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*The Vicar's Seminary Preparation and the  
Supervisor's Involvement in Training  
for Work in Education*

"THE VICAR'S SEMINARY PREPARATION AND  
THE SUPERVISOR'S INVOLVEMENT IN  
TRAINING FOR WORK IN EDUCATION."

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The vicar program employed by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is where "the rubber meets the road" as far as the young men, who are training to become parish pastors in our synod, are concerned. It is the "practicum", if you will, of the seminary training program that gives them the opportunity to put into use the theory portion of their training which they have received in the classroom in their Junior and Middler years. In order for this "hands on" experience to be beneficial to the seminary student, it is vital that there be a proper admixture of theory and practice...the seminary providing the theory through classroom instruction in all phases of the pastoral ministry, and the congregation to which the vicar is assigned, under the monitoring eye of the supervising pastor, providing the practical situations where that classroom theory can be exercised.

This disquisition will deal specifically with the role that each (i.e. the seminary and the supervising pastor) plays in order to provide that proper admixture of theory and practice in the areas of parish education.

I have broken down "education--all phases" which requires a proper theory/practice approach for maximum benefit to the seminar-ian into six main areas:

- I. sermonizing
- II. confirmation class
- III. Bible class
- IV. Sunday School
- V. Y.P.S.
- VI. vacation Bible school

#### I. S E R M O N I Z I N G

Without a doubt, the Sunday sermon provides the biggest opportunity (at least from a quantity vs. quality standpoint) for educating the members of the congregation in the ways of Christianity. The vicar who is working in one of our typical congregations will deal directly with as many as 1,000 to 1,500 people on a given Sunday morning. What kind of training do we expect the seminary to provide our

students with in order to prepare them for this vital area of parish education? And at the same time, what kind of opportunities will the seminary expect the congregation to provide the seminarian with in this area, and to what extent will or should the supervising pastor be involved in the seminarian's training in this area?

It goes without saying that the seminary, through classroom instruction, will provide the seminary student with proper exegetical, hermeneutical, and homiletical principles and procedures. We, as supervising pastors, expect that the young men who are sent to us as vicars will be able to properly work through the original of the text that they are assigned to preach on, know how to gather information and material germane to that text from commentaries and other resource materials, outline, organize, write and deliver a sermon on that text with cognizance of proper sermon preparation, although perhaps not competence or confidence at the same.

That constitutes the "theory" part of the theory/practice training that the seminary student receives. Almost all of the "practice" part becomes the responsibility of the congregation to which the seminary student is assigned as a vicar. (Yes, the seminary student does preach in homiletics class to his classmates, but let's face it, preaching to your classmates, all of whom are sharpening their filleting knives with each sentence that comes out of your mouth, is about as true-to-life a situation as the story line on "Days Of Our Lives"!)

Your congregation; then, should provide the seminary student who is serving as your vicar with opportunities to place the theoretical part of his training into practice by having him preach before a real, live, not-too-critical audience, in as many different types of situations as possible (a regular Sunday service, a Lenten service, a funeral, a school opening or closing service, etc.)

Now, the question is, to what extent will you or should you, as a supervising pastor, be involved in the training of the seminary student who serves as your vicar in the area of preaching? It should be

your responsibility to see that your vicar adheres to the exegetical, hermeneutical, and homiletical principles and procedures that he has learned in the classroom for every sermon that he writes and delivers. This can be done by requiring your vicar to show you his exegetical work, his outline procedures, and, of course, the final product before he steps into the pulpit each time. It should not be necessary for you to teach the principles and procedures of good sermon writing to your vicar, because this should have been accomplished in the classroom long before he got to your congregation. But you may have to aid your vicar in properly dividing a text, working out a decent outline and theme, adjusting the application of the text to the particular congregation he is preaching to, or even correcting faulty theology, illogical progression, or a poor choice of words. By observing the vicar's delivery you will be able to advise him on diction, volume, gestures, eye contact, and pulpit mannerisms. You, as a supervising pastor, see how the seminary student handles himself with the text and in the pulpit in a congregational setting, something which the teaching staff of the seminary really can't do. You, therefore, are a vital part of the training in sermonizing that the seminarian receives in his four years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The seminarian is "shortchanged" whose bishop merely asks to see a final draft of the sermon he is preparing half an hour before he delivers it. At the same time it should be noted that you, as a supervising pastor, are not there to mold each vicar you have assigned to you into a perfect carbon copy of yourself. That seminarian is "overchanged" whose bishop insists on providing the themes, changing the outline to his liking, actually rewriting certain paragraphs and phrases, and insisting on mannerisms and style that mimics his own with each sermon the vicar writes. I think it is safe to say that you, as a supervising pastor, are there to guide and direct seminarians by keeping them faithful to the principles and procedures of homiletics they have learned in the classroom, not to be a "stemple" that reproduces a miniature "you" with each vicar

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that returns to the seminary from your congregation.

It will also be your responsibility to inform the seminary faculty of any areas of difficulty that the seminarian has displayed and not overcome during his vicar year, so that these areas may be addressed in his Senior year.

## II. CONFIRMATION CLASS

Another vital area of parish education that requires a proper theory/practice approach is that of confirmation (instruction) class. Through classroom work in areas such as dogmatics, isagogics, etc. the seminary provides the vicar-to-be (and consequently the pastor-to-be) with the basic knowledge of Biblical history and doctrine to instruct others in the truths of Holy Scripture and Christian life in preparation for membership in our church body. The instruction that the seminary student receives in catechetics class gives him the "mechanics" of teaching an instruction class. Again, however, these classes provide only the theory angle of teaching an instruction class. The actual field-testing of the methods of catechetical instruction learned in the seminary classroom takes place in the congregation to which the seminarian is assigned as a vicar. Thus it should be the objective of the calling congregation to provide the seminary student with ample opportunities for catechetical instruction on both a primary and adult level.

The supervising pastor should, therefore, expect that the vicar assigned to him has a sufficient knowledge of Christian doctrine and catechetical methods to present a confirmation class to either children or adults. It should not be the task of the supervising pastor to teach a course in dogmatics or a course in catechetics as part of his supervising role. (Indeed, a supervising pastor must be careful not to contradict what has been taught in the seminary classroom, even though he himself may not use the methods and procedures that the catechetics course of the seminary proscribes.)

The task of the supervising pastor is to help the seminary student with the application of the methods, theories, and procedures he has learned in the classroom. This might include advising the vicar on how to establish good discipline in a children's confirmation class, clarifying doctrines, like the doctrine of election, the role of women in the church, etc., observing and commenting on or correcting elements of speech, teaching skills, classroom rapport and the like, or giving advice on how to handle delicate or complicated questions.

It should be the seminary's job to provide instruction in the use of various audio-visual aids that can be used in instruction classes, and to familiarize the seminary student with the resource materials that are available. The supervising pastor will be the one who observes how the seminary student makes use of this instruction in a practical setting through his classroom teaching, and to provide insights, methods, and "tricks-of-the-trade" that years of experience in the field have produced.

Once again, the supervising pastor will want to report to the seminary faculty any difficulties in the area of confirmation instruction that the seminary student was not able to overcome during his vicar experience, so that they may be able to work with the student in his final year.

### III. B I B L E C L A S S

Teaching a Bible class is certainly an important part of any pastor's arsenal for Christian education in the congregation. Thus the seminary student should leave the seminary equipped to handle a Bible class when he is assigned as a graduate. At the risk of being labeled tautological, I would have to say that again the seminary's role in preparing the student to present a Bible class lies on the theoretical side of the theory/practice combination exercised in our program. Through classroom instruction the seminary student will learn what the Bible contains, background information on its

authors, how it fits into God's plan of salvation, how to properly read and interpret the Bible, and how to gather resource materials for Biblical study. It will be the supervising pastor who will provide the seminary student the opportunity to actually present a Bible class to the members of a congregation. As always, the supervising pastor should be present on occasion to observe the vicar as he presents a Bible class, in order to give advice and suggestions, based on the pastor's experience in teaching Bible classes. I think that it is imperative that the supervising pastor guide and encourage the seminary student in Bible class preparation, so that he doesn't get in the habit of relying merely on prepared Bible studies, but does his own work, perhaps in conjunction with a prepared piece of work. (We want to avoid future generations of pastors adopting as their theme song: "Oh Come, Oh Come, A Manual"!)

#### IV. SUNDAY SCHOOL

Most of the congregations that our vicars serve for their "internship" are large and have Christian Day Schools, and for that reason probably small Sunday Schools. But the seminary graduate will perhaps be assigned to a congregation that is much smaller, has no Christian Day School, and therefore a Sunday School that is the single greatest source of Christian education in the congregation outside of Sunday services. The seminary student, therefore, should be familiarized with the operation of the Sunday School before he takes on his first assignment after graduation.

What preparation does the seminary student receive at the seminary for handling a Sunday School program? Well, to my knowledge, there are no courses at the seminary in developing good administrative procedures. Here, then, is one of the areas where the supervising pastor will probably do more teaching than guiding or correcting.

The supervising pastor will teach the vicar methods of organizing and administering a Sunday School program, as he carries it out in his congregation. Engaging teachers, ordering materials, dividing classes, setting up a curriculum, etc., these are all things that probably are not covered in any course at the seminary, and yet things that a graduate should be familiar with before he enters into his first parish.

The supervising pastor will also want to make sure that his vicar has an opportunity to handle a Sunday School teachers meeting. Once again the seminary student will have received from the seminary training in exegesis, isagogics, dogmatics, and catechetics, which will give him the "head knowledge" necessary to conduct a Sunday School teachers meeting. What the vicarship provides is the opportunity to use that knowledge to train others to share the Word. In this area, too, the supervising pastor may have to become more of a classroom instructor, so to speak, than a guide and an overseer of the vicar's work and progress, since very little methodology in handling a Sunday School teachers meeting is taught at the seminary.

#### V. Y O U N G   P E O P L E ' S   S O C I E T Y

The young people's society often falls into the bailiwick of the vicar, not so much by reason of the definition of the word "bailiwick" (i.e. "the area of one's expertise") but by default. We probably will hear somewhere along the line in this seminar how supervising pastor's should not give the young people's society to the vicar, because he is not really prepared to handle this area of work, despite his greater proximity in age to those who make up the average Y.P.S. group. And yet it is an area of parish education that the seminary student should be familiar with and able to handle when he is sent out to his first church upon assignment. For that reason, we, as supervising pastor's, should provide the seminary student vicaring in our congregation with an opportunity to work with a Y.P.S. group.

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Again, to my knowledge, there are no specific courses at the seminary that train the seminarian in working with a young people's group. The seminarian's training is restricted to the courses that give him the "tools" necessary to teach Bible classes and handle doctrinal discussions, which are a great part of most young people's groups. As a result, the supervising pastor will be called on here to provide expertise and training for the vicar that is assigned to his congregation in the area of dealing with the young people. The congregation will provide the opportunity for the vicar to use both his theoretical knowledge and the practical knowledge that he has gained from his "bishop" by having the vicar work with the pastor or perhaps alone with the young people's group. The supervising pastor should make it a point to observe the vicar at work with the young people on a regular basis to guide and, if need be, correct him. Perhaps one of the most important things that a supervising pastor can teach the seminary student in regard to work with the young people is how to maintain a proper level of maturity among people who are not too far removed from the vicar's own age. This, of course, is something that cannot be learned through a book in a seminary classroom, but by experience and advice in the practicum.

## VI. V A C A T I O N   B I B L E   S C H O O L

One last area of parish education that I would like to dwell on briefly is the vacation Bible school. Some of the larger congregations with Christian Day Schools may not operate a vacation Bible school during the summer, but again, most of the young men who are assigned to their first parish will probably be in congregations that have no CDS and will want to operate a vacation Bible school. A seminary graduate certainly should have some experience in organizing and conducting a VBS if at all possible. As is the case with all other areas of parish education, the seminary will only be able to provide the basic tools and perhaps some classroom

theory on the operation of a vacation Bible school. Little opportunity is afforded the seminary student for actually being involved in a VBS program. It is the congregation once again that provides this opportunity for the seminary student to gain some practical experience here. And it is the supervising pastor who will provide most of the instruction, again, based on his experience in operating a VBS. It would be a poor idea to simply assign the VBS program to the vicar and expect him to carry the ball completely. A better approach is to have the vicar work with you, the supervising pastor, and gain valuable information on the do's and don't's as he observes how you have operated the VBS in your congregation over the years. In a congregation that doesn't have a VBS program, the supervising pastor may want to consider asking a neighboring congregation that does have a VBS program if your vicar might be involved in some way in order to get some practical experience.

#### C O N C L U S I O N

The vicar program that our synod employs is designed to create the proper balance of classroom work and practical work in the field. The seminary faculty is responsible for teaching what we might call the "theory" side of that proper balance. The supervising pastor is in some cases simply a provider of opportunity and a guide monitoring the work and progress of the seminary student, giving advice, suggestions and correction if necessary. In some cases, however, because certain areas of parish education are not concentrated on heavily at the seminary, the supervising pastor must assume the role of teacher, providing more than just guidance and supervision. Needless to say, in all areas of the ministry the supervising pastor is a "silent" teacher, if you will, because the vicar learns many things simply by observing how his bishop handles various aspects of the ministry. I would venture to say that merely by observing how a seasoned pastor handles himself in the pulpit, in the office, in the classroom, and in the parsonage, a vicar learns more than the 3 years of classroom work he has at the seminary. It is, however, not the purpose of the supervising pastor to consciously try and mold the vicar into his own

image, but rather to let him develop his own style and personality under the guiding hand of the bishop.

In general, we, as supervising pastors, expect that the young men who are sent to us as vicars will be thoroughly trained by the seminary in areas such as dogmatics, homiletics, isagogics, catechetics, etc. so that we do not have to spend time teaching them the basic things they should know. Under that assumption, then, our part in the vicar program is to provide opportunities for the practical application of that knowledge, to observe the vicar as he handles various aspects of the ministry, offer suggestions, advice, correction, and encouragement, and finally, to inform the seminary faculty of the performance of the vicar and of any areas that should be concentrated on in the seminarian's final year in the classroom.

The supervising pastor is most definitely involved heavily in the training of the seminary student in the areas of parish education, although his role differs greatly from that of the professor in the classroom. Hopefully the faculty providing the classroom experience, and the supervising pastor providing the practical experience is a combination that serves to prepare our seminary students for the ministry in the best way possible.