Lutheran Mission Matters

Volume XXVIII, No. 2 (Issue 57) November 2020

The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program: Reflections on a "Contextual" Experiment in Theology and Mission

Andrew H. Bartelt

Abstract: The development of the Specific Ministry Pastor program serves as a model for intentional and serious engagement of both sound pastoral formation and the mission needs of the church. The process was marked by fair-minded representation of sometimes competing interests, an extended process of listening and learning from others, and a spirit of collegiality toward common goals through generative, creative solutions. In so doing, both strengths and weaknesses of different models of pastoral education and formation, often summarized as residential and distance, were evaluated. The future of pastoral education should make use of all available tools and models toward the most effective achievement of clear outcomes, appropriate to whatever ministry context is in view.

It is now over a decade since the Specific Ministry Pastor program was approved by synodical convention in 2007 and implemented in the fall of 2008. This seminary program is primarily a distance education model (with several short-term residential experiences) for qualified candidates already in a ministry context. Upon entering the program they serve as vicars for two years before certification, call, and ordination into the Office of the Ministry. Two additional years of course work, also done in context, are required. They are rostered as Specific Ministry Pastors, who serve in a specific context under the supervision of a general pastor and with certain restrictions.

The historical drivers and development of that program merit some reflection, especially in an issue of this journal that is focused on theological education in a missionary age. SMP, along with its antecedents, engaged in some creative thinking about contextual education in the mission and ministry of our Lord's Church. The

---

Rev. Dr. Andrew H. Bartelt is professor emeritus of exegetical theology at Concordia Seminary, where he served as Vice President for Academic Affairs from 1998–2013 and Director of the Specific Ministry Pastor Program from 2014–2016. He also served on the LCMS DELTO Oversight Committee (2001–2007) and the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee (2007–2016), and on both the Board for Mission Services (2003–2008) as well as the National Advisory Group for Mission (2003–2010). bartelta@csl.edu

View Lutheran Mission Matters 28, no. 2 (2020) 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.

work that led to the approval of this program (by 76 percent of the convention delegates) involved many years of cooperative and coordinated due process, collegial input from the larger church, including those on the front lines of mission, and theological reflection grounded in our Lutheran Confessions. The program has also continued to develop with refinements that have built on strengths and responded to weaknesses, and thus it provides a case study in both this process and this program of contextualized theological education and pastoral formation. At the risk of my own selective memory from our work at the St. Louis seminary, including some more personal observations, I offer some reflections on the important interplay between theology and mission as it relates not only to curriculum but also to the specific development of the SMP program.

Background

1. The most prominent driver leading to SMP was the apparent collision of theology and mission inherent in the 1989 (Wichita Convention) Resolution 3-05B. The 1980s had seen a growing number of "lay ministers"[1] who served small congregations and some mission starts. This created concerns over the distinctive functions of the pastoral office to be done by those "properly called" into it (Augsburg Confession XIV). Res 3-05B sought to regularize this practice by means of licensing men not only for "emergency situations" but also "for a prolonged period of time" and by designating them as "certified church workers, lay" or "deacons" to distinguish them from other professional workers in general and from ordained pastors in particular. On the one hand, this was an attempt to deal responsibly with the theological oxymoron that might be described as "pastoral ministry done by one who is not a pastor."[2] For its supporters, this resolution was a step forward in moving toward a regularized, *synodical* way of dealing with such lay ministers in the mission of the church, providing a more uniform approach to preparation and "licensing" as well as "proper supervision" and "accountability of those workers who have been asked to carry out distinctive functions of the pastoral office without having been placed in that office." On the other hand, just that problem—of having "distinctive functions of the pastoral office carried out by those not placed into that office"—and to do so in an ongoing way apart from true emergency situations—was not settled. Instead of resolving irregularities, the resolution had the effect of normalizing, even sanctioning them in an ongoing way. This resolution proved to be highly controversial into the next decade, and one might add, decades that have followed.

That problem—of having "distinctive functions of the pastoral office carried out by those not placed into that office"—and to do so in an ongoing way apart from true emergency situations—was not settled.

This is not the place to analyze and fully critique Res 3-05B and its place in the long history and discussions of "church and ministry," though a few observations are quite relevant. (1) The resolution distinguishes "emergency situations" from a "prolonged period of time" and "circumstances where no pastor is available to lead worship and preach *regularly*" (emphasis added), but it essentially bases the need for an extraordinary solution for the latter on the practice of the former.[3] This blurring of "emergency situations," and with it the debate over "when an extraordinary situation ceases to be extraordinary," remains a controversial issue. (2) The resolution calls for more regularized qualifications and formation for "such laymen" to be authorized to "compose and deliver sermons" through either (a) "appropriate courses of study at a synodical seminary" and "recommendation by the seminary faculty to serve as a field work or vicar" or (b) being "approved and licensed by the President of the District to which the congregation belongs." As it turned out, path "b" became the almost universal means of approval and licensing, for an initial one-year term but renewable for up to two years at a time, presumably with some ongoing review and evaluation. Any significant role of a seminary, functioning in the name of the whole synod, was never established. (3) This licensing at the local level, in spite of some recognition that a district president is a synodical officer and of careful rubrics administered by the Council of (district) Presidents, actually worked against the need for—and perception of—a more generalized, universalized, and consistent model of pastoral formation at the "transparochial" and *synodical* level. It essentially provided a third way of certifying men for (at least certain functions of the) pastoral ministry beyond the seminaries and Colloquy Committee. (4) As almost an aside, it might be further noted that 1989 Res 6-16 was adopted "To Establish Alternate Routes into the Pastoral Ministry."

Wichita Res 3-05B sought to address the need for Word and Sacrament ministry in the mission of the church. It was primarily about *how* to get God's gifts to people who otherwise would not have access in any regular way, and by whom this might be carried out. It raised important questions about the relation of mission to the pastoral office, especially in circumstances where pastoral ministry was absent or where "full-time ministry" could not be maintained, but where God's people needed to hear God's Word of life and receive His sacraments.

2. Another factor leading to the need for "alternate routes into the pastoral ministry" was the erosion of the programmatic distinction between the two seminaries of the LCMS. Historically, the St. Louis seminary received graduates from the pre-seminary "system" of six-year preparatory schools and the "Springfield"[4] program provided more "practical" formation, largely for those who did not come through the system, many of whom were second-career men. In the late 1960s, however, and due to various factors,[5] even graduates of Concordia Senior College[6] began matriculating at Springfield. In the wake of the walkout and "Seminex"[7] crisis in 1974, the St. Louis

seminary began rebuilding. At Springfield, Robert Preus, formerly on the St. Louis faculty, became the new president in 1974. Accelerated also by the move to the former Senior College campus in Fort Wayne, the Springfield program and recruitment pool continued to overlap with those of St. Louis. In sum, what had been the distinctive niche of the old "Springfield" seminary was gradually lost to the new model of two accredited seminaries with similar program offerings, both receiving applicants from system and non-system undergrad programs as well as second-career students.

3. The decades that followed the crises surrounding Concordia Seminary in 1973–74 also brought renewed emphasis and efforts on mission. Though a very generalized observation, there was a sense that the LCMS had stood its ground on biblical and Confessional orthodoxy, but that this could not be allowed to become a *dead* orthodoxy. "*Gottes Wort und Luther's Lehr*" were a critical goal, but not an end to themselves, and in the late 1970s and 80s, the synodical mission board was reinvigorated and a board for evangelism services was introduced. Seminaries reestablished focused mission professorships and developed programs such as the World Mission Institute at the St. Louis seminary. Many looked to the Evangelicals, who had combined a high view of scriptural inerrancy with aggressive methods of outreach. Increasing attention was paid to evangelism and outreach at the local and congregational level,[8] including evangelism training at the seminary.[9] These mission efforts also engaged the laity more inclusively in outreach and the mission of the church, many of whom became increasingly committed to such service.

Another phenomenon that entered the LCMS from evangelical models was the Church Growth movement, including an emphasis on individual spiritual gifts.[10] (Again, our purpose here is not to evaluate or critique either these movements or their influences, both positive and negative, on the LCMS.)[11] But there was a growing awareness of the role and qualifications of the laity in the mission and ministry of the church.

Then came the 1990s and a new wave of social change driven by demographics and immigration. The *Mission Blueprint for the Nineties* was adopted by convention in 1992 (Res 1-01), and Res 1-02 declared the US as a "world mission field," leading to new attention to *national* mission. This emphasis became a more robust arm of the Board for Mission Services, which remained primarily engaged in international mission work, but now with intentional focus on domestic mission and outreach. National missions supported districts and congregational mission emphases and developed initiatives for synodical work at the national level, including the *Ablaze!* mission movement, with goals for evangelism,

Res 1-02 declared the US as a "world mission field," leading to new attention to *national* mission.

new congregations and mission plants, congregational revitalization, and outreach among minorities and people groups not in the mainstream of the LCMS. Both seminaries participated actively in a National Advisory Group for Missions, somewhat of a think tank and coordinating council for missiological research led by Robert Scudieri, synodical director of national missions.

This short and superficial historical sketch simply seeks to underscore the renewed energy for mission as it relates to formation for the pastoral office. Ambitious and even unreachable though many goals were, if we were to plant two thousand new congregational mission starts, then we needed to consider the need for two thousand additional pastors—well-formed "called and ordained servants of the Word" who were qualified and certified by the whole church.[12] And many of them would need more specialized skills in language and culture to reach across such boundaries.

4. A fourth thread worth noting is the rise of distance education, driven by innovations in internet technology. This was also time when the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) was engaged in a major revision of its accreditation standards (approved in 1996), which included an entire, new section devoted to distance education and learning. In general, these new standards were cautious and even cumbersome, reflecting both the need to recognize new media and opportunities and a clear concern for losing the great strengths of the residential community, especially in programs of pastoral formation that engage not only the necessary academic knowledge but also personal, communal, behavioral, and affective formation.[13] But these new standards took seriously the potential of distance education, still in its very early stages, and they helped guide the development—and approval—of accredited programs such as SMP, which engaged such new media. In fact, the model of SMP, from curriculum to instruction, from residential faculty to local mentoring, from both asynchronous to synchronous learning modes, from personal formation to community relationships, represented the very best integration of distance learning into the strengths of a residential seminary. By my own personal appraisal as one who served as an ATS accreditation visitor, our program was (and still is) far superior to any other such model.

DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination)

In the decade following the 1989 Wichita Convention 3-05B, the controversies over "licensed deacons" continued, as did the multiplication of various district programs that prepared men for such diaconal ministry. This came to a head, of sorts, with the 1995 Res 3-07A, "To Establish the Procedure by Which Laymen Licensed to Perform Functions of the Pastoral Office Be Called and Ordained into the Ministerium of the LCMS." The "whereas" paragraphs stressed the need for theological education through the seminaries in order to prepare and certify such men to be called and

ordained into the pastoral ministry of the synod, and then resolved that such licensed laymen had two years to apply to a seminary program of study. Such a program of study was to be individually "tailored to the needs" of each applicant and "completed through ministerial experience, academic training (the majority of which should be conducted through extension classes) and a student-mentor relationship with the supervising pastor." The resolution called for the seminaries "together [to] establish a common program of theological education that would enable a layman licensed to perform functions of the pastoral office to be trained and certified for a pastoral call and ordination without unnecessary interruption of his ministerial responsibilities."

While this was an attempt to bring such licensed laymen into the regular certification and call process of synod through its seminaries, it also laid out some basic foundations for what would become distance education within the context of ministerial service, delivered through extension courses and guided by a mentor-supervisor. The problem, of course, was that such "seminary programs of study" barely existed, if at all. Nothing had even been considered at Concordia Seminary St. Louis (CSL),[14] though Concordia Theological Seminary Ft. Wayne (CTSFW) had begun some early attempts at non-residential education. The first came as a direct response to the developing mission needs of the early 1990s, when several pastors approached President Robert Preus at CTSFW for help with theological education and certification for immigrant mission planters. Missions Professor Robert Newton was asked to develop a program of study that could credential such men within their local contexts.[15] That need was congregationally based, but it modeled a creative approach to theological education for the mission needs of the church. After David Schmiel became CTSFW president in 1992, the Southern[16] (and later Texas and Michigan) District began working with CTSFW to develop a more extensive program, modeled after the long-standing Alternate Route curriculum, including prerequisite Greek. This met with the approval of the then "Standing Committee for Pastoral Ministry," chaired by former synodical president J. A. O. Preus II, and a first cohort, dubbed "SoTex" (Southern/Texas districts) was launched in January 1996.

The next years witnessed both support and controversy over this fledgling program. David Schmiel had just retired, William Weinrich filled the interim presidency, and Dean Wenthe became president for the academic year 1996–97. Although CSL had not previously been engaged,[17] it began to receive inquiries about such a program, since Res 3-07A had mandated that students apply to "a seminary program of study." In response, a CSL Distance Ed. Task Force was formed[18] and a program similar to that originally designed by CTSFW was initiated, working closely with district mission executives and a local mentor-supervisor. In 2001 Dr. David Wollenburg was appointed director of DELTO. Almost immediately the design was changed from one of sending professors out to extension sites[19] to bringing students to campus as the central site for intensive instruction.[20] The director served as a dean of students of sorts, working directly with student retention and in building

community. In short, the program began to be integrated into the ministerial formation of the seminary, but we were clearly building the boat while already into the rapids.

By 1998, Convention Res 5-01 could state that "The Board for Higher Education (BHE) has established the Joint Seminaries DELTO program for off-site preparation of future pastors" and resolved, to "commend the seminaries for the development and implementation of the DELTO program; and to continue the DELTO program and direct the BHE to assure compliance with the approved policies." The first whereas grounds the need in "an increasing number of special-need pastoral vacancies and mission start-up opportunities in the LCMS."

In short, the program began to be integrated into the ministerial formation of the seminary, but we were clearly building the boat while already into the rapids.

Despite the 1995 Res 3-07A that mandated a two-year terminus for licensed deacons to apply to a seminary program (and to some degree because of it), the continuing need for "licensed deacons" for ongoing pastoral ministry along with the uncertain and unproven nature of DELTO brought another imperfect storm to another convention. The Board for Higher Education had issued a document, *What is DELTO?* in Sept. 2000, to clarify and explain its role and function as

> 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 enhanced congregational life as the congregation participates in the growth of its DELTO students.[21]

It is important to note the inclusion of "contexts where English is not spoken" and other missionary settings within this statement of purpose for DELTO. The original concerns over the 1989 "licensed deacon" resolution were largely over the Confessional (AC XIV) issues of the pastoral office. By 2000, DELTO, which was largely developed to provide more regularized pastoral formation, now also foresaw specific mission needs among the growing non-Anglo contexts.

In any case, this was a key and controversial issue in the 2001 convention, which resulted in Res 3-08B, "To Address Needs and Opportunities for Pastoral Ministry in Specialized Situations." In sum, this action established "an oversight committee composed of members of the BHE, the seminaries, and the Council of Presidents, in conjunction with District and local representation" to "revise DELTO." It also highlighted key issues at the time including concerns with the restrictive admissions requirements of DELTO[22] and the growing number of vacancies, especially in situations where full-time ministry could not be maintained, largely due to financial

constraints and geographical isolation making multi-point parishes and a "circuit rider" approach unfeasible.

In short, this resolution provided a way forward through what became the "DELTO Oversight Committee," constituted to reflect the spectrum of vested interests and representative of even conflicting (and, at times, contentious) views. As a member of that committee from its formation, I have often recalled how effective it was in actually listening to one another and the larger church, disentangling and debating the complexities of issues, breaking down preconceived ideas, and working with one another—often as iron sharpens iron. Yes, sparks flew, but progress moved with a sharper edge toward creative solutions and positive outcomes.

By 2004,[23] this committee had reworked and regularized DELTO into a common curriculum and cooperative arrangement with the various district lay ministry programs. It was still modeled on the traditional alternate route certificate programs of thirty courses, with a Greek language prerequisite.[24] The first ten courses were to be taken at the district level through their lay ministry programs,[25] Greek could be taken in a summer intensive at one of the seminaries, and the remaining twenty courses were offered by the seminaries in an early form of distance education combined with some on campus seminars. Concordia University Education Network (CUENet)[26] would provide its resources in curriculum and distance delivery.

From DELTO to SMP

DELTO was an effort to regularize "lay ministry"[27] into pastoral ministry with synodical-level certification through the seminaries. It was a cooperative effort between seminaries and district programs and between seminary admissions and district mission execs in identifying qualified students. It sought to replicate the alternate route curriculum to provide pastoral ministry where otherwise such pastoral ministry would be lacking.[28] The DELTO Oversight Committee had modeled cooperative work across the spectrum of vested interests even as it continued to monitor and evaluate the program along with the growing technologies that were being increasingly engaged in distance education.

Several concerns were identified. Though designed with both pastoral and mission needs of the twenty-first century in view, very few non-Anglos were enrolled, largely due to "second-language" issues in courses taught at a master's level. The Center for Hispanic Studies, the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology,[29] and the Cross-Cultural Ministry Center at Irvine[30] had already been developed to work in these contexts.[31] With certification, call, and ordination at the conclusion of a program that, with the need for Greek (even done somewhat minimally), could take a minimum of six years, this was a long time for a vicar to be serving essentially as a pastor.[32] It also became a disincentive to enter the program compared to the four years of the traditional residential route.[33] At the same time, rising concerns over the costs of residential

education and mounting issues of student debt (not only for tuition but especially for living costs for families) had become a growing disincentive to residential education.

Further, the mission needs of the church continued to grow. This was true in terms of "pastoral ministry in specific and specialized situations where a traditionally prepared seminary candidate or pastor is not available"[34] and "especially in light of the mission challenges of today's world."[35] To be sure, the goal to plant two thousand new congregations by 2017 proved to be overly ambitious, but the need for more pastors remains, especially in reaching out with mission planting in new contexts. As contextual, non-residential education and the technologies to support it continued to develop and be evaluated, its strengths and weaknesses could be laid against those of residential education (which has its own set of strengths and weaknesses.)[36] The fact that students were essentially placed within the context of their first call at the beginning of their formal pastoral education insured a much better "fit" and respect for their spiritual leadership within a specific congregation.[37]

As contextual, non-residential education and the technologies to support it continued to develop and be evaluated, its strengths and weaknesses could be laid against those of residential education (which has its own set of strengths and weaknesses.)

In sum, although the DELTO Oversight Committee had completed its primary task to "revise DELTO," it continued to evaluate not only DELTO but also all the various routes leading to ordination in light of the mission and ministry needs. One question left unresolved was the tight restriction on enrollment to situations where a congregation cannot support a full-time pastor. The mission needs of church planting, often done by or in cooperation with existing congregations, and other expansions of congregational ministry needing pastoral leadership but already begun under laymen now performing certain functions of the pastoral office, were not eligible to participate in a program that could provide seminary formation and certification in that ministry context. In fact, a September 2004 resolution of the Council of Presidents (COP) requested the DELTO Oversight Committee to "open enrollment to men already serving in ministries where an ordained pastor is also in place."

As the Committee considered that COP resolution, then synodical president Kieschnick advised that the Committee make no further adjustments to DELTO but to continue "to study which routes leading to ordination (including routes not currently available) would be most helpful to the Synod in producing a sufficient number of able and effective pastors to provide leadership to Synodical congregations in fulfilling the Great Commission."[38] The Committee was expanded by three additional members who represented congregations and districts engaged in mission and outreach. Two

more years of intensive and collegial work followed, including study papers from each seminary regarding how best to meet future needs and a unified document from both seminaries outlining theological assumptions underlying a "pastor-specific context," which were incorporated into the preamble to Res 5-01B at the 2007 Convention, "To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program."

Some key factors of this new program, which have also proven controversial, are the reduction of the seminary program to four years[39] and sixteen courses (assuming the seven entrance competencies) and the elimination of any biblical language. This was done with much study and intentionality, essentially introducing an entrance level of ordained, pastoral ministry well below that of the MDiv or even the Alternate Route curriculum, but also creating a new synodical rostering category with certain restrictions to recognize this difference.[40] This reflects the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of a contextual program: it is contextual. On the one hand, it provides an "in-ministry" setting for learning and a built-in awareness of the local context. On the other, it does not benefit from the "extra-contextual" experience of moving from one, specific local context to the larger seminary and synodical context for an extended residency[41] and the breadth and depth of coursework that prepares a man for entrance-level "general" ministry in any context. The goal was to achieve a basic level of pastoral competency so that a candidate serving in a pastoral capacity could actually perform the functions of the pastoral office from within that office, through certification, call, and ordination. The curricular[42] strategy was a circular one, covering the basics in the first two years and then "going around again" to begin to fill in some depth. This also built into the educational model the awareness of the need for continuing education, not only within the program itself but also thereafter, with tracks that led to an MA and encouraged continued formation toward the roster category of "general pastor" and even the MDiv itself.[43]

This reflects the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of a contextual program: it is contextual.

The language requirement was eliminated for two reasons. The first is time and expediency, as even learning only one language (and if so, which one?) to a level of usefulness requires a minimum of six to eight semester hours. The second is the learning outcome of knowing what one does not know. As a language teacher myself, I would rather have a pastor who knows that he must depend on the competency of others for access to the original text than one who may think he knows more than he does,[44] and the course in biblical interpretation intentionally addresses the limitations of interpreting the Scripture in English (or any other language) translation. By design, this remains a very clear point of distinction between the seminary education at the SMP level and at the "general pastor" level.

Our focus here does not allow a full discussion of these and so many other related issues, though critiques of these changes often do not reflect an awareness of the thought and intentionality behind them. Since 2007, both seminaries have had extensive experience with this program, including regular evaluations and reports and two "white papers" by the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education. At the same time, the synod has reaffirmed the importance of residential education and begun to address concerns of cost and student debt that come with it. 2019 Res 6-02 promotes "Residential Seminary Education as the Preferred Option for the Preparation of Men for Pastoral Ministry" and Res 7-03A seeks "To Enhance the Specific Ministry Pastor Program" with attention to curriculum and standards, including instruction in the biblical languages. One hopes that such review will benefit from the input and evaluation that went into the original design and has been done since, including significant growth in the awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of distance learning models, all accelerated by the pandemic since spring 2020.[45] In fact, any changes to SMP should follow a comprehensive review of *both* the residential and non-residential programs in light of current practices in order to compare the strengths and weaknesses of both,[46] including study of the now ten years of SMP graduates to determine what weaknesses in their ministerial practices are due to the program itself and warrant correction. The future of theological education is likely various hybrid combinations of the most appropriate features of various delivery systems in the service of well-defined curricular goals, learning outcomes, and effective practices.

The future of theological education is likely various hybrid combinations of the most appropriate features of various delivery systems in the service of well-defined curricular goals, learning outcomes, and effective practices.

Conclusions

Our goal in this essay was to provide some historical background and reflection on the development of the SMP program as a case study in how theological education relates to the needs of the church in a missionary age. At the risk of too many historical details (but certainly still very selective[47]), I have tried to document at least some of the twists and turns of a long and winding road, strongly theological and Confessional but also missional and generative, to highlight the process of how SMP came to be. While building common ground among sometimes competing interests, that process took time. It took listening with understanding. It took patience. 2007 Res 5-01B notes the generative "process of conversation and collaboration over the past six years" that "brought together representatives of the needs of the field with the entities of the Synod to whom leadership for pastoral education and certification is entrusted, and in so

doing provided a helpful model for continuing such collaborative work." Both DELTO and SMP were developed through work between seminaries and especially mission leaders and congregations committed to outreach, mission, and church planting. SMP continues as a partnership between districts and congregations and the seminary.

What began for some as a theological issue of church and ministry, specifically in our understanding of the pastoral office and those who carry it out in light of AC V and XIV, and for others as primarily a mission issue engaging pastoral ministry shaped both by the mission needs of the church, led to the creative development of different models of pastoral formation and synodical certification in light of the mission needs of the contemporary church. Two of the three goals of DELTO spoke to outreach and mission, in "contexts where English is not spoken," and "ordained missionary personnel where finances and/or conditions do not permit calling a full-time missionary." The "whereas" section of the SMP resolution (2007 Res 5-01B) specifically speaks of the mission challenges of today's world and the (then) synodical goal of aggressive church planting, which assumed an increase in pastors, with a recognition that "the existing focus of DELTO, even as it was redesigned and redeployed, would not be sufficient to meet these needs."

I will never forget the opening session of the first SMP cohort on the campus of CSL in the fall of 2008. Over twenty men, all with background and experience in congregational life and service, introduced themselves and their context. Many were serving small congregations "where full-time ministry could not be maintained," but many of those congregations had already shown signs of revitalization due to a program that would provide them with a resident pastor who already had strong relationships to the congregation and community. Many other students, some from larger congregations, told of new outreach and mission planting that could not support full-time pastors on their own but depended on their presence and connection to an established pastoral staff to keep momentum and growth, along with accountability and supervision from the pastoral office. Story after story told of renewed energy for ministry that touched the lives of both the dechurched and unchurched. In short, the mission energy in that room of students exploded.

And everyone knew there was a lot to learn from this seminary program. No one was seeking to cut corners. Mission energy is one thing; pastors are formed in the *habitus* of devotion to God's Word that includes interpretation and communication, solid theology, and a community far greater than one local context. Graduates from a residential

Graduates from a residential program take that formation into congregational life within a mission context. Those SMP students brought that congregational life and mission context into their pastoral formation.

program take that formation into congregational life within a mission context. Those SMP students brought that congregational life and mission context into their pastoral formation.

Too often "theology" and "mission" are understood in opposition, in a relationship more competitive than complementary. At times, such a generalized bipolar opposition could well describe synodical debates, many of which accompanied the road we have just reviewed. But the process and progress in development of SMP and now the way the program operates continue to engage both in the important checks and balance that are a part of the genius of Lutheran theology: theology serves mission; mission needs solid theology to remain the mission of Christ.

In practical terms, we have noted the "bipartisan" work of the DELTO Oversight Committee that represented the needs and concerns of the whole church, not just one or the other side of the convention aisle. Floor Committee 5[48] spent much of the 2007 convention listening to floor debate and engaged in hundreds of hall, meal, and mall conversations over the details of Res 5-01B. For many Res 5-01B sought to resolve a theological problem and, for others, to expand the mission and ministry of the church. In the end, the convention represented more than a supermajority in engaging solid theology in the service of the mission of Christ.

Secondly, the "what" of the long process leading to SMP has come to show the important place of contextual learning. This is not a replacement of residential programs, tried and true and effective as they are. Yet the debates that often pit residential against non-residential models continue. What is helpful is evaluation and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each, then laid against the contexts of ministry for which a candidate is preparing. All education is contextual, with contexts *within which* the education and formation takes place for students who bring their own context and background *from which* they come, as well as the contexts *for which* the education seeks to prepare them. We have briefly noted the transactional and transformational aspects of pastoral ministry (see endnote 37) as well as the need to engage practica into a residential program. These are important in any context, and residential programs leading to general pastoral ministry in a variety of contexts have done well in achieving such competencies. But in a mission context, these factors play an extremely critical role, especially when language and culture are part of the mix. International missionaries have long recognized this. Even within our traditional calling process within the congregations of synodical life, every call has a certain cross-cultural aspect to it, from one congregational context to another.[49] How much more when one crosses from an "insider" community that already shares communion fellowship to engagement with the mission community around it that does not—and may even be hostile to it! A key aspect of contextual pastoral formation is that a candidate already knows the local context, and the person and character of the candidate is *known by* those in the local context. This was recognized early in the fresh

thinking that surrounded the development of contextual programs such as SMP. Mission leaders understood the importance of that connection between missionary and context, something that can take years for a traditional seminary graduate to achieve.[50]

The key point is that contextual education has its own strengths (and weaknesses!) but may actually be better suited for certain contexts. Of course, there are many other factors within the complex dynamics of education and formation, but, like residential models, contextual models have their place in the arsenal of a strong, effective educational system. The future of theological education must get past simply pitting one against the other, especially without assessment data that supports various claims, but working to use all the "tools" available in the most effective ways.

In the end, the focus, not only of this essay but also of theological education itself must be on the mission of Christ's Kingdom and our Lord's Church, with one eye on the Word of God and the other on the contexts in which that Word interacts with God's human creatures. Any pastoral formation must be grounded in both with the skill to read and learn from them.

Thirdly, a short observation should be made about programs engaging ministry and mission with non-Anglos, sometimes called "ethnic ministry."[51] We have observed the development of programs such as the Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS) and Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), which somewhat parallel the rise of DELTO and SMP, but are not the major focus of this study.[52] Concerns for such ministry, including language groups other than English, were included in the rationale and reasoning for such contextual programs, but the specific cultural, educational, and language needs have led to programs other than SMP for many in these contexts. In fact, SMP reflects *ethnic* demographics similar to residential programs and has not done as well among non-Anglo mission contexts.[53] Culture-specific programming has also highlighted the importance of such contextualized education. As our church considers the further development in these most critical areas, it will do well to continue to learn from those deeply engaged in their development and build on the models of collaborative work that is grounded in those contexts and communities.

Finally, the process of "substantial experimentation and experience with distance-education models, including the evaluation of both the advantages and disadvantages" noted in Res 5-01B is fundamental for "a more cohesive and comprehensive curriculum design that engages the best practices of education design and pedagogy." This is the work of ongoing curriculum review that must continue to bring together seminary and field. Our synodical model for pastoral formation has been a multi-track approach from the beginning, with two seminaries working in a

Our synodical model for pastoral formation has been a multi-track approach from the beginning.

complementary way to provide pastors who are well-grounded in Scripture and our Confessional theology and able to bring God's gifts to God's people in many and various contexts. The development of new programs such as SMP, along with the new ethnic programs, provide contemporary models of just such collaborative, complementary churchmanship that brings theology and mission together serving the harvest of our Lord's mission.

Endnotes

[1] A study of the growing number of such "lay ministers" produced a number that the resolution cited as "approximately 135."
[2] This might be compared to medicine as practiced by someone who is not a doctor, though other parallels to trained and certified professional roles such as physician's assistants or nurse practitioners might also be noted.
[3] Rather than "licensing" for pastoral ministry at the district level, the more obvious solution for regular pastoral care would be to call the man into the office, which then brings into controversy the qualifications and preparation for such *synodical* certification for ministry, entrusted to seminary faculties and the Colloquy Committee.
[4] Originally at Fort Wayne, then to St. Louis from 1861–1874, and then to Springfield and back to Fort Wayne in 1976.
[5] Both seminaries were accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the 1960s (St. Louis in 1963, Ft. Wayne in 1968). This led to both seminaries offering the MDiv degree, though language prerequisites continued to be different. With growing theological concerns on the St. Louis campus at that time, some "system" graduates sought to go to Springfield, and in the 1967 synodical convention, Res 6-52 was passed, stating "that the Synod declare that the graduates of the Fort Wayne senior college are free and without restriction in attending either the Springfield or the St. Louis seminary."
[6] For which the Ft. Wayne campus was built to open in 1957; the Senior College was closed in 1977.
[7] Theological controversies eventually led to the suspension of seminary president John Tietjen, which was followed by a walkout of the majority of faculty and students to form a "Seminary-in-Exile," aka "Seminex."
[8] For those of us who grew up in the 50s, a "mission festival" was essentially about "foreign" or international missions.
[9] Many of us were introduced to "Kennedy evangelism" in the 1970s, another borrowing from the Evangelicals. This was adopted and somewhat adapted into a Lutheran doctrinal framework as "Dialog Evangelism" in various iterations over the next decade or so.
[10] One might note other evangelistic efforts on a global scale, such as the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, initially energized by Billy Graham and with its first meeting in 1974. By its second international congress in 1989, in Manila, it had grown into a truly worldwide effort at global mission.
[11] And far too often "church growth" (and all that someone may want to include with it) is either applauded or dismissed with a wave of the hand without careful discussion of its definition and assumptions.
[12] It was in this context that the SL seminary formed a missionary formation track, in collaboration and partnership with mission leaders at synodical, district, and local levels, including the work of the Mission Planting Institute and the Center for U.S. Missions.

[13] I often quipped that the ATS needed both to rein in various "low church" schools who were early adopters of distance ed in their more practical and practica-based approaches and to help other communities, especially those for whom a seminary was primarily a worshiping community around sacramental liturgy, that there even was an internet that could be engaged in teaching and learning. In this vein the helpful analysis of different models of theological education and how they are driven by differing community assumptions remains formative in my own reflection. See David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About Theological Education?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).
[14] Hereafter, I will simply use CSL to designate Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and CTSFW to designate Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.
[15] Robert Newton, personal communication, Sept. 10, 2020.
[16] Jan Case, formerly on the CTSFW faculty had become the district mission exec for the Southern District.
[17] I became Academic Dean in 1998, following J. A. O. Preus III who had been called to become president at Concordia University Irvine. I recall a visit from Rev. Chris Reinke of the Alaska Mission for Christ, who had developed one of the early lay ministry training programs working also with Concordia University Portland. He came to us at CSL looking for a way to connect and cooperate with seminary education and certification, but at the time we were unprepared to respond helpfully. He would later arrange for a mission trip to visit the work in Alaska. Dan Mattson, Charles Arand, and I spent four days driving around Alaska with Chris, visiting mission sites and talking church and ministry. Chris later confided that his local colleagues feared that he was inviting criticism and that the seminary might tell him to stop what he was doing. Instead, we built the foundation for some common understandings that became formational in the development of synodical programs which took seriously also the work at the district and local levels.
[18] The Task Force began meeting in late 2000, and was comprised of members of the seminary faculty, representatives of several districts, representative pastors, and a representative from the Board for Mission Services.
[19] The original model depended on a regional cohort, with students needing to wait until a critical mass in one region had been formed. Instruction was primarily done in weekend seminars, with a professor often conducting intensive instruction for a few students at each of three locations, then returning in time for regular classes on Monday.
[20] This brought students into the campus community of a seminary of the whole church. It also allowed for a new cohort whenever a critical mass of students had been accepted, regardless of their local context.
[21] Quoted in 2001 Res 3-08B, 5th Whereas.
[22] DELTO had largely followed the Alternate Route admissions criteria of a minimum age of 35, at least two years of college, and ten years of significant parish service.
[23] It may be worth noting that the 2004 convention had *no* resolutions dealing with the various issues of licensed deacons or DELTO. The lead resolution from the floor committee for Higher Education was 5-01, "To Emphasize Mission Leadership Focus in Professional Church Worker and Lay Person Preparation," noting the work of Mission 21st Century Task Force and the "need for workers to reach diverse peoples and cultures with the eternal truth of the Gospel" that "calls us to evaluate continually our present methods of preparing workers for the church today."
[24] By comparison, the MDiv at CSL was forty courses, with both a Greek and Hebrew prerequisite.

[25] These had become fairly standardized in providing basic "pastoral" skills in biblical content (two courses), doctrine, Lutheran Confessions (two courses), preaching, teaching, worship, mission/evangelism, and an historical survey.
[26] "Concordia University Education Network," originally begun at Concordia-Irvine under D. Ray Halm as a think tank and resource center as technological capabilities developed. It brought together leadership in education and missions from across the synod.
[27] One of the festering issues is a clear definition of "lay ministry," which is often used in two quite different ways: the ministry of the laity, which is to be affirmed, fostered, and supported, and "pastoral ministry done by a layman," which was the original concern in the wake of the 1989 Wichita Res 3-05B and continues to chafe against AC XIV.
[28] One of the admissions criteria was that the candidate had to be "in, or entering, a word and sacrament ministry where no seminary prepared pastor is available and where his presence and ministry is expected both during and after the completion of the program."
[29] CTSFW created a similar program in conjunction with the People of the Book Lutheran Outreach (POBLO).
[30] Originally the Ethnic Pastor Certification program (EPCP), then the Multicultural Pastoral Certification program (MPCP).
[31] Of course, very few non-Anglos were enrolled in the residential programs of either seminary either.
[32] Continuing the debates over which functions of the pastoral office can be delegated, most DELTO vicars did not consecrate the Sacraments, which limited the frequency of the Lord's Supper, though they did preach regularly, under supervision.
[33] It must be remembered that the most "efficient" way to finish a program of study is to do so full-time.
[34] 2007 Resolution 5-01B, 4th Whereas.
[35] 2007 Resolution 5-01B, 5th Whereas.
[36] One example might be the need for specific practica-like field education and vicarage brought *into* a residential program by sending students *out of* the residential experience.
[37] This is a key issue worthy of extended discussion. The pastoral office is, in its "*esse*," a form of transactional authority and leadership (authority conferred by office), by virtue of "call and ordination." In this regard, pastors are basically interchangeable, and residential programs prepare a pastor for general service to any calling context. However, the "*bene esse*" of pastoral ministry includes a host of personal factors and skills that form the "transformational" aspects of authority and leadership (authority earned and given voluntarily and relationally), which are often specific to persons and contexts. The important attention paid to the placement process does well in matching a first call to the personal aspects of each candidate, but rarely does a conflict develop with pastoral leadership in a contextual program, where such "transformational" relationships already exist.
[38] 2007 Resolution 5-01B, 10th Whereas. The language of "carrying out the Great Commission" was in the original 2001 Res 3-08B, added as a final resolved to all resolutions of that convention.
[39] The ten courses done at the district level were essentially replaced by the demonstration of seven key competencies as admission qualifications (see endnote 25).
[40] This difference recognizes the limitations of a contextual program in both breadth and depth especially at the "transparochial" or synodical level. For that reason, a "Specific Ministry Pastor" functions under the supervision of another pastor and cannot hold positions at the synodical level (e.g., circuit visitor). It continues to puzzle me when SMP is compared to the MDiv as though the academic work should be equivalent to that of a general pastor, when it

was intentionally designed to be significantly less.
[41] To address this in part, on-campus experiences were required from the beginning. As the program has developed, such experiences have increased substantially, including (at CSL) a required January intensive course and other such offerings in the summer term.
[42] Here I am speaking of CSL, which intentionally developed a new curriculum built on a cross-discipline model. At the time, we had concluded a decade of work on MDiv curriculum review (see the essay in this issue of LMM), and SMP presented an opportunity to field test various ideas that had grown out of that process, including such interdisciplinary and cyclical depth approaches.
[43] All SMP courses are accredited at a master's level, so that they can count toward the MDiv (or MA as a graduate but not a professional degree).
[44] And many pastors will acknowledge only limited, or even no, use of biblical languages, despite having met competency prerequisites upon entrance to a seminary program.
[45] One example within the circle of theological schools is the publication (2017) of *(Not) Being There*, by the Auburn Studies program, as an update and counterweight corrective to the early and largely negative appraisal of distance education in *Being There* (Carroll, Wheeler, Aleshire, and Long Marler) published in 1997 and very much discussed in our circles, often as a defense of the priority, if not exclusivity, of residential education.
[46] One example as a corrective to somewhat romantic recollections of residential experiences, in addition to student debt, is the impact of married students' responsibilities to family. For many, this can make the campus more of a commuter school than a fully residential model.
[47] I have consulted with David Wollenburg, secretary of the DELTO Oversight Committee, but my own files are unavailable to me at this time of limited travel. There are many others who have lived through much and even more of this story, and I welcome further input, correction, and discussion as we continue to look back over thirty years of collaborative work and debate.
[48] Chaired by Dr. Jon Diefenthaler, then president of the Southeastern District.
[49] Even language and culture can be significant factors in the placement of a candidate from the suburbs into a rural or urban context. As faculty charged with certification, working with the COP as charged with placement, we all pray for that holy synapse between call and graduation at the seminary and ordination and installation in the field, by which the "*esse*" of the pastoral office is supported by the "*bene esse*" of the person and character of the pastor who fills it within a specific ministry context.
[50] One of the SMP committee members, Robert Newton, once observed that it "takes about eight years to form a pastor. Traditionally that's four years of seminary plus about four years of learning in the context of ministry. If we turn that sequence around, or mix one with the other, it still adds up to about eight years." The question is one not of time or tradition, but of effectiveness.
[51] All ministry is ethnic, including Anglo. Vocabulary is sensitive here, and what we often mean is "minority." This term also carries a host of overtones, but in a neutral sense of "not the majority ethnicity," which, in a denomination that is about 97 percent Anglo, includes too few people within and far too many people outside.
[52] In no way does this imply any less importance to such programs. On the contrary, the learnings gleaned from the SMP process can be valuable in such more ethnically focused work, even as much of the impetus for DELTO and SMP originated with concern for alternate educational models for contexts defined by culture and language.
[53] However, many SMP candidates are deeply engaged in mission that engages demographic groups of the "next generations" also of Anglos who would otherwise not be highly visible in many traditional congregations.