13</sup>

Christ commands His Church to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Though the Gospel is changeless, this does not mean the command to proclaim it is without challenges. As the Church strives to faithfully heed Christ’s command, she prays for wisdom and seeks knowledge, striving to best to share the Gospel with people of every nation and language.

*The mission of the Church is carried out by every Christian*

The centrality of Article IV of the Augsburg Confession was stated earlier, and it bears repeating that Lutherans confess that the Church stands or falls on this article of justification. The next article is on the Ministry. Through the divinely instituted Office of the Holy Ministry, the Holy Spirit creates and sustains saving faith through the preaching of the Word and the administration of His blessed Sacraments: “Through the Christian congregation, as the holder of all churchly authority, God calls qualified men to fill this divinely established office and sends them as His ministers to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to administer the Sacraments publicly in the stead of Christ and by His command with accountability both to God and to the Church” (*LSB Agenda*, 155).

The pastor teaches and preaches God’s Word in its truth and purity centered on Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. This is consistent with AC XIV: “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.” The LCMS defines a rightly ordered call,

or “proper call,” one that entails three biblical and confessional mandates: examination, call, and ordination.<sup>14</sup>

God’s people receive instruction in the Word from their pastors, and they in turn share this Word of God with their neighbors, each in their own vocation. Christian parents teach the Word to their children. Grandparents share God’s Word with their grandchildren. Employees give witness to Christ, according to God’s Word, with their coworkers. As baptized children of God in Christ Jesus, we share God’s Word and bear witness whenever we have the opportunity.

Concerning carrying out the mission of the Church, Schulz wonderfully describes the relationship between pastors and those baptized in Christ:

Indeed, given the biblical mandate and the worldwide need for the gospel, we should underscore that the Church has an obligation to *set apart individuals and commission them on behalf of those Christians who remain behind* (Acts 13:3). Although mission can include spontaneous outreach and works of love and mercy arising *from all Christians*, it also represents the intentional targeting of people in the state of unbelief to whom the Church sends individuals.<sup>15</sup>

The earthly church should not restrict any Christian from telling his or her neighbor the Good News of Jesus Christ for life and salvation. Every Christian gives witness to the faith, each according to her or his vocation.

## **Pastoral Formation**

God entrusts pastors with sacred duties and responsibilities. He calls pastors faithfully to handle the holy things of God, to be stewards of His mysteries (1 Cor 4:1). Stewarding God’s mysteries occurs in the preaching and teaching of the Word, administration of the Sacraments, Confession and Absolution, and applying God’s Word to the faith and life of God’s people in pastoral care, leading God’s people through this vale of tears into the eternal kingdom of God.

Since the mission of the Church has eternal ramifications, we should not look for shortcuts, easy routes, minimal formation, or even formation processes invented by a single pastor or district. While the Lutheran Church has adopted stop-gap measures occasionally, we should always strive for what is good and right in the formation of pastors and other church workers who fill a divinely established office that shepherds the eternal lives and souls of God’s people.

### *Pastoral formation begins at childhood*

The Church, from the pastor to Christian parents and grandparents, congregation members, and commissioned church workers, “trains up a child in the way he should go” (Prov 22:6). We train up a child to love God and serve neighbor through teaching and training in salvation and identity in Christ.

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*Set Apart to Serve (SAS)*, the LCMS Church Worker Recruitment Initiative,<sup>16</sup> has developed categories that pertain to the formation of the whole person in Christ Jesus for church work. These areas of development are particularly important as we, the body of Christ, train pastors and other church workers in Christ Jesus for the life of the world.

1. **Spiritual formation.** Spiritual formation involves immersion in God’s Word from an early age. This includes hearing the Word through preaching (Rom 10:17), being immersed in church liturgy (which contains the Word), and studying the Word at church and home. Spiritual formation also takes place in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For those preparing for pastoral ministry, spiritual formation involves learning Hebrew and Greek, hermeneutics, isagogics, apologetics based on the Word of God, and an in-depth study of the biblical text as applied to God’s people in preaching, teaching, stewarding the Sacraments, and pastoral care.
2. **Confessional formation.** In the Lutheran Church, these confessions are contained in the *Book of Concord* and are adhered to because (*quia*) they are faithful to the Scriptures: “These Confessions give clear, unambiguous, and certain witness to the Christian faith. They unite all those who bear the name Lutheran and wish to be—and remain—genuinely Lutheran.”<sup>17</sup> Every LCMS pastor at his ordination and/or installation pledges faithfulness to all the Confessional documents in the *Book of Concord*. From childhood, confessional formation begins with learning Luther’s *Small Catechism*. Pre-seminary and seminary formation includes reading, studying, and applying the Lutheran Confessions to preaching, teaching, stewarding the mysteries of God, and pastoral care.
3. **Character development.** Character development is a part of one’s baptismal faith and life in Christ. In one’s early years, the father and mother and those in authority (e.g., pastor, teacher, grandparent) train and discipline the child in Christian character. A child grows on this foundation through instruction in confession and repentance, in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5), integrity, virtue, manners, civility, humility, and a sanctified life in Christ. Character development is formed through Christ and His Word. In his list of qualifications for overseers (pastors), St. Paul lists several items of character: “Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” (1 Tim 3:2–3). Those who teach and lead at elementary and high schools, universities, and seminaries continue to inculcate good character in those being formed for the pastoral ministry.
4. **Intellectual development.** Intellectual development begins in the womb. Reading to a child, singing to a child, having conversations with a child, speaking in an adult voice, and supporting a child’s natural desire to learn are



all building blocks of intellectual development. As a child grows and matures, intellectual development encompasses a well-rounded comprehensive curriculum, quality instruction, thinking skills, verbal skills, philosophy, music, math, science, and the like. Such development is beneficial for every child, but especially true for a child taught to love God and serve his or her neighbor as a Christian. This is also true as we raise our children for higher education and especially the Office of the Holy Ministry. The education of pastors encompasses, but is not limited to, (biblical) languages, grammar and rhetoric, theology, history, the skill and art of teaching, higher-level of knowledge of the world and liberal arts, as well as a mastery in doctrine and practice.

5. Physical and emotional development. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul makes it clear that God redeems and sanctifies each believer: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In our vocations as the baptized in Christ, we serve our neighbor through our bodies and emotions. Therefore, as a new creation in Christ, pastors and other church leaders are not excluded from being stewards of the bodies God formed and gave them. Neglecting stewardship of the body jeopardizes the ability to fulfill one’s vocation in the ministry. The same is true for the stewardship of emotional health. As we rear our sons and daughters in the faith, we do so in a healthy environment and address emotional issues when necessary.
6. Synodical development. Anecdotal evidence and research reveal that pastors entering full-time church work in the LCMS know little about the Synod. “The Synod is organized to work in support of and on behalf of congregations to assist them in carrying out their ministries as they seek to serve our Lord Jesus Christ, the members of His body, and the world which stands in need of the Word and the impact of His redeeming love” (Bylaw 1.1). Understanding the purpose of the Synod and how we agree to live together is vital for the confession of our faith and the unity in which we proclaim it. Synodical development is nurtured in others by how we talk about Synod in our ministry and circle of influence.

To raise up new generations of church workers within this robust formation development constitutes an intentional, all-hands-on-deck culture change in the LCMS. It means striving for what is good and right for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It means believing in the Gospel and taking it seriously for the faith and life of our children and grandchildren, family and friends, and all God’s people. This has been a core message in the *Set Apart to Serve* church work recruitment initiative.

### *Reflections concerning Seminary formation*

The two seminaries of the LCMS are leaders in theological education for our church partners and emerging church partners around the world. Current and future

church workers from across the globe leave their families, homes, and countries for a time to study at either Concordia Seminary, St. Louis or Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

The Synod has expressed in several conventions that “the most complete means of preparing a man for the general responsibilities of the pastoral office and a lifetime of service is the residential master of divinity route at the Synod’s seminaries.”<sup>18</sup> And furthermore, “that residential seminary education is the preferred option for the preparation of men for pastoral ministry.”<sup>19</sup> There is great value in forming pastors at the residential seminaries. These men are being shaped and formed in community by daily chapel in the Word, face-to-face interactions with their professors and peers, and immersion in a Synod culture that has benefits for years to come.

Synod Bylaw 2.8.1 states that “[Pastoral] candidates shall be declared qualified for first calls . . . who will have satisfactorily completed the prescribed courses of studies and will have received their diplomas *from their respective educational institutions of the Synod* or have fulfilled the requisites of a colloquy or other approved education program of the Synod.” Among many other reasons, this bylaw safeguards the qualifications of the *whole Synod* concerning the men who enter the pastoral ministry in the LCMS. Since we maintain that the mission of the Church is *Christ’s* mission, we strive toward the most complete means of preparing a man for the pastoral office and agree on the “high bar” qualifications to be a bearer of the eternal Gospel.

No man or woman exits the seminary fully formed. Formation takes a lifetime. The seminary works to form men and women who are well-immersed in the Scriptures, theology, and apologetics. When it comes to the pastoral office, seminary education provides extensive practice in preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and administration through field education, vicarage, and conversations with professors and peers throughout the day. But, still, no one leaves the seminary *fully formed and equipped* for the ministry context and situation in which he or she is placed.

Both seminaries continually evaluate their curriculum as they form men and women for ministry with the changeless Gospel for an ever-sinful and changing world. While we rejoice in the stability of our seminaries, we applaud their agility to respond to generational, cultural, economic, and ethnic challenges in which their students will proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have called faithful teachers of the church to our seminaries to form pastors who serve under the cross. These faithful teachers are forming pastors who will speak the Gospel into contexts influenced by COVID-19, gender and sexual identity politics, multiculturalism, social media, church membership decline, transglobal and international tensions, debates around abortion, persecution, and more.

I contend that the first step in addressing the mission of the Church and pastoral formation is to pray for our seminaries and their teachers, especially their incredible, sacred task of forming men and women for ministry who proclaim the eternal Gospel to a dying world. I contend we pray for our pastors and deaconesses who faithfully serve God’s people with His gifts of life and salvation. We pray they continue to be formed through God’s Word, continuing education, and their experiences of suffering and joy. We pray for our congregations, who desire faithful church leaders and gladly hear and learn God’s Word. We pray they cherish God’s Word as the one necessity for their life and salvation, and for the salvation of their children and grandchildren.

To this end, we heed the voice of our blessed Savior: “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt 9:38).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This and subsequent Book of Concord citations are from Paul McCain et al., eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Sasse, *Witness: Erlangen Sermons and Essays for the Church, 1933–1944* (Saginaw, MI: Magdeburg Press, 2013), 219.

<sup>3</sup> Sasse, 210.

<sup>4</sup> Sasse, 213.

<sup>5</sup> Sasse, 214–15.

<sup>6</sup> Bo Giertz, *Christ's Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 61.

<sup>7</sup> Giertz, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Giertz, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Giertz, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Detlev Schulz, *Mission from the Cross: The Lutheran Theology of Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), x.

<sup>11</sup> Schulz, xi.

<sup>12</sup> Schulz, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Giertz, *Christ's Church*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Resolution 6-02, *Upon This Rock: 66th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Milwaukee, WI, July 9–14, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Schulz, *Mission from the Cross*, 28, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Resolution 6-01, *Joy: Fully Lutheran: 67th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Tampa, FL, July 20–25, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> McCain et al., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Resolution 5-14A, *Baptized for This Moment: 65th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, MO, July 20–25, 2013); Resolution 6-03, *Upon This Rock: 66th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* (Milwaukee, WI, July 9–14, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Resolution 6-02, *Joy: Fully Lutheran: 67th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Tampa, FL, July 20–25, 2019).