

A “Conversation” about Seminary Formation for Mission Leadership

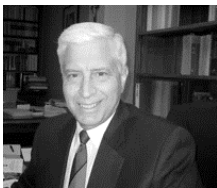
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Abstract

Based on a review of curriculum and conversations with academic leaders, the author provides a summary of observations about the current formation programs of four North American seminaries, including his own thoughts, all in the spirit of contributions to this ongoing conversation. He notes, positively, what courses and practica are in place, but he also calls attention to the need for more urgency and creativity in dealing with the challenges of a declining church body in the face of an expanding mission field.

The focus of this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* on pastoral formation for missional leadership prompted my own research and reflections into just what a typical seminary might be doing to form candidates to be leaders for today’s mission context and challenges. To get a global perspective, I sent a simple questionnaire to all the seminaries on the home page of the International Lutheran Council, with mixed results. From a statistical standpoint, the response was insufficient for any serious analysis; though, in general, the seminaries that did respond indicated that they were very aware of the mission needs of their own context and were attempting to respond with various missions courses and practica.¹ It was striking how similar the curricula were to one another. These similarities indicate a certain regularity in covering the key biblical, doctrinal, and historical foundations along with the practical applications appropriate to different cultural contexts.

Perhaps simply because they were “closer to (my!) home,” I was able to conduct a more detailed evaluation of the curricula at the four North American seminaries within that Confessional circle. I engaged in direct and first-hand discussion with



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colleagues at the two LCMS seminaries, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), as well as the two seminaries of the Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC), Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catherines, Ontario (StC) and Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton, Alberta (EDM). My interviews included some presidents, deans, and especially those who teach in the area of missions. To best capture the focus of this issue, I posed the simple question, “What—and how well—are we doing in seminary formation to raise up pastors for mission leadership in today’s mission context?”

A review of each seminary’s academic catalog quickly showed attention to both the larger concerns of our Lord’s mission and the more focused attention to outreach. All four seminaries have some kind of statement in the goals and student learning outcomes (SLO, or Programme Learning Outcomes [PLO]) of their Master of Divinity program of pastoral formation, such as the following (one needs to supply something like “a graduate [will be able to] . . .”):

“Evangelize those outside the Church in order to gather them into the saving fellowship of Christ’s body.” (SLO #10, CTSFW)

Several statements include the awareness of cultural issues that affect mission engagement, such as,

“Analyzes and engages cultural and global realities.” (SLO 12, CSL)

“Be able to articulate and critically assess the teaching and practices of people in the multi-faith and multi-cultural Canadian context in order to proclaim Christ’s love to them” (PLO 2.c., StC)

(a) “Understand Canada’s varied social cultural, and religious contexts; (b) be aware of contemporary global issues; (c) be ready to represent Christ and share the Gospel in a variety of contexts.” (PLO 5, EDM)

Several also use language about empowering the laity for Christ’s mission, such as,

“Ability to prepare and lead members of a congregation to bring the Gospel to those outside the church.” (SLO #17, CSL)

“Be able to equip Christians to further the church’s mission.” (PLO 4.d., EDM)

“Develop the skills and attitudes to equip members of the congregation to further the church’s mission in the local community and the world.” (1 Peter 4:1–11) (PLO 4.c., StC)

Further, individual curricula in the various programs all include at least one, sometimes a second, required course in some area of missions, usually quite general, from history of missions to contemporary challenges. These often address cultural

issues, and one theme in the recent curriculum revision at CSL was an emphasis on mission in a post-modern world. Already in the curriculum review done in the 1990s there was a focus on addressing a non-Christian world. Course assignments were often geared to explanations that avoided theological shorthand and could be understood by a seeker or unbeliever. That is also when the traditional “Religious Bodies” course was augmented by a new course on “World Religions.” In their current curriculum CTSFW has courses entitled “Confessing Christ in Today’s World” and “Ministry in a Pluralistic Context.” Evangelism is included in all programs in some way, such as a practicum or requirement on vicarage, including some “hands-on” experience in actually sharing the Gospel with another. A “Community Outreach Project” as a vicarage assignment (CSL) serves as a deliberate exercise in building positive relationships with the congregation’s neighbors. A second year “pastoral leadership” course has been added at CSL that includes on-site interaction in local congregations where an emphasis on outreach is apparent. All four seminary programs include a variety of missions electives, though these are usually taken by those already predisposed toward some sort of mission focus. Various mission trips are available. Both CSL and CTSFW have a “Mission Formation” track listed in the catalog, and I know from personal experience how these operated in some collaboration with the work of synod’s national missions and the now discontinued Center for US Missions when these programs were developed now twenty-plus years ago. Currently they are relatively inactive.

Of course, a short survey of “what” is being done does not speak to the “how well?” Outcome statements and course titles, even curricular requirements themselves, only go so far in what is actually taught, and more importantly caught, in any educational program. Rather than continuing to catalog the many things that are being done, with some very positive and some more mixed results, I will turn attention to questions of evaluation and try to summarize some more general observations, as these conversations yielded some remarkably similar themes.

1. All seminaries are very aware of the mission of Christ’s Church. Of course, this can be defined in different ways and with different lenses by which it is focused. At one level, the mission of the Church includes providing new pastors for its congregations, bringing the Means of Grace to the Body of Christ so that they may be empowered to be the Body of Christ out in the world.² And by necessity, graduation, and thus enrollment and thus recruitment, have a certain urgency just to fill the pastoral needs of a church body. The LCMS director of pastoral education noted that statistical analysis has demonstrated that the two LCMS seminaries need to graduate 220 pastoral candidates every year just to break even with the needs of the field.³ Even with a substantial increase, seminary enrollment (and the shrinking pool from which to draw potential candidates) will be hard pressed to meet those needs.

Statistical data can also reveal the importance of the Church’s mission to bring new *people* to our congregations, not just pastors. The dramatic decline in church membership in North America alongside the changing culture in which today’s church is engaged in Christ’s mission has been logged extensively elsewhere, and the numbers are significant.⁴ We do not respond in fear, nor are we driven by numbers. But the data

are alarming. In the book of Acts, the early church rejoiced to see the numbers of believers increasing. Ours are not and have not been for decades.

One factor not fully studied is the more anecdotal observation that new members of the Body of Christ, especially younger ones, have a different perspective on matters of the institutional church, including attitudes—and aptitudes—about educational modes and models. And frankly, it’s hard work to engage a culture that is increasingly unaware, uninterested, or even hostile to the Church.

One statistic that stands out as most telling, at least in my own view, is that of adult confirmations and baptisms. This number—for the whole LCMS—hovered around 30,000 per year from the 1960s through the 1980s.⁵ According to the statistics in the 2022 *Lutheran Annual*, this number dropped to 26,684 in 1990, stayed in the upper 20,000s through 2000, dropped to ca 20,000 in 2000–2005, has stayed in the mid-teens through 2018 and dropped to a low of 10,991 in 2019, the year before covid.⁶ An interesting study would look at the congregations where this growth in new adult members is occurring most, especially in light of the striking statistics that the vast majority of our congregations don’t baptize or confirm even one new adult member per year.⁷ That question should also relate to issues of pastoral formation and leadership toward outward mission as shaped by the seminaries.

2. One key factor is that of diversity. One of the great strengths of residential education is that it moves a pastoral student from a context in which he is familiar to one in which he may come as an outsider. A seminary is intended to be an arm of the church corporate, where the interests and attitudes of the larger church are brought to bear on any one candidate.⁸ This can be very true in terms of people and places, worship styles, the intra-church reciprocity of fellowship, and engagement with theological and doctrinal issues of ecclesiology.

This is also very true of socio-cultural issues and demography. Of course, if a seminary looks just like “my home congregation”—and seminaries will reflect the demographics of the congregations it serves—this has less effect. But, for example, the presence of international students on campus can lead to awareness of the global nature of the church, and interaction with those who are already disciples—and are also engaged in making disciples—of all nations. This was noted universally, especially by our Canadian partners, where a higher level of diversity seems to be present even among Lutherans. Further, students in specialized programs such as our Hispanic or EIIT programs bring important diversity to campus life when they come for their residential components.

But the challenges of recruiting a diversity of students to residential programs remain, and they are not being resolved. It can be challenging for a minority person to

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integrate into a different context dominated by the majority. As a result, a seminary that is 96–97% Anglo will continue to reflect a church body that is also 96–97% Anglo.

3. Seminaries are somewhat limited by the constraints of a very full curriculum. This is not to excuse any lack of mission emphases, which regularly go beyond specific courses in those areas, but to encourage adding more requirements is likely not a helpful path to take. There was a time when four years of seminary was only a piece—a major piece, to be sure—of at least eight, if not twelve years of pastoral formation. Through the 1960s and even well into the 1970s, the strongly academic and largely “first career” path of CSL enrolled students who arrived already shaped to understand a student community focused on theological education and pastoral service, with a certain *esprits de corps* that extended into the ministerium itself. Greek and Hebrew were already learned in undergrad studies and were ready to be used for exegetical study at the seminary. In the Springfield track, students generally came as second career and brought a rich background in congregational life as lay leaders. All candidates graduated and were placed into a circuit that generally functioned well in supporting new pastors in that transition from transactional leadership (“by virtue of the office . . .”) to transformational leadership, enhanced by pastoral relationships and experience.⁹

In today’s world, we continue to have some excellent pre-sem formation at the LCMS Concordia Universities, but those students are a minority of entering seminarians.¹⁰ Much of what was once shaped before seminary is now crammed into the same four years of residential education, often requiring intensive summer work to learn languages or make up for their place in the curriculum. Second-career students continue to bring their life experiences to bear, but questions of time and money are even more important for students with families, and the residential experience for many can become more like that of a commuter school, in which students juggle studies with part-time jobs, spouses’ work schedules, and children’s activities. What was formerly a two-track approach at two seminaries distinguished programmatically has become a one-track approach at two seminaries that are distinguished by other criteria, which, by the way, the church as corporate and collegial church, has never addressed.

In short, seminaries are hard-pressed just to cover the essentials of theological education that can lead to certifying those declared to be of “entry level competence and qualified for a first call.”¹¹ Yet there seems constant pressure for an “easy fix” by many in the church to “add a course in x, y, or z.” This concern was reflected universally by the faculty and administrators with whom I talked.

4.a. Related to the previous issue came discussion of the fact that missions can easily become “just another course” or topic for pastoral ministry on an already cluttered “to do” list. This is similar to the way many congregations can function as though “missions” is of special interest for those who share that, well, special interest.

This is true also of faculty; not that we don’t need specialization of those with experience and credentials in missions and missiology. At one time, back in 1990s, CSL made a very public effort to name a “missions professor” in every academic

department as at least one way to make the statement that missions infuses all areas of study. In an earlier decade, the “World Mission Institute“ of Concordia Seminary worked closely with (then) LCMS World Mission to provide mission research and awareness to the church through its seminaries.

But again, this cannot simply “relegate” the topic of missions to those specialists who, instead, can assist all of us in such awareness. Sometimes the core concept that everything we do as the people of God is part of the mission of Christ’s kingdom—to be a Light in a world of darkness—can get lost to the compartmentalization and specializations of our lives.

4.b. Also in the “there’s only so much we can do” category is the fact that what is *taught* and *caught* in seminary is perhaps less significant than what is *brought* by students to the seminary. Some come with a high level of interest and even background in outreach; others do not. The role of the home congregation and even the larger church context thus has a lot to do with the shaping of seminarians before, during, and after the seminary experience itself. A shift in synodical culture from “mission awareness” to “Confessional faithfulness”¹² has shown the need for keeping our balance between mission and pure theology. There are some who approach seminary with a sense of the pastoral role as what might dubbed an “intellectual apologist” or “cultural warrior” rather than a Seelsorger pastor and mission leader. Others may come with a strong commitment to missions but a weak or shallow theological framework for addressing the complex theological and missiological issues of today’s challenges.

Thus, those who do graduate with a focus on mission and outreach are likely those who came *to* the seminary already so inclined. Extra-curricular activities such as a student mission group or use of a missions room or center are voluntary and tend to serve only those who already have such interests. A better assessment of the impact of mission formation within a curriculum would be the number of students who came with a very low awareness, understanding, or interest in missions but who had been changed by their seminary experience.

5. Which raises the key issue of assessment and evaluation. This topic has been part of a sea change in education in general and in accreditation in particular. In sum, the emphasis has been moved from “teaching” to “learning,” and for the most part it has raised very important questions. Instead of measuring the credibility of a school by the credentials of its faculty and research facilities, the key questions shift to whether students have actually learned what the curriculum has intended to teach them.

So how might we assess the ways in which seminary education has formed its students for missional leadership in the twenty-first century? Those with whom I spoke at these four seminaries agreed that this is an area crying for more attention. Some attempts have been made, often with more emphasis on negative results (when and why might a candidate *not* do well) than on positive factors that lead to healthy, thriving congregations. Faculty generally know, more anecdotally than from actual assessment tools, who will do well in a mission setting as compared to others who may not. And, again anecdotally, we usually can predict when a candidate and congregation will thrive and grow together in carrying out our Lord’s mission. Certainly our district

presidents know, and they also know when things are not going well. But might there be some more regularized research to correlate such healthy congregations to what might be both taught and caught at seminary?

Of course, complicating this issue is the nature and “culture” of individual congregations. Some graduates might enter their first call overflowing with mission zeal but then find that the congregation is not on that same page. These are placement issues, but they are also issues of pastoral leadership—and patient nurture and care. Even more importantly, they are issues of a church’s “culture” beyond the seminary at the pastoral and congregational level and at the district and synodical levels as well.

6. There was a universal sense of concern that our traditional seminaries are not meeting the current needs of the church. That is certainly true in simply filling calls and placing candidates into viable congregational contexts. Many calls go unfilled, and many candidates go into congregations in need of some sense of revitalization, including recapturing the joy of participating in Christ’s mission to all. That means helping a congregation look outward instead of only inward, and these situations can be very challenging for a young pastor.

On the other hand, many potential students who are already engaged in healthy congregations and mission work may simply not come to residential seminary programs for various reasons. Some are vitally needed where they are. Many potential students, especially those with families, struggle with the decision to come to programs originally designed in a time when all seminarians were single and coming straight from a B.A. in liberal arts. Significant adjustments over the years have enhanced the residential program specifically for families, but often potential students are unaware of these extra services.¹³ Some are finding academic programs elsewhere that may

seem to fit their needs and contexts. Some find the worship forms modeled at a seminary to be too culturally restrictive for their mission context. Already many of these are exploring other ways into pastoral ministry.

Seminaries, too, are willing and anxious to explore new methods and models, not only in the delivery of residential education but also in integrating what we have already learned and might be able to do with contextual models or pieces. On the one hand, the positive effects of practica, from field education and vicarage to mission trips and site visits, are included in the residential programs; on the other, some of the great strengths of residential experiences can be exported into contextual programs. But often new ideas are resisted and precluded, openly by the church’s court of opinion and sometimes quietly by those with governance authority, even before serious consideration and exploration can be done.

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Concluding Observations for the Discussion

Moving from what was shared in conversations with seminary leaders, I would attempt to draw some conclusions and suggestions based on our dialogue, though what follows are my own observations.

Where all this leads would seem to move quickly beyond the seminary into the church, but in a grand partnership in which pastoral formation and the mission of the church work hand-in-glove. That starts with a renewed commitment to making disciples *of all nations*, and, in my view, we simply must find ways to increase the number of non-Anglos in all programs. That may mean expanding specialized programs that lead to greater inclusion within mainstream programs that take seriously the multicultural context of the world around us.¹⁴

We must also take seriously the challenges that minority students face in such programs. Further, there must be more diversity among those in positions of leadership and authority in both seminary and church.

This partnership with the whole church also necessitates encouragement and formation before seminary and continuing education thereafter, not only in formal programs but also in the attitude that we all are continuing to learn together. Pastoral candidates are certified for “entry-level ministry,” and they, as do we all, have much yet to learn.

One solution to the overcrowding of seminary curriculum, especially in the areas of actual pastoral ministry, would be some creative thinking about how to decompress the seminary experience by downloading some elements into more experiential learning activities in the early years of parish ministry. The SMP program already does this from the other end, essentially leaving candidates in parish ministry experience while they engage in seminary curriculum. Of course, this slows the process of course work significantly, as a student can take only four courses a year. But one might study and compare the qualitative experience of such “in-service” learning to the practica that are imported into a residential program.

Further, the fundamental question of pastoral missional leadership is one that cannot be limited to the seminaries. They do play a major role in theological education and pastoral formation, but one take-away from this exercise in reviewing seminary curriculum and interviewing seminary personnel is that the development of mission leadership is not only a matter of a “seminary culture” but also of a “church culture.” And our fellowship of Confessional Lutherans does have a long history of mission energy and outreach.¹⁵ We also have a long history of care and precision in both theology and practice. There *are* congregations that are flourishing and growing, looking outward to the mission field and not simply inward in serving and strengthening those already there. Seminary graduates need to be placed into church contexts that not only care deeply about “getting it right” but also about “getting it out,” as former LCMS President Alvin Barry liked to say.

Almost all churches are dealing with the pressures of the striking decline in institutional church membership, including seminary enrollment.¹⁶ Lutherans in

particular have the great strengths of a solid, biblical theology anchored in God’s Word and His unwavering sacramental presence. We also have a sense of creativity in addressing a changing world. If Lutheran theology is truly biblical, then it should be able to sort out issues of theology and culture in ways that truly engage those of all nations, to which we are sent as the People of God and disciples of our Lord Jesus.¹⁷ Luther exemplified this in translating and communicating God’s Word into the vernacular language and idioms of the everyday people and culture around him. He also embraced the new and “tech-tonic” change that moveable type brought to the communication and dissemination of God’s Word.

We are at a time when seminary education is under extreme pressure to meet the needs of the church as it engages in a growing mission field literally at our doorsteps. We are also at a time when we have a host of models, means, and media by which to raise up and form pastors with missional leadership for our contemporary challenges. There is much to be said for our traditional models, but that should be articulated, documented, assessed, and evaluated—not simply asserted. There is also much to be learned from new and creative ways of connecting faculty and students with the pastors and people—and pastoral candidates—of our congregations.

The LCMS already has over a decade, or in the case of the Center for Hispanic Studies, over thirty years, of experience and data with various non-traditional and contextual programs.

The Lutheran Church—Canada has long had a program for “Pastors with Alternate Training.” It has been fifteen years since the Specific Ministry Pastor program of the LCMS was initiated, with generally positive assessments along the way,¹⁸ and we have learned much about the role it can play in meeting the needs of the church. In addition to the Hispanic Center, we have experimented with programs specifically designed for engaging non-Anglo and immigrant mission work through the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology at CSL and the Cross-cultural Ministry Center at Concordia University, Irvine.¹⁹ We have worked hard to bring mission experiences into residential programs; there are many ways to bring strong academic and theological coursework into contextual programs that form pastors within mission-focused ministry. Such experiences and assessment data should be collected, collated, and analyzed by decision makers at local and synodical levels.

Every generation seems to address the needs of theological education and pastoral formation for its own time, and the past generation and even decade, too, have been marked by a host of studies and summits, confabs and conferences, task forces and convention resolutions that seek to address this issue. Unfortunately, and in my opinion, they have not benefitted from all the input that is both needed and available. They have often represented only certain stakeholders within our fellowship, and therefore run the risk of creating further division rather than building a unified and more universally accepted approach.

Much of this has happened with more of a sense of caution and resistance than urgency and careful creativity. A renewed commitment toward our strong, residential programs is vitally needed and already underway in the LCMS, including an emphasis on formation and recruitment.²⁰ This will take time to produce results, and the demographics continue to show a dramatically declining “pool” from which to draw potential seminarians.²¹ At the same time, our Confessional churches have tremendous

resources in theological and mission leadership both in their seminaries and throughout the church to work together and, yes, walk together toward engaging the whole church, pastors and people, in the great mission of our Lord to be His people in a world of lost sinners, making disciples of all nations.

ENDNOTES

¹ Two of those that did respond also contributed extended essays. see Christu Das, “Theological Education for Ministerial Formation: An Indian Reading,” and Acir Raymann, “The *Missio Dei* under the Southern Cross: Some Considerations,” elsewhere in this issue.

² This assumes that attention is actually turned from what is done inside the church to how the people of God interact with the world outside. Here, in my own view, the power of the recession could be reinforced, as after we have come together as the Body of Christ gathered around the Presence of Christ, we are led by the cross out into the world.

³ James Banek, based on statistical studies with LCMS Roster and Statistics. Dr. Banek noted that this number is based on “worst case scenario” projections.

⁴ According to LCMS Roster and Statistics, 67% of congregations that reported are declining or showed no increase over the past year. It is assumed that many of the 20–30% of congregations that do not report would also show zero growth. Statistics for average attendance has been so affected by the pandemic since 2020 that current data is not helpful, but there has been a steady downward trend since 2007 from ca 150 at worship to ca 100.

⁵ Data from The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Department of Human Resources, *Statistical Yearbook* (St. Louis: CPH, published yearly until 1981) and The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Annual* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, published yearly with statistical data included after 1982).

⁶ The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Annual of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod*, Compiled by The LCMS Office of the Secretary, rosters, Statistics, and Research Services (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and Concordia Publishing House, 2022), 798.

⁷ Increase/decrease in membership (see footnote 5) combines both losses and gains. One estimate is that over 50% have not baptized or confirmed one adult in the past year (see William Utech, “The ‘End’ of Seminary Education: Healthy and Flourishing Congregations,” elsewhere in this issue).

⁸ This was a key discussion in the development of the SMP program, which is highly contextualized. Of course, the greatest strength of a contextual program is that it is contextual. But the greatest weakness of a contextual program is also that it is contextual—and largely limited to one context. For this reason, the SMP curriculum includes certain residential components, bringing all students together within the campus community in residence. For the same reason, the limitations on the roster category of an SMP pastor are intentionally all at the *synodical* or trans-parochial, trans-congregational level.

⁹ These might be dubbed the “esse” of the office of the pastoral ministry (transactional authority conferred) and the “bene esse” of the pastoral ministry (transformational leadership earned through relational ministry).

¹⁰ And in a curriculum increasingly determined by the needs of those non-traditional students, those who have gone through even the remnants of the old “system” can feel penalized in various ways. One example might be the delay in using the biblical languages and thus in building immediately on what was already learned in undergrad programs.

¹¹ This is the official language of the seminary faculty certification resolution.

¹² This was noted by several colleagues as something reflected in more recent students.

¹³ Robust changes have happened over the past generation, from married student housing and the clothing and food pantries to more recent attention to wives and families, such as staff support for transitions and community building, a full curriculum for sem wives soon-to-be pastors’ wives, youth groups, sports and children’s activities, reduced tuition at local Lutheran schools as well as homeschool support groups, and financial advising. On one hand, such intentional changes accent the need and expense of adding these services, but on the other, they have certainly made the residential experience possible and positive for families, and many families attest to the unexpectedly positive and rewarding experience they would have missed had they not come to seminary.

¹⁴ In his dissertation research, Larry Vogel demonstrated that the conservative denominations that have shown growth over the past decades are those who have found ways to be more inclusive of all ethnicities. See his very recent “Behind the Numbers: A Traditional Church Faces a New America” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2023).

¹⁵ As one example, Michael Newman has drawn recent attention to this in his *Gospel DNA: Five Markers of a Flourishing Church, Learning from a Movement called “Missouri,”* (San Antonio: Ursa Publishing, 2016, revised 2018).

¹⁶ Statistical data from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) shows a pattern of increase in total enrollment from 1990–2000, a period of transition from 2000–2008, and then over a decade of decline from 2008–2020. LCMS seminaries had 633 MDiv students in 1996 (60% of their total enrollment) and 371 in 2018 (44% of their total enrollment). In 2020, however, the total enrollment in all ATS schools showed a surprising increase. See Chris Meinzer, “An Enrollment Surprise—More ATS Schools Grow than Decline for First Time Since 2006,” *Colloquy Online* (Holiday 2020), <https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/an-enrollment-surprise.pdf>. In his further analysis, Meinzer notes that the Covid-19 pandemic caused more seminaries to offer online courses that attracted new students, and the same pandemic slowed graduation rates, adding to the number of enrollees overall. Further, this enrollment reflects total enrollment, not necessarily MDiv. In fact, there is also a growing shift from MDiv programs to MA programs, both academic and professional. And those schools that have showed the most consistent growth have all been approved for online delivery. Since 2020, however, total enrollment in MDiv programs has declined from 30,387 in 2020 to 27,635 in 2022. See also Tom Tanner, “Reports of the MDiv’s Death are Greatly Exaggerated,” *Colloquy Online* (January 2019), <https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/reports-of-the-mdiv-death.pdf>. In this related essay, Tanner, Director of Accreditation at ATS, explores the fact that “the percentage of all ATS students enrolled in the MDiv has remained relatively stable for the last two decades—43% in 2006 at the MDiv’s enrollment peak, and 41% ten years earlier in 1996.” [Note: in 2020 that percentage had dropped to 39% and in 2022 to 35%]. Tanner writes in response to the “rather famous *Patheos* blog eight years ago, written by an ATS seminary professor” (see Frederick Schmidt, “Is It Time to Write the Eulogy?: The Future of Seminary Education,” *Patheos*, March 21, 2011, <https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2011/03/is-it-time-to-write-the-eulogy-frederick-schmidt-03-21-2011>). In his analysis, Tanner notes that, oddly, “the biggest growth in the MDiv has been among denominations that typically do not require the MDiv for ordination,” and that, also oddly, “Less than half of all MDiv graduates (49%) [are] serving as pastors or associate pastors.” Thus “the MDiv seems to be serving different vocations than it did just a few decades ago.” But he concludes by simply raising these observations and does not follow up with any further analysis.

¹⁷ Larry Vogel (op. cit.) has pointed out that this is fundamentally an issue of catholicity and ecclesiology, and therefore a matter of right doctrine.

¹⁸ See, for example, the initial reporting done to the church in two White Papers, May 2012, and March 2013. There have been several internal assessments of the program at Concordia Copyright 2023 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission. View Lutheran Mission Matters 31, no. 1 (2023) at <https://lsfm.global/>. Membership in LSFM is available at <https://www.lsfm.global/join-the-society-for-missiology/>. E-mail lsfmissiology@gmail.com to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Seminary, St. Louis, of which I am aware, which have both confirmed positive feedback and indicated areas for improvement. See also the summary of some anecdotal interviews with SMP students by James Marriott, “Preparing Mission Leaders in the SMP Program” elsewhere in this issue.

¹⁹ See Glenn Fluegge, “Integrating Theology & Mission in the Cross-cultural Ministry Center (CMC),” elsewhere in this issue.

²⁰ The LCMS initiative, “Set Apart to Serve” is a major and comprehensive program toward church-wide cultivation and development of a positive understanding of the vocation of pastor (and other church servants) toward seminary recruitment. See also James Baneck, “The Mission of the Church and Pastoral Formation,” elsewhere in this issue.

²¹ As one statistic among many similar, the number of “youth confirmed” in the LCMS in 1967 was 58,490. In 2020 that number was 12,010. The decline can be traced in a nearly straight line, e.g., in 1977: 40,926; in 1987: 30,699; in 2002: 25,542; in 2012: 18,470; in 2017: 15,512. Data from The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Department of Human Resources (see fn 4).