

Spiritual Growth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

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"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph 4:15). "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen" (2 Pet 3:18). These two exhortations from God provided inspiration and guidance for the WELS Spiritual Growth Task Force to conduct a series of interviews with a cross-section of WELS people in 2001. The task force's goal for these interviews was to uncover key challenges to spiritual growth in our church body. As the members of the task force compared notes, they discovered that twenty issues were raised consistently by those interviewed. These are the twenty points the task force identified as key issues:

- The mission of the church
- A personal relationship with Jesus
- Spiritually healthy families
- Spiritual character formation of future called workers
- Personal spiritual growth of current called workers
- Unity and respect among different forms of ministry
- Interpersonal and management skills
- Universal priesthood and public ministry
- Male spiritual leadership
- Ministry empowerment
- Opportunities for member ministry
- Women's spiritual gifts
- Students' spiritual and academic growth
- Serving in an atmosphere of permission giving and trust
- Teaching flexibility in ministry methods.
- Employing flexibility in ministry methods
- Relevant teaching and preaching skills
- Ministry attitudes
- Mutual encouragement and support
- Ministry appraisal.

By organizing and commenting on these twenty key issues the task force hoped to help God's people develop strategies to address them directly. It was determined that the key issues naturally subdivided into three categories:

- 1) Spiritual issues regarding present called workers.
- 2) Spiritual issues regarding future called workers.
- 3) Spiritual issues regarding the members of our congregations.

When we consider these three categories, it is easy to understand why the WLS faculty made the task force's report the subject of its study meetings during the 2003-04 school year. Our graduates are current called workers. Our students are future called workers. And the harvest field into which we send candidates involves the congregations of our synod. As a faculty we are thankful for the Spiritual Growth Task Force's work in pinpointing challenges to spiritual growth as they have been perceived by the people of our church body. Our study of the challenges included much valuable discussion about our own personal spiritual growth, as well as the way we teach and mentor our students. These discussions renewed our desire to grow by the means of grace,

to apply the means of grace to our students every day in class, and to encourage pastoral candidates to make spiritual growth by the means of grace a priority in the shepherding of their future flocks.

It will be difficult to summarize the faculty's discussion on these twenty key issues which took place over the course of seven study meetings. Your reporter has decided to take the following approach to distilling the discussion for the sake of the faculty's consideration. We shall list the key issues by the name and number given them by the Spiritual Growth Task Force. In some cases key issues that have much in common will be treated as a set. First, we shall identify the spiritual challenge that underlies each key issue, especially as that challenge relates to a man who is studying to be a pastor. Second, we shall analyze the spiritual challenge by determining why it exists and how it manifests itself both on and off campus. Third, we shall propose ways to address these spiritual challenges through our teaching and mentoring pastoral candidates.

Please permit a brief word of explanation regarding this final step, namely, proposing ways to address spiritual challenges in ourselves and our students. Time and again in our faculty discussion we reminded one another that all salutary changes in this area must proceed from the faithful proclamation of law and gospel to our hearts. We understand God's Holy Spirit to be the One who moves us to embrace salvation, to do good works, and to overcome spiritual challenges by daily repentance. We understand that God the Holy Spirit provides this spiritual growth by speaking to us by his law and gospel. It is clear from the task force's report that they also understood this to be the case. Therefore, when we ask ourselves, "What can we do to help ourselves and our students do better in the face of these spiritual challenges?" the first answer will always be "keep on applying law and gospel." This we strive to do constantly. In the following report what you will read are other, secondary answers.

Key Issue 1: *The Mission of the Church*

There appears to be some fuzziness in our church body about why we do what we do. Too many of our current called workers, future called workers, and congregational members lack a clear understanding of the mission of the church, namely, to make disciples of all nations by proclaiming the gospel. Of course, the gospel cannot be proclaimed to the nations unless it is preserved in our midst. But there is a tendency among us to gravitate toward the preservation without giving the same attention to the proclamation. In other words, inreach replaces, rather than impels, outreach.

Every human being, including every Christian, has a strong self-preservation instinct. The same is true of institutions. This instinct alone may cause called workers and congregational members to give an inward slant to the mission of the church. When this happens the proper preservation of Christian doctrine becomes an end in itself, and the going out to proclaim those doctrines may be forgotten. Skewing the church's mission the opposite way could also be a problem. A called worker may so emphasize outreach that he fails to give the "teaching them to obey everything" of our Lord's great commission its due. Imbalance in mission manifests itself when pastor and people do not see every bit of their work together as a part of the overriding task to make disciples by proclaiming the gospel.

How would you answer this question if it were posed by a seminary student: "True or false? When I'm a pastor all I'll need to do is preach the gospel." Who of us would answer false? We never want a candidate to lose sight of his main objective or to lose trust in the inherent power of the gospel. Yet, the question might make a seminary professor a little nervous. Preaching the gospel without a strategy of laying it on as many hearts as possible is not the wisest stewardship of talents. Nor is it completely faithful, for the steward of the Word will seek to be faithful to it and faithful with it. As we teach and mentor our students let us emphasize a mission strategy to go out with the Word. Such a strategy will reflect a complete adherence to the gospel, a desire to learn from the way things have been done in the past, and an understanding of the changing communities and

cultures that we are trying to reach so as to penetrate them with the gospel. Our confidence in the gospel's power to create and strengthen Christians should never militate against a culturally-sensitive plan to reach out with that gospel.

Key Issue 2: *A Personal Relationship with Jesus.*

Every believer has a personal relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit has seen to that by the miracle of faith. It's also true that God creates relationships among believers through congregations and church bodies that match their confession. There is a challenge to spiritual growth, however, when the Christian views his relationship with Jesus only from the corporate perspective. For instance, to simply say "I am WELS" in the place of "I belong to Jesus," or not being able to express what "being WELS" is in terms of a relationship with Jesus, is not a sign of good spiritual health. A related challenge to spiritual growth is to see one's relationship with Jesus as something that only exists in corporate worship, rather than something that exists every minute of every day.

A strong allegiance to WELS, of course, is not a bad thing. And we might expect (and thank God for) this allegiance in a church body that has enjoyed such a strong educational system over the years. Similarly, any church that has sought to make a clear confession in an unclear religious world can expect her members to profess their faith in denominational terminology. Yet, to the degree that one's allegiance to the WELS replaces one's Christ-centeredness, there is a problem. And if future and current called workers can think of their church only as the one that opposes open communion, scouting, and the ordination of women, then there is a real problem.

The seminary professor must be on his guard in the classroom and in private conversation so that he does not spend all his time despairing over false ecumenism. There is a true ecumenism to rejoice in. The more we show our students that we praise God for Christianity wherever it exists, the more we can lead them to see their place in the *Una Sancta* as a blessing that supercedes that of being in the WELS. The more we teach our synodical history as being linked to Christian history, the better we help them appreciate that they are WELS Lutherans because they are Christians, and not the other way around. The more we can help our students express what Jesus means to them in the answers and comments they offer in class, the more they will thrill to their personal relationship with Jesus.

Key Issue 3: *Spiritually Healthy Families.*

What a blessing it is for each family in our fellowship to have on hand plenty of food for their souls in the form of Word and Sacrament. Yet, the sad fact is that too many of our families remain spiritually weak, failing to partake of the feast the Lord has prepared for them. This weakness results from poor habits in personal and group Bible study, home devotions, church attendance, etc. Future pastors must be aware of these realities and make it a priority in their ministries to encourage family growth in the gospel.

The problem of families spending less, if any, time in the Word together is not going to get better on its own. There are too many societal forces competing for a family's time and, in fact, encouraging members of a family to spend time away from each other. Family devotions must be intentionally scheduled. Often these devotional times become the casualty of poor scheduling or, perhaps more accurately, poor priorities. Speaking of Jesus' love and saving work freely in the home makes for a devotional life that provides fertile ground for planned family devotions. This kind of "faith-talk" is often missing from our homes. There is also the tendency for a parent to see the matter of spiritual health in the family to be the church's concern, rather than the family's concern. Thinking himself unqualified, a father may abdicate his responsibility to raise children in the training

and instruction of the Lord. The students entrusted to us are increasingly more likely to have little experience with family devotions from their own upbringing.

We address this issue curricularly. Both our education and pastoral theology departments must continue to impress upon students that family ministry will be one of the highest priorities to set before their congregation. An "earlier the better" mentality must prevail as congregations consider a program for promoting family devotions. Future called workers are served well when they are instructed in how to work with parents in the spiritual nurturing of children, rather than working for parents. Future pastors will be encouraged to lead worship where a family feels confident that all its members will be fed with the Word. An important element of the future pastor's own family devotional life will be marrying a Christian woman who shares his desire to worship at the family altar.

Key Issue 4: *Spiritual Character Formation of Future Called Workers*

Key Issue 13: *Student's Spiritual and Academic Growth*

Those interviewed by the task force repeatedly complimented the academic excellence of our worker training system. At the same time, however, they consistently reported a general weakness in the personal devotional life of our students. There is an ongoing challenge for our campuses to encourage and foster the students' personal faith-life. Another way of saying this is to bring growth in faith and godly living to the same level of importance as academic excellence in our worker training schools.

Is this problem real at the seminary? If we are honest, we must say yes. As was mentioned in the last issue, an increasing number of our students have not had a devotional life modeled for them in the homes in which they grew to maturity. Add to this the challenge for a school that rightly treasures the study of the Bible's original languages so as to yield confessional Lutheran exegetes who correctly handle the Word of truth. While unintentional, we who teach the Word may leave our students with the impression that an academic study of the Scriptures is the most important study. When the Bible is taught amidst the trappings of academia, there is a temptation to see time in the Word as mere homework for an academic subject.

How can the seminary professor help in this challenge to spiritual growth on the part of our students? Perhaps the best thing we can do is to teach in a manner that lives up to our own syllabi. We always tell students at the beginning of a course that we expect the Holy Spirit to grow our faith as we study the Word he inspired. A group prayer before we begin class in which we ask the Lord to build our faith during the next 50 minutes would certainly be appropriate. Perhaps through the discussion we encourage, the homework we assign, and our own personal testimonies to how this Word has affected us, we may help our students to see all their time in the Word as blessed devotional time. By the way we teach preachers and teachers we need to reinforce that the first "hearer" and "student" is the preacher/teacher himself. This is a way to encourage the devotional preparation of every sermon and lesson. The faculty can continue to support the small group Bible studies that are conducted on our campus as a means for spiritual growth among our students and a pattern for lifelong devotional study of the Scriptures with the brothers.

Key Issue 5: *Personal Spiritual Growth of Current Called Workers*

While WELS called workers continue to encourage congregational members to be in the Word, by their own admission they tend to fail to take the time necessary for personal Bible study and family devotions. It seems that they are well-trained to provide spiritual food for others but inclined to neglect their own needs. A concern that is often voiced in called worker gatherings is the need for more time in prayer each day.

Some of Jesus' letters to the seven churches in Revelation come to mind as we analyze this challenge to the spiritual growth of called workers. The Ephesians were commended for their hard work but admonished for having forsaken their first love. Further gone than the church in Ephesus was the one in Sardis, which had a reputation for being outwardly busy in doing good but was actually dead on the inside. All called workers are to stand up and take notice. Ecclesiastical busy-ness must never replace the quiet times of contemplation in the Word of God and prayer. When called workers live and minister on a ministerial education campus, academic growth must never be confused with true spiritual growth. To live as Mary in a Martha world will always be difficult. But if faculty members do not prioritize personal time to sit at the Savior's feet in daily repentance, our souls go thirsty even as our mouths dispense the water of life.

Professor, heal thyself. As we encourage our students to develop their personal devotional life, we must never let other good and useful commitments push aside the one thing needful for us. It is for each professor to determine how this may best be done. Without taking a cookie-cutter approach to managing off-campus commitments for the faculty, we must find ways to encourage one another to focus our time on devotional time in the Word as we prepare to teach. Of course, many off-campus commitments drive us into more time with our Lord in his Word and thus are energizing. This is another reminder that, for the called worker, all study of the Word is first and foremost devotional in nature. Whether preparing a sermon or a lecture, we first get to have God cut and heal us personally. Such is the blessing of a devotional approach to "professional study" of the Word. Even better is an increased commitment to more devotional time on the part of every called worker. Let's make our own personal dashes to God's gold mine each day, and there discover a new nugget of his amazing grace for ourselves. Then, and only then, are we best equipped to share the brilliance of salvation with those entrusted to our care. Here, as in every area of ministry, there will be leaders among us. If we truly are committed to personal spiritual growth, we shall not hesitate to listen to these leaders when they lay options for devotional time before us.

Key Issue 6: *Unity and Respect among Different Forms of Ministry*

Though this issue speaks to a disharmony among current called workers, it is significant that the task force placed it in the section of spiritual issues regarding future called workers. Through interviews the definite impression was given that students in the different tracks of our ministerial education system do not always show the proper respect for each other. It is not surprising that some of that disunity would spill over into the public ministry for which these students are preparing. More serious than the youthful taking of sides, however, is the failure to recognize and thank God for the gifts of a fellow minister of the gospel.

Authentic disrespect between ministers who serve in different ministries is no laughing matter. It cannot be excused as "kidding around." Cutting remarks reveal more than a sarcastic sense of humor; in reality they betray a heart that is ignoring that we have different gifts according to the grace given us, ignoring that we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. Aside from the old self within, there may be other reasons for this problem. Students tend to focus on what they have in common, not on how their differences complement one another. Students in one ministry track may look at their longer road to ministry and feel superior because of it or resent the others for their shorter road. Students in another track may resent those who think themselves superior. These harmful spirits have little chance of resolving themselves once they get out into public ministry. A pastor with feelings of superiority is hardly going to give proper respect to a teacher with feelings of resentment, and vice versa.

This problem reminds this reporter of the advice we gave our children upon entering grade school: "You don't have to be best friends with everybody. You do have to be friendly to everybody." Best friendship is rare. It cannot be forced. But to be best friends is not necessary for people to get along, respect one another, and harmoniously work for the good of the kingdom. To tell a pastoral candidate, for instance, that he must be best friends with every teacher is not realistic, nor will it do anything to address this issue. It's better to remind him

from Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 that the teachers and staff ministers he will work with in the future have plenty of gifts different from his, and that they all will be offered in one great sacrifice of praise to God. The ministries of teachers and staff ministers must be held before our students as precious to the Lord of the Harvest. It also wouldn't hurt to emphasize from time to time how difficult and challenging those ministries are, so future pastors don't get the idea that theirs is the only arduous task in the harvest field. These truths do not depend on whether different called workers' personalities perfectly mesh. These truths are upheld by shepherds who appreciate teaching and teachers who appreciate shepherding.

Key Issue 7: Interpersonal and Management Skills

Thank God the gospel he revealed to us in his holy Word is the power for the salvation of everyone who believes. We called workers are painfully aware of our unfortunate ability to place obstacles in the way of people's hearing of the gospel. Inadequate interpersonal and management skills can easily become such obstacles. It seems too many of our current and future called workers struggle in this area. Included in the desired skills are servant-leadership, team-building, and just plain getting along with other people (not being a loner). There is a real challenge here for called workers whose personalities are not naturally outgoing.

What is it that makes a good Christian leader? We could list many elements, but certainly the skills addressed in this issue are key. Leadership implies managing a group of people with a loving servant's heart. Such management does not just mean knowing what needs to be done for the good of the group, but also the art of involving the group in getting it done. Respectful and encouraging communication is the main channel by which this leadership flows from the called worker to the group. In this way a God-serving, Christ-proclaiming team is built. Our future called workers do not suffer from a lack of training in communication. In fact, preparing and employing spoken language to get the point across is a strength of our curriculum. The same could probably not be said for communication that fosters team-building. From day one of the ministerial education system students are encouraged in independent study. To a degree, called workers become comfortable with the "one-man show" because much of their training nudged them in that direction. Add to this the responsibility felt by confessional pastors and teachers to impart the truth accurately, and you end up with communication that is made up of much more telling than involving. When an introverted personality complicates the issue further, total communication break-downs between called worker and congregation may result.

No ministerial education school can perform personality transplants. But we can teach and model personality skills. At the seminary we do this in the way we instruct. Even when "sage on the stage" lecture is the way to go, the more we season our words with a spirit of cooperation and respect, the more we impress a team-building style upon our students. Little things like ample questioning and not being afraid to "give up the floor" when students discuss an issue in class will go a long way. Group project assignments will also help. This reporter uses two-man teams to perform class assignments. One wonders if more five- or ten-men teams would be better, thus allowing our students to practice the art of consensus building in a larger group. These projects would not necessarily have to be semester assignments. Perhaps we could find ways of larger groups completing big ministry projects in association with local congregations over the course of a year or years. We pray that our vicar students see good leadership modeled by their supervising pastors through effective communication and management skills. God willing, through all this training and modeling a simple goal is attained. No matter what personality our students have, we want them to leave our school as "people persons" in the best sense of the word. We want pastors who are quick to listen because they are truly interested in others before themselves, feeling all the more enriched as a person because of it. That kind of attitude will translate into team-building leadership. Perhaps it cannot be taught, but it can be caught in classrooms where teaching styles emphasize interpersonal communication.

Key Issue 8: *Universal Priesthood and Public Ministry.*

Key Issue 10: *Ministry Empowerment.*

Key Issue 11: *Opportunities for Member Ministry.*

The scriptural doctrine of the universal priesthood was one of the buried treasures uncovered by the Lutheran Reformation. It would appear from the task force's interviews, however, that too many sons of the Reformation fail to put it into practice. There is a general sense that the WELS must do much more in using congregational members to do gospel ministry. The laity is under-instructed in the teachings of public and private ministry, and there is a concern that the scriptural idea of Christian vocation is being lost. Apparently pastors are giving the impression in the pulpit and at the council table that they are the only ones qualified to carry out most of the church's ministry activities. Perhaps this impression is coming from a controlling attitude. If that is the case, the pastor's servant heart is certainly not showing through. Lay people speak longingly of a congregational climate where members feel encouraged and equipped for ministry both by their pastor's attitude and his instruction. When enabled to carry out gospel ministry, lay people are looking for outlets to do so.

Our faculty wondered if the situation was as dire as the interviews made it seem. Yet, there can be no question that this is a subject that strikes an extremely sensitive chord with lay people of our synod. The desire to serve that has been worked in them by the means of grace has not been matched with opportunities to serve. No doubt most of this problem stems not from pastors who don't believe in lay ministry, but from pastors who are challenged in the area of equipping the saints. A small part of the problem may result from pastors, especially the more inexperienced ones, who don't want to appear weak and thus feel threatened by lay initiative in gospel ministry. We would be remiss if we didn't mention another potential cause for the problem of underused member ministry. Sometimes even the most universal priesthood-minded pastor runs into a brick wall when he tries to recruit lay members for ministry. This brick wall may take the form of lack of willingness or lack of gifts, but it is a wall that cannot be knocked down merely by the pastor's desire to train.

There is much our faculty can do to address these challenges with our students. Since the break-down, at least in part, is with the attitude of the pastor, it's important that we continue to emphasize the servant aspect of pastoral ministry every day in class. To paraphrase our Savior, the great pastor is the one who serves, not the one who dominates every possible gospel ministry activity. But there is more than attitude to this problem. There is a weak aptitude to equip the saints. Rather than simply telling our students to do it, we must show them how to train members for service. We can do this by drawing on our own parish ministry experience or by presenting the ideas of others. No doubt a joyful example of working shoulder to shoulder with lay people in parish ministry will have an impact. And as we instruct in how to equip the saints, let's keep in mind that a congregation's lay ministry plan does not have to be built around the church's traditional structure. Rather, it can (and probably should) be built around the members' gifts and schedules.

Key Issue 9: *Male Spiritual Leadership*

One of the presuppositions with which the Spiritual Growth Task Force conducted its work is the idea that spiritual growth will always be resisted, even among Christians, because of the devil, the world, and our own sinful natures. Some "ways of the world" are easier to see in the key issues than others. Here is an issue that mirrors one of the biggest problems in secular society: poor male leadership and role modeling. The lack of fathers' spiritual leadership at home—or perhaps the lack of a father—has filtered down to a corresponding lack of male spiritual leadership in the church. Where there are willing men to lead in spiritual affairs, sometimes we have not taken the time and effort to develop their spiritual qualifications. What is needed are Acts 6 men who are full of the Spirit and wisdom. What is further needed are pastors who are willing and able to develop such leadership.

Some of the root causes for the poor devotional lives of students and called workers apply to this issue as well. Men who are willing to serve as leaders in the church may not have had a very good example of male spiritual leadership from their fathers. Sometimes called workers compound the problem by fast-tracking men into positions of leadership when they are not ready. The development of the spiritual qualifications the Bible

teaches for church leaders takes time. Nor should business or technical savvy replace these necessary spiritual qualifications. When "good with the computer" replaces "good with law and gospel," we have a recipe for male spiritual leadership melt-down.

The story is told of the pastor who preached a very inspiring sermon on male spiritual leadership in the church. At its conclusion he asked all the men who wished to serve to step forward. To the congregation's delight a full 100 men came forward. The pastor was then heard to mutter under his breath, "Oh, great. What am I going to do with a hundred ushers?" If we want men to lead, we must train men to lead. And if we train men to lead, we must allow them to be servant leaders in every appropriate area of gospel ministry, not just a few traditional ones. Our students are quite curious to know in what ways women may serve in the church (more on that in the next key issue). Perhaps we could help them be just as interested in the ways men may serve by leading. In fact, the future pastor's ability to teach the proper role of the Christian man in the home and church is probably even more critical than his ability to teach the proper role of the Christian woman. We professors may get this point across by giving concrete examples of how the male believer's role may be taught and exercised in today's WELS congregation.

Key Issue 12: *Women's Spiritual Gifts*

Any church body that seeks to confess the biblical roles of men and women in the church can expect flack from religious and secular society. The challenge here is for the WELS not to take on a "bunker mentality" as it adheres to the biblical principles. This happens when we fail to utilize the spiritual gifts of women in the name of being doctrinally correct. Such a state of affairs gives the impression that the WELS is hostile to women, or perhaps an old boys network. A related concern voiced by many interviewed is the failure to appreciate women's spiritual gifts when they are utilized. Because the women of our congregations often support the gospel ministry behind the scenes with their gifts, their considerable contributions can be overlooked and under-appreciated. This is the sad case even though women are usually in the majority in our congregations.

Let's be clear on one thing that does not cause this problem. Biblical doctrine does not cause this problem. Being faithful to God's Word, even when most observers mock this faithfulness, doesn't back us into a corner and limit our effectiveness. We must be careful that we do not lay the blame for under-utilizing women's spiritual gifts on biblical doctrine. That being said, let's take an honest look at how we have taught and applied the doctrine. Have we emphasized "don't" over "do" in the area of Christian women using their gifts to God's glory in the work of the church? Have we promoted lay ministry while at the same time artificially narrowed the range of gifts we want our female laypeople to use? Have we revisited the biblical principle when new applications suggest themselves, or have we elevated our traditional applications to the level of principle? We fail to examine these questions to the peril of God's people.

Seminary students are, like everybody else, children of the times. They understand what a hot-button issue this is and they are well aware that our synod has created a women's ministry committee and hopes to conduct a national Christian women's leadership conference in the near future. When our students become pastors they will serve in congregations that want to examine new ways for women to use their spiritual gifts, even if those congregations don't come right out and say it. Now more than ever we must prepare our students to make the biblical principle of man/woman roles their own. It's important they understand that their knowing the biblical doctrine is only the beginning. Knowing must find expression in teaching it to their congregations, and the words they choose to teach it will be vital. Words like "teaching" and "authority" and "leadership" must be clearly defined and understood. We professors must prepare our students to think every work of service (ministry) through as to whether it truly exercises authority over men or not. We must prepare them to lead their congregations in ways that not only do not violate the principle, but also do not harmfully undermine the principle. We must prepare them to appreciate all the wonderful gifts women bring to the church and home—in

fact, we do this every time we speak of our own wives lovingly and respectfully in class. And finally, we must prepare them to express their thanks for every work of service in the church; whether carried out by men, women, or children, it does not matter.

Key Issue 14: *Serving in an Atmosphere of Permission Giving and Trust*

Key Issue 19: *Mutual Encouragement and Support*

We praise God that in our midst the gospel is moving more and more people to serve in the church. Men and women are offering their talents for the full-time public ministry as well as part-time member ministry. A challenge exists for all God's people to provide a climate where that service is encouraged and supported. Both called workers and congregational members feel something different. They are concerned about a climate of fear in which they do their work, specifically the fear of making mistakes. Creating this fear is an overall perception that the proper admonition of mistakes will not take place with love and respect, but rather with a negatively critical spirit.

As we analyze these two key issues, it is helpful to see the first in terms of congregational members and the second in terms of called workers. Perhaps lay people are feeling they don't have "permission" to use their gifts because they sense that the professionally-trained called workers view themselves as better equipped to "get it right." Their fear of failing and disappointing the called worker keeps them silent in witness opportunities and paralyzed in other service opportunities. And, let's face it, nobody likes to be wrong. When lay ministers do make mistakes, it might be difficult for them to accept correction even when it is offered lovingly and constructively. Called workers don't like to be wrong either. But we do make mistakes, and we should be able to expect loving admonition and encouragement from brothers and sisters in the public ministry. Loving admonition and encouragement, however, have a hard time flourishing when we are used to ridiculing each other's weaknesses rather than building them up. That such ridicule in the name of humor exists on our worker training campuses cannot be denied. Then again, whenever youthful immaturity mixes with sinful nature, too often there will be ridicule instead of support.

As we propose ways to address these spiritual challenges in the way we teach and mentor, we will again do well to think of congregational members and called workers separately in these two issues. Lay members will not feel confident in their service in the church unless called workers demonstrate that they are very happy to have lay members serve. And that means being happy even when the service is provided in a way the called worker would not. We must encourage pastoral candidates to cultivate a "freedom to fail" climate in their congregation—where members are encouraged to use their gifts boldly and just as encouraged to accept gentle correction when mistakes are made. In short, pastoral training in lay ministry must be both empowering and trusting. Similarly, professors do well to encourage their students to trust one another once they leave the hill and enter public ministry. This will manifest itself in pastors who are not afraid to try new ministry methods nor afraid to accept a brother's admonition. We can lead our students to realize the differences with which they approach their common work, and then rejoice in those differences. God willing, this will help in developing a charitable attitude toward brothers in the ministry who will do things differently from the way we do them. Differences in personality, differences in gifts, differences in cultural background—we have a wide diversity in our student body. With our public teaching and private counseling, let us lead our students to say: "Vive la difference."

Key Issue 15: *Teaching Flexibility in Ministry Methods.*

Key Issue 16: *Mutual Encouragement and Support*

One of the objectives Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has for carrying out its purpose is to instill in students an "appropriately flexible" attitude. According to the task force's interviews, this is a worthy and difficult objective to accomplish. Apparently too many worker training students are leaving their schools

believing they have learned the only right way to do ministry. A companion belief is that they would be less than faithful if they showed some flexibility in their ministry methodology. This attitude does not dissipate once the student enters the public ministry. The interviews uncovered a perception that many pastors and congregations are reluctant to "step out of the box" with ministry methods for fear of being criticized by other pastors and congregations. There is an inappropriate inflexibility in making changes and trying new approaches to placing the gospel on human hearts.

One can understand a student's perception that there's only one right way to carry out ministry tasks. By necessity they are taught the basics. Our worker training faculties want them to be well-schooled in the building blocks of preaching a sermon, teaching a lesson, doing evangelism, etc. These foundational principles are essential for appropriate flexibility later on. Students are encouraged to build on the methodological foundation they have mastered by branching out and finding their own unique style as they become more experienced in ministry. However, often this encouragement to be flexible is lost in frantically trying to learn the basics. And, apparently, it is forgotten as the years go by. The student who believes there's only one way becomes a young called worker who believes there's only one way. This tendency toward inflexibility is fed by inexperience, and the lack of confidence that accompanies inexperience. As these called workers get older and gain experience, they still might get caught in the rut of believing that no changes in method will do any good. And we all know it is characteristic of the sinful flesh to criticize a method we're not employing.

Continued classroom encouragement to look at the practical disciplines of theology from new angles will go a long way. In other words, professors must never tire of preaching the wholesome effect of being flexible in the way we do ministry. We can do this in a number of ways. We can tell our parish ministry stories of how we or colleagues tried a new approach and experienced personal and congregational blessings. We can show our students that we're not afraid to "step out of the box" in the manner we teach or the assignments we give. We can pepper our Winterim curriculum with courses that delve into different styles of preaching, teaching, evangelism, etc. We can encourage appropriate flexibility by the way we react to (and possibly defend) a student's classroom presentation that was different but effective. We can advise our students to find experienced mentors in ministry who will help them think creatively about sharing the gospel with their community. We can rein in our tongues when asked about a questionable ministry method currently being practiced in our fellowship, especially when we don't know the whole story. We can urge our students to practice the Eighth Commandment by taking their future ministry brothers' actions in the kindest possible way. We can promote attendance at every circuit meeting, pastoral conference, and district convention as times when, among other things, a young pastor may learn new methods of ministry from veteran pastors. We can tell our students never to be afraid to try something new, but to bring God's people on board in a brotherly way by discussing it before they do it.

Key Issue 17: *Relevant Teaching and Preaching Skills.*

The key word in this key issue is "relevant." Interviewees spoke highly of the biblical accuracy with which their pastors preach and teach. God's people respect our pastors' ability to expound a word of God in a sermon or a Bible class. However, these interviewees gave low marks for the way that word is being applied to their everyday lives. Applications, if they are present at all, are missing the mark. Apparently, God's people in the WELS are missing something else in the preaching and teaching they hear. They are missing the preacher's passion, a demonstration of his personal conviction and excitement for the gospel message he brings. No one wants the scriptural basis for our sermons and lessons to change. But we need to make noticeable improvements in the kind of thorough preparation that leads to simple, clear, life-related messages.

To prepare a good sermon or Bible lesson is an arduous and intricate task. The pastor must first dig deeply into the Scriptures in order to expound it for himself. He must plan ways to illustrate that Scripture in order to shed light on it for his listeners. He must consider the struggles and challenges of his hearers as he

comes up with ways to apply that word of God directly to their lives. He must take the difficult steps of preparing a message that will not only answer the "what does this mean?" question of his listeners, but also the "what does this mean for me?" question that is really gnawing at their hearts. He must carefully consider his delivery of this message so as not to detract from the content. And all this he does week after week after week. So then, part of the challenge of making preaching and teaching more relevant is to give the preparation of preaching and teaching, particularly life-related applications, the time it deserves. The other part of the challenge, it would seem, would be for a pastor to place continuing emphasis on improving his communication skills. To write a sermon or lesson is to write for the ear, not the eye. As we get older it becomes easier to "pack more in" when we should be striving for simplicity and clarity. One also wonders how much objective critiquing of sermons is going on through congregational boards of elders, circuit meetings, and pastoral conferences.

If pastoral preaching and teaching in our synod is not life-related, the seminary must examine how it is preparing preacher/teachers. While the exegetical skills necessary to expound a text are probably our students' strengths, and we rightly emphasize them in the art of sermon and lesson writing, perhaps we need to spend more time emphasizing the art of applying the text. The budding preacher/teacher's concern cannot be only what the message will mean on Sunday in the pew, but also how it will be remembered Tuesday at work. Much of this has to do with effective strategies for oral communication. As a faculty, we should be alarmed at deficiencies in the use of the original languages that manifest themselves in poor sermons. We should be equally alarmed at deficiencies in English that do the same. We have set the bar high for faithfulness to the original. Do we do the same for winsome English style? And if we are going to emphasize sermon and lesson writing that is well-crafted in content and application, then we must be prepared to require rewrites and take the time necessary for the personal tutoring that happens through them. Let us also come to grips with the fact that the latest generation does not see as much need for writing long letters and pondering their own written word. We do well to encourage them to be well-read in order that they might be immersed in good written communication. Let the seminary faculty also realize that the majority of sermon and lesson writing takes place off our campus during the vicar year. Perhaps communicating our standards for mentoring in preaching and teaching will take more time than can be provided by a two-day seminar for supervising pastors every four to five years.

Key Issue 18: *Ministry Attitudes*

Attitudes that hinder true servant leadership are being expressed by called workers and perceived by congregational members in our synod. The improper attitudes named in most interviews were fear, arrogance, and apathy. For a minister of the gospel such attitudes spring from being self-focused rather than God-focused in one's work. These attitudes tend to show themselves to the congregation as a lack of excitement or passion regarding gospel ministry just doing a job rather than being privileged to carry out the Lord's calling.

Self-focus (essentially selfishness) is characteristic of the sinful nature and has the potential of hampering ministerial life as much as any other life. The more a called worker depends on himself or herself for the power to do ministry, the more he or she will sink into arrogance, fear, or apathy. Misguided motivation for ministry, then, plays the primary role in this problem among our called workers. Some of the problem, however, is external. Our churches and schools have inherited and perpetuate an organizational structure that puts quite a bit of pressure on called workers to be the "one-man show." When called workers do not sense (or want) a team approach to gospel ministry in the congregation, they tend to take too much responsibility for spreading the gospel upon themselves. In such a situation the gentle balance between confidence and humility is going to suffer. Bad attitudes result.

When a spoken spiritual challenge for our ministerium relates to attitudes, seminary professors are reminded that they must be much more than imparters of information. They must be mentors and models of

proper ministry attitudes. We can mentor in this area through the constant encouragement for our students to deepen their devotional life. Only by applying law and gospel to himself daily can a pastor grow in his confidence to let the means of grace be the power for his ministry. A proper confidence in the gospel's power will go a long way in eradicating both fear and arrogance from a minister's attitude. As far as preventing apathy is concerned, we professors simply need to tell it like it is. Nowhere else but in public gospel ministry does a Christian have a chance to spend every day being in the Word and helping people with the Word. Nowhere else is one's entire life spent preparing himself and others for eternal life. The Savior specifically asked all Christians to pray for those who serve them with the Word. We have a chance to get these apathy antidotes across to our students every day. Furthermore, we can encourage pastoral candidates to seek counsel from a trusted friend or colleague when they feel their apathy toward ministry is getting dangerously high.

Key Issue 20: *Ministry Appraisal*

Critical to growth in ministry is the desire and ability to review one's work objectively. For such a review to be objective it must be carried out by others. This process of appraisal is meant to evaluate, yes, but mostly to encourage the called worker. For years teachers have submitted to this kind of review and have grown from it. It appears that pastors struggle with the idea, perhaps viewing the process as a personal threat. The congregations these pastors serve would like to see them open up to the idea of regular appraisal for the benefit of the kingdom.

There are reasons why a pastor may feel threatened or uneasy about the idea of congregational review, but no good reasons. Perhaps he misunderstands the doctrine of the call to mean that he should never have his work evaluated as long as he is remaining true to the Word in his ministry. Perhaps he feels he will only be evaluated on the basis of his congregation's numerical growth. Perhaps he does not trust the evaluation of laypeople because he's not sure everyone on the evaluation team understands all the elements of pastoral preaching and leadership. These are reasons, but not good reasons. We must also admit that our synodical structure is not exactly set up for the regular review of a pastor's service. Those who might have some responsibilities in this area (district praesidia, circuit pastors) have their hands full dealing with more "urgent" cases. When one brother pastor honestly and lovingly reviews the work of another brother pastor, he still has to be concerned about being labeled as one who interferes in another man's ministry. And so we see that much of this particular problem stems from our reluctance to accept brotherly admonition.

The shepherd's shepherding is only half of the equation. There is also the way his flock receives his shepherding. Seminary professors can impress this reality upon their students by preaching the value of regular assessment by the congregation. One way we preach this is by being open to the students' assessment of our teaching through regular course evaluations. It's good for our students to see another professor sitting in the back of the room from time to time, as we partake of our peer review process. These displays of our own evaluation give us the right to encourage them to seek out evaluation when they reach the public ministry. The proper attitude begins with a desire to self-evaluate. We can point out to future pastors the value of regularly asking themselves how they are better pastors this year than they were last year. A pastor who is comfortable with such introspection is much closer to welcoming the appraisal of his members. What will he hear at the appraisal meeting? Perhaps there will be things that (rightly) wound his pride or hurt his feelings. Perhaps there will be evaluations based on poor premises. But part of being a pastor is being able to accept these comments without immediately jumping to the conclusion that God's people have it in for you. Let us encourage our students to foresee these reviews as times of encouragement and growth, no matter how temporarily painful they might be. The same may be said of a pastor's willingness to bring in evaluation from the outside, e.g., from the circuit pastor or WELS parish consultants.

Conclusion

As we consider the aforementioned challenges to the spiritual growth of our synod's congregational members and called workers, we on the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary plan to continue our daily journeys to the cross and the empty tomb to see our sins forgiven and to be empowered to rise to new life with our Lord Jesus. We plan to take our students along on this journey through instruction that thrills to God's amazing grace and inspires men to find their strength in that same grace. We plan to take as many pastors, teachers, and staff ministers as possible on this journey through continuing education that emphasizes the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom. All these long, lovely journeys to the source of our salvation will be with the harvest field in mind, being filled with grace to fill others with peace, being fed on the gospel to feed other sheep both inside and outside the Good Shepherd's pen.

S. D. G.