

It is not without reason that Scripture reserves some of its strongest calls to repentance—and its most powerful warnings of judgment—for those who abuse positions of responsibility in the church. “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (Luke 12:48). He who has ears, let him hear (Mark 4:23).

Here is one place that the leadership of our synod (of which I consider myself one small part) has too often failed to act. While we must respect the doctrine of the divine call, we cannot be blind to the fact that a few pastors have misused and abused that protection as a cloak to cover the evil of persistent laziness in their calling. For a church body knowingly to allow such situations to continue is to disgrace the public ministry. Worse, it is a disgrace to the name of Christ and an offense to the flock of Christ and to a world just looking for reasons to ignore him.

Insights to Be Gained from New Educational Delivery Systems

All of this brings us to Knowles’ fourth driving force at work in adult and continuing professional education: the use of new delivery systems. It is fascinating to note that Knowles wrote those words in 1980 when much of what has happened in the explosion of digital technology was still only a dream. It is true that Knowles wasn’t thinking only—or even primarily—of digital technology. He was thinking less specifically and more systemically that “education is no longer seen as the monopoly of educational institutions and their teachers” (Knowles 1980, 20). However, since the issue of learning outside of formal classrooms and off college or seminary campuses has really been dealt with earlier in this project report, the focus most beneficial for my project at this time is to take Knowles’ delivery system in the direction of what is doing more to free education from the traditional “place in space” than

anything else. The greatest change in delivering education today is what has happened with advances in technology, and, in particular, with education delivered online via the Internet.

The fact that in most places in our country almost anyone can learn almost anything at almost any time has become something far less than empty hype with the dawn of the digital age. A revolution in the delivery of tools for learning—and in the critical connection of learners with one another—is happening all around us. Just recently, two events opened my eyes still wider to what is now possible in learning for pastors in preaching. Via e-mail a former student asked me for some advice on a plan for improving his preaching. Part of the plan he has already put into place. For some time he has been downloading podcasts of sermons into his MP3 player and listening to a sermon each morning while he showers and shaves. The very same day I received that e-mail, I was invited by another e-mail to spend thirty minutes with four WELS pastors (all are my former students) scattered around the country as they used the Internet for a live (synchronous) voice chat about a common text on which they had agreed to preach for that next Sunday. Growth opportunities previously undreamed of are daily realities, and the opportunities are only continuing to grow. While the issue of delivery is more than just an issue of technology, it is technology that simply must be explored for the rich opportunities God is giving us there for real learning.

Some believe strongly that we are seeing the dawning of a third great revolution in education.

The emphasis on instructional technology brings us to revolutions in instruction. The first of these may have occurred with the development of written language about 7,000 years ago. It allowed the content of advanced ideas and teaching to transcend time and place. The second revolution in instruction began with the technology of books. Books made the content of high-quality instruction available anywhere and anytime, but also inexpensive and thereby accessible

to many more people. A third revolution in instruction appears to be accompanying the introduction of computer technology. The capability of this technology for real-time adjustment of instructional content, sequence, scope, difficulty, and style to meet the needs of individuals suggests a third pervasive and significant revolution in instruction. It makes both the content *and* the interactions of high-quality instruction widely and inexpensively accessible—again anytime, anywhere. (Fletcher 2006, 47)

Granting that exuberance for anything new and exciting in any field makes for hyperbolic statements, yet it appears undeniable that digital technology offers access to educational resources on a scale that would have been unimaginable only twenty years ago. A congregation is being quite foolish if it does not consider how a Web site, or Facebook or Twitter, might be compelled to serve Christ. A pastor who does not consider whether almost uncountable new doors to education have been opened to him right on his computer screen may be even more foolish.

In reference to preaching, being present to hear others preaching well is a tremendous learning opportunity. While nothing can beat being literally present to hear and be edified (and learn!) from good preaching, being virtually present is not too far behind. It enables one to travel distances from pulpit to pulpit previously reserved only for God's other kind of created messengers.

For those who are concerned that too much that is critical to theological education is lost because the learner is isolated when learning online, it is good for us to consider the very real dimensions of connectivity and interactivity the Internet provides. Could it be that one of the reasons teens seem to be spending more and more time on the Internet and less and less in front of television sets (although the TV is probably still on as they multitask) is that the Internet is to a large degree interactive whereas television for the

most part is not? So too in education, in many important ways, asynchronous online class discussions allow for much greater depth and variety of response than in the typical brick and mortar classroom.

The very effort of reducing a message to a written form with no other scaffolding fundamentally alters the construction, lending it greater focus and clarity (Pilkington & Walker, 2003). On a technical level, asynchronous discussion threads allow time to frame or focus interactions; they can include hyperlinks, graphics, or simulations that enrich or amplify content exchanges. Disclosure of life details and personal schedules is often elicited in asynchronously linked study groups that need to plan group project activities. Additionally, as Molinari (2004) suggests, threads often include social devices such as self-revelation that individuals exercise to create community in asynchronous settings. The medium (and asynchronicity) change the message in discussions and thus F2F and WBL discourse differ in fundamental ways. (Cherniavsky 2006, 91)

It may be ironic that it may be online learning that may teach seminary professors to be more interactive in our face-to-face classrooms!

I would like to “call” theological educators on their claim that online learning contexts are somehow inimical to theological learning by pointing out that our *typical* contexts are rarely embodied and contextual. I think we actually have more to fear and critique in our current classroom practices of *disembodied* learning than we do from our experimentation with online learning.

Either way, I believe that emerging learning technologies, even most narrowly and specifically construed as desktop-based asynchronous online distance learning, have much to offer us by the way in which they call into question our current modes of teaching and learning. It is precisely because they raise these questions in sharp and new ways that we must engage them—and then bring the questions back into more typical classrooms as well. (Hess 2005, 68)

As I will also report under research, as part of this project (and to meet a goal my WLS continuing education committee had set), I decided to take an online course for credit. It was a course designed to help educators consider the philosophy of online education. I entered skeptical about online learning’s ability to accomplish what Cherniavsky and Hess maintained. My skepticism has shrunk considerably!

But we can't leave a discussion of delivering education over the Internet without two serious cautions. First, learners or institutions that pursue online education as "education on the cheap" will have an eye-opening experience. For institutions, delivering quality online education will almost certainly be no cheaper than delivering education face to face, at least in terms of the most expensive part of education: manpower. The time it takes to design and prepare an online course (not to mention the assistance almost certainly needed from computer specialists) and the time it takes to teach it well (actually interacting with students' posts and being available to them at times convenient to their schedules) rival if not exceed what is required in the face-to-face environment. For a student, while there may be the advantages of savings on travel and, in an asynchronous course, the ability to study at times conducive to her or his schedule, let the student beware: the time spent credit-for-credit in pursuing learning online is equal to, if not greater than, pursuing that same education in a traditional classroom. Large amounts of time will be spent pursuing the endlessly interconnecting resources of the Internet (and sorting through what is relevant and reliable from that which is neither) while also simultaneously seeking to participate creatively and wisely in the substantive discussion threads mentioned above. That appears to be one reason why online learning has struggled with startlingly high dropout rates. "Distance learning has traditionally faced higher student dropout rates (between 10%-50%) than classroom-based courses (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). The situation is similar with Web-based distance learning, with noncompletions in some online corporate university courses as high as 70%-80% (Martinez, 2003)" (Dembo, Junge, and Lynch 2006, 185-86). While merely anecdotal, I will acknowledge the multiple times I found myself contemplating dropping the course I took. The time commitment was significantly

beyond what I anticipated. Pastors signing up for online courses may need to be disabused of that reality well in advance of the beginning of the course!

Now, the second caution: learning in the virtual fellowship of brother pastors should not be viewed as a replacement for all that can take place when brothers in the ministry actually— not virtually—take time away from their regular schedule to gather for learning at the same physical place. The question isn't solely or even primarily what can happen when they are together in the classroom. In addition to the beneficial interactions that can take place within the classroom (although, as mentioned above, they don't always occur), there is also the factor of what can happen when pastors get away from the time pressures of regular ministry and enjoy face-to-face fellowship opportunities outside of class hours. The more extended release from the press of duties—which almost by definition does *not* accompany online education—can open up unique opportunities for iron to sharpen iron (Prov 27:17). There is more than a hint of this reality behind the words Paul penned to his troubled congregations in Galatia: “How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!” (Gal 4:20). I don't believe, if Paul were writing today, that he would have penned, “How I wish I could participate in an online, asynchronous discussion with you.” While that may have given him some of the feedback he was looking for, what Paul was longing for most of all was the eye-to-eye and person-to-person interaction that would have allowed him to ascertain from fully embodied visual and auditory cues: how is this strong call to repentance being received by the Galatians?

There is also much to learn from how Jesus trained his apostles. As Jesus knew, when we are training under-shepherds, we are more concerned with shaping by the gospel the

Christian character of the shepherds than we are about merely putting facts into their heads. That is what makes the “being with” factor critical. Even the enemies of Jesus seemed to grasp that power of Jesus’ method of training his apostles when they took note that Peter and the other disciples “had been *with Jesus*” (Acts 4:13). I don’t believe Jesus would have substituted in-depth, online, asynchronous chats for all the months and years he spent walking the dusty roads of Israel with his disciples in tow. He intended them to observe firsthand how eternal souls are shepherded. As much as the face-to-face classroom can learn from the insights of online education, online and face-to-face theological education should not be viewed as exclusive alternatives. They are complements that afford more learning opportunities, each with its own unique strengths.

Summary of Insights from Adult Education and CPE

Below is a brief list of what I pray I do not forget from the world of adult and continuing professional education as I pursue the goal of this project. This list is in no way intended to imply that these points are all I needed to or could learn from this part of my study. I make this list so that I do not fail to include as much as possible in my plan. God willing, along with these bulleted points, the plan proposed later in this document shows that even much more has been learned.

- I. I must regularly repent of harsh and unloving judgments that too quickly and easily label others as “non-participants” in continuing education. I will not assume that laziness and apathy is reigning in any brother unless he proves otherwise. I will err on the side of the gospel! I will engage WELS pastors as full partners when the plan is put to work.

- II. I must understand myself, and help others understand as well, the wide range of educational opportunities (formal, nonformal, and informal) that pastors are already using. This alone will expand legitimately the concept of how many are involved in continuing education. It will also offer great encouragement for many to continue or to begin using those opportunities.
- III. I must design realistic and flexible tools for evaluating preaching that pastors can use for themselves and with others so that they have a relatively objective basis on which to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in preaching.
- IV. I must help brothers get a handle on the use of their time so that they more and more take the necessary time both to reflect on their ministry with others and to engage in planned and organized growth in ministry.
- V. I must grow myself and encourage all others offering continuing education in our midst to grow in understanding better how adults learn so that learning events designed in our synod are more and more adult friendly and ministry impacting. Above all, this means growing in the humility to admit that those who come to us for continuing education often have as much to share with us as we have to share with them.
- VI. I must help pastors see the beauty of the body of Christ so that they more and more recognize ministry peers and lay leaders as gifts of God to them in their pursuit of better preaching. Accountability is not the key concept; gospel-empowered support and encouragement to one another is!
- VII. I must encourage our congregations, synod, and seminary to pursue what is needed (especially in the areas of funding and manpower) to make sure we are building a

culture that more and more supports, not hinders, CPE. At its heart, CPE should be a program that first seeks to provide opportunities that nurture and build up our pastors in the gospel.

And it is specifically to the concerns of that last point to which we now turn.

*Continuing Professional Education in the WELS
and at WLS: A Brief History and Analysis
of Current Strengths and Weaknesses*

Since I am writing first of all for those who may not be familiar with the history, polity, and structure of the WELS and WLS, it would be helpful to sketch that very briefly as it relates to this project. The WELS is a relatively small (just under 400,000 total members in the United States), biblically conservative church body. Loving the truth of all of God’s inspired and inerrant Word as the source of our saving knowledge of Christ, we are understandably cautious in these last times when “men will not put up with sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:3).

In that struggle to continue to hold to and proclaim the truth, the WELS is significantly marked by a long and painful doctrinal struggle with our longtime sister synod, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.⁹ What sticks in the minds of many who lived through those struggles—or who have learned of them—is that the doctrinal troubles experienced in the past by the LCMS can be traced at least in part to scholars on their seminary faculties who studied at secular universities or non-confessional seminaries and who lost their biblical

⁹ Fellowship with the LCMS was formally ended between the WELS and the LCMS at the 1961 convention of the WELS.

bearings. This history has had a chilling effect on the view in the WELS of the pursuit of terminal degrees by pastors or especially by seminary professors.¹⁰ While rightfully valuing faithful biblical scholarship above all other learning, it would be fair to say that there may also be a subtle or not-so-subtle hint of anti-intellectualism existing in our midst.

When it comes to church polity, our church body is congregational. The basic building blocks are the more than 1,276 congregations that have voluntarily joined themselves into a synod. Moving up the typology of groupings within the WELS, small groups of congregations (about eight to twelve) in the same area are joined into circuits. While circuits have significance almost exclusively for how pastors gather with one another (and how support or discipline is carried out for clergy), it is often these circuits that offer significant learning opportunities for pastors. Many circuits meet monthly with at times a quite aggressive agenda for study being pursued. The next larger grouping is the conference (varying in size considerably from about twenty congregations up to almost seventy in areas in which our synod is more populous). Conferences also have significance for this project since they are the second most frequent gathering of pastors. Agendas at those gatherings are often and sometimes exclusively educationally focused. Those in the teaching ministry are also organized along similar conference lines, and their conferences also routinely plan continuing education events. The next largest organizational unit is the district, of which there are twelve (covering all of the United States and Canada). Districts vary greatly in the number of congregations and in the geographic area they cover. Where our synod is more populous a district may be just one state (in Wisconsin

¹⁰ I have on several occasions had in-person or e-mail discussions with pastors who have been uneasy about my studies for the doctor of ministry degree.

there are three large districts). In other areas a district covers multiple states (with a province or two of Canada added in several cases). The smallest districts have from 45-75 congregations. The largest districts have 150-170 congregations. Every district offers at least some educational opportunities (if only an essay shared as part of their annual conventions or conferences), but most districts are too big and unwieldy to offer effective ongoing educational opportunities. The largest organizational unit is the synod itself, which meets in convention once every two years. The meetings are always representative, with a predetermined percentage of lay representatives from congregations and called workers selected on a rotating basis to attend each convention. While agendas at all synod conventions do include the reading and discussion of essays, the educational opportunities are quite limited by the size (about 500 delegates) and infrequency of the gathering.

It is also helpful to note that there are essentially three identifiable groups of full-time called workers in our synod for whom continuing education is a concern. The largest group (numbering almost 2,800) is the male and female teachers called to serve in our preschools, elementary schools, area Lutheran high schools, prep schools, and colleges. The pastorally trained are the next largest group, numbering about 1,550. Only 1,300 of those pastors serve in congregations, with the other 250 serving, for example, as overseas missionaries, administrators, and teachers at the secondary, college, or seminary level. The final group of called workers is staff ministers, who number about 125. Their work can be as varied as being full-time administrators of large congregations, or serving as youth and family ministers, or leading the evangelism efforts of a congregation. Almost all of these three types of full-time called workers have been and are being trained at our ministerial education college, Martin Luther

College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Almost without exception (quite literally), all our pastors continue their training for ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary after graduating from Martin Luther College with a BA. The seminary offers a master of divinity program with three years of on-campus instruction and one full year of internship (we use the term “vicar” to describe them) in a congregation somewhere in the United States. The vicar year comes after the second year of on-campus instruction.

One more polity note may prove helpful when it comes to understanding who the “players” are that offer continuing education for called workers within the WELS. When it comes to the initial placement and ongoing faithfulness and welfare of all called workers, the primary synodical governing body is the Conference of Presidents (COP). The COP is made up of the elected synodical president, vice president, and secretary, as well as the elected president of each of the twelve districts. They are responsible for doctrine and practice within the synod. The COP also assigns all new workers to their first calls as well as prepares call lists of capable workers when congregations are seeking experienced called workers to fill pastoral, teaching, and staff ministry vacancies.

When it comes to providing organized formal and nonformal continuing education for called workers, two areas of our synod share that task. The Board of Ministerial Education, which oversees the synod’s two prep schools, ministerial training college (Martin Luther College), and seminary (WLS), offers formal continuing education for teachers and staff ministers through Martin Luther College. Martin Luther College offers such programs on campus, off campus, and online. They also offer various nonformal workshops and seminars off campus. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary also offers formal and nonformal continuing

education primarily for pastors but with one master's level program that also serves all called workers in the synod. Both MLC and WLS offer considerable materials that can be accessed and used for informal learning as well.

Partnering with the Board for Ministerial Education is the Parish Services division of the synod.¹¹ Parish Services focuses on providing nonformal and informal educational and training materials for lay people, but it also offers very focused, nonformal educational opportunities for called workers. Parish Services also provides a plethora of materials for lay and clergy for informal learning as well. These tend to be focused on very specific or specialized ministry opportunities that arise within congregations.

That brings us to the history of continuing education within the WELS.¹² The WELS has a rather long history of respected theological leaders who urged and encouraged called workers to continue to grow in faithful ministry long after graduation. Ever since the beginning of the 20th century, a repeated emphasis from leading theologians and elected leaders has been the importance of growth for called workers, with special (and at times exclusive) emphasis being on continuing to grow through personal study of the Word and through devotional use of the Word even in the midst of more "professional" handling of the Word for others. There were also relatively frequent encouragements in those essays and articles to grow in practical areas of ministry.

¹¹ Parish Services is in the process of being reorganized as the Congregation and Ministry Support Group.

¹² Continuing education efforts in the synod more generally will be treated first, then those efforts coming from WLS in particular.

Significantly, however, I have not uncovered any attempts to systematize or organize this study. It was assumed that those trained at our college (and seminary, for pastors) would know how to carry out this study in a way beneficial to their own faith and the faith of others.

During the last half of the 20th century, our synod began to reflect some of the growing trends in continuing professional education in our country. The impact has been most direct on those serving in the teaching ministry. Some of this organization was prompted in particular by the need for accurate information on teachers' capabilities as call lists are prepared for often very specialized teaching positions. Regular classroom visitation of all classroom teachers became and remains the relatively consistent norm throughout our elementary and high schools. A rather extensive "team ministry process" currently seeks to help pastors, principals, teachers, and congregational boards of education work in partnership to promote excellence in our schools. When followed as designed, this team ministry process also includes specific steps that can be used to help each teacher plan personal and professional growth between the annual classroom visits. An accreditation system for schools within our synod has also been developed, with one of the key standards being the ongoing professional growth of those who teach in our schools.

With pastors, the continuing education picture is far less organized and focused. Some individual congregations working with their pastors have established their own structures for accountability and encouragement focused on pastoral ministries that are similar to what is offered to those in the teaching ministry. However, up to this point no parallel synod-wide system similar to the team ministry process has been developed for our pastors. A spirit of

“rugged individualism” among pastors coupled with a fear of using earthly standards to evaluate faithfulness in Word and sacrament ministry appear to be two factors that work against greater organization of pastoral continuing education efforts.

In the past twenty years, there have been two noteworthy efforts to provide more structure and support for helping pastors grow in their ministries. In 1989 a joint effort by the Board for Ministerial Education and Parish Services set up an ad hoc committee under the leadership of WLS seminary professor David Kuske. This ad hoc committee sought to organize seminars on continuing education in every pastoral circuit in the synod. The seminars were built around the study of the book *Pastors on the Grow* by Stephen Carter. I had the privilege of helping to lead the workshop in the circuit in which I held membership. Although the ad hoc committee had earlier proposed the establishing of some specific long-term structure for pastoral continuing education (including a system of CEUs to be tracked at the seminary and the forming of a standing Continuing Education for Called Workers committee), unfortunately their suggestions had not been initiated by the time the *Pastors on the Grow* seminars were held. While continuing education coordinators were appointed in each district, there was no organized synod-wide structure in place to channel the momentum generated by the circuit meetings. This rendered the seminars ineffective insofar as organized long-term impact on CPE for pastors in the WELS as a whole.

Continuing to recognize that weakness, the ad hoc committee that organized the *Pastors on the Grow* workshops proposed to the 1991 synod convention that a synodical Continuing Education for Called Workers (CECW) committee be formed. This was approved and the synodical CECW was born. Its first meeting was held in 1991 with high hopes. Sadly,

the CECW has had a feast or famine existence—and at present, for all practical purposes, it has ceased to exist. Lacking any dedicated manpower (all committee members were engaged in other full-time ministries) and often significantly limited in funding, it has experienced significant lapses in activity. Between 1991 and 2007 it met only fourteen times, twice with gaps between meetings of four or five years. At present the committee exists on paper, but there are no active CECW members. However, in April 2008 the first vice president of the synod, our seminary president, and this author met to begin formulating a plan for how this important work could be revived. In August 2008 a think tank of those involved in continuing education in the synod was brought together to continue that planning. The overwhelming consensus of the group was that nothing would happen long term without the focused support of the COP (Conference of Presidents) and without giving this effort the critical manpower and financial support it needs. On behalf of those involved in the planning, Paul Wendland (WLS' president) authored a rationale for what was needed to move this effort ahead. Sufficient funding and manpower were the emphasis of the rationale. As the nation's financial crisis also severely limited the synod's funding, the COP is still wrestling with the best way to move ahead.

The other significant continuing education effort for pastors in the WELS focused on preaching specifically. It began in 1994 with the Parish Services division asking a seminary professor, Joel Gerlach, to present an essay to their board. The essay, "Revitalizing Our Preaching," was subsequently published in the seminary's professional journal (the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*). Following this presentation, Parish Services asked its Commission on Worship to gather a think tank of leaders and pastors in the synod to discuss the state of

preaching in the WELS and what could be done to continue to strengthen that preaching. In January 1997, this meeting was held in Milwaukee at the synod headquarters. I was invited to be part of that meeting.

Following that meeting, and to act on ideas generated there, the C/W appointed a five-man Preach the Word ad hoc committee. I had the privilege of serving on that committee. Three fruits of that committee's work emerged over the next years. In the midst of a brief survey on what WELS pastors saw as educational needs in preaching, pastors were given the opportunity to indicate if they would welcome having one-on-one feedback on their preaching. More than 180 pastors indicated that they would appreciate receiving such feedback (more than 15 percent of active parish pastors). The pleasantly larger-than-expected response sent the committee into some quick planning for how to train sufficient preaching consultants. While many consultations eventually were held between trained consultants and individual pastors, a lack of funding and focused manpower kept the consulting program from reaching all interested pastors in a timely fashion. To some degree, a rich opportunity was lost to establish a new pattern in our midst for growth in preaching.

The second fruit of the committee's work was the production in 2001 of a video of four professionally filmed sermons including commentary by those who preached the sermons. The video also included comments by other pastors and homiletics teachers on the strengths and weaknesses of the sermons. I had the privilege of preaching one of the sermons included on that first tape. VCR tapes of the four sermons were mailed to every WELS congregation. While anecdotal responses and one limited survey both seemed to indicate a high approval rating, and while more sermons had already been filmed, funding

another video was thought to be too costly in the midst of the uncertain economic times following the events of September 11, 2001. The hope was that digital technology would soon make it possible to deliver such materials without the costs of mailing and physically duplicating materials.

The third component of the Preach the Word initiative was the development of a bimonthly four-page newsletter entitled *Preach the Word*. Two former seminary professors became the first two editors of *Preach the Word*, and the newsletter has enjoyed overwhelming support from our pastors down to the present. Since my research has focused on the use of *Preach the Word* among our pastors, and as currently planned, it is the centerpiece of the comprehensive plan for growth in preaching that this project has developed, much more on this newsletter will follow in subsequent chapters.¹³

Another budding movement synodically to encourage continuing education for all called workers is in its infancy. At the 2005 synod convention, a resolution passed to form an ad hoc commission to study ways to address critical issues for the future of our church body (building a clearer sense of shared mission, providing adequate financial support, continuing faithfulness to the truth of the Word, and other issues). This commission has now completed its work. One of its major thrusts was calling the synod yet again to a much more aggressive and organized effort in promoting a culture of excellence in ministry for all of our called

¹³ It is important to note that while the previous CE efforts in the WELS may not have born all the immediate fruit that many had hoped for, God may have blessed those efforts in many ways beyond anyone's ability to measure. This much certainly can be said: those previous efforts laid the foundation for what can be accomplished now and in the future. New CE efforts in the WELS are not starting anywhere near square one.

workers. In the first draft of their proposal, continuing education would have required called workers to meet minimum continuing education standards. In their final draft, the requirement was dropped. In response to the work of that ad hoc commission, here is the resolution of the 2009 synodical convention in regard to continuing education.

WHEREAS 1) there are benefits for all called workers to be “involved in some type of ongoing and regular professional growth” (BORAM pg. 186 ln. 1008-1009), for the enrichment of the called workers and those they serve; and
 WHEREAS 2) our synod offers a variety of opportunities for continuing education for called workers; and
 WHEREAS 3) our synod does not currently have a coordinated program of continuing education for called workers; and
 WHEREAS 4) the Committee for the Continuing Education of Called Workers (CECW) has been inactive in recent years; therefore be it
Resolved, a) that the CECW be reestablished by the COP; and be it further
Resolved, b) that this committee takes steps to develop “a coordinated and comprehensive program of continuing education for called workers that meets real ministry needs and that understands various learning styles and preferences of our workers,” realizing that “programs of professional growth can be flexible and can incorporate many different kinds of professional growth opportunities” (BORAM pg. 186 ln. 1021-1024); and be it further
Resolved, c) that the CECW provides a progress report to the 2010 district conventions and brings a coordinated and comprehensive program of continuing education to the 2011 synod convention; and be it finally
Resolved, d) that all called workers be encouraged to participate in current and future programs of continuing education, and that all WELS congregations be encouraged to support their called workers in these endeavors. (Proceedings 2010, 70)

The fruit of this resolution is only beginning to become evident in our synod.

From continuing education efforts in my synod in general, we now move on to what has taken place specifically through WLS. In 1972, the seminary responded to the growing trend toward more formal continuing professional education in our country by initiating what has come to be called Summer Quarter. Summer Quarter began by offering three-week morning courses for pastors during June and July. In the thirty-eight years of its existence, Summer

Quarter has expanded the number and variety of its offerings. Courses are now offered for one, two, or three weeks in mornings or afternoons. The other significant development was opening summer quarter up to male called workers, and, beginning in 2004, to all called workers, both male and female. Summer Quarter has also become a formal degree granting program for those interested in the discipline and goals of such requirements. Over the years three different degrees have developed: the Master of Sacred Theology, which is open to pastors in our fellowship who already have a theological degree (either an MDiv or BDiv); the Master of Arts in Religion, which is open to male and female teachers and staff ministers in our fellowship; and the Master of Pastoral Theology, which is again open to pastors of our fellowship.¹⁴

Attendance at Summer Quarter hit an all-time high of 126 in 2005, but more typically enrollment runs between 80 and 110. At present, there does not appear to be any pattern of growth. It would be fair to say Summer Quarter enrollment has plateaued.

In the midst of busy pastoral schedules (too often with no release time for pursuing continuing education other than regular vacation time), what appears to be the area of growth is professors taking nonformal and formal education events off campus. Our WLS

¹⁴WLS currently offers no doctoral programs. When WLS calls new professors, it has always valued above all else that its prospective professors possess a gospel-centered pastor's heart that has been nurtured by significant parish experience (usually a minimum of ten years). Now, when you combine that with the general antipathy toward terminal degrees in our synodical culture, that goes far toward explaining why only two of our current faculty members arrived on campus with a terminal degree. At present, one other professor has earned his doctor of ministry degree, and three others are at work to complete either a DMin or PhD. As the number of professors on campus with terminal degrees has grown, informal discussion about the possibility of a doctoral program at WLS has also begun.

Web site lists each professor's nonformal offerings (presentations from three to ten hours in length called Pastors' Institutes) as well as for-credit courses (called Satellite Summer Quarter). Officers or agenda committees from circuits and conferences—and at times districts—contact the chairman of the seminary's continuing education committee to organize these off-campus offerings. In 2008 there were fourteen such events led by professors or adjunct faculty off campus with a total attendance of 308. In 2009 there were twenty-five such events with a total attendance of more than 900.¹⁵ These off-campus opportunities appear to have significant potential for reaching many more called workers with formal and nonformal events. The only limit at present is that all WLS professors are all full-time teachers in our regular MDiv program. Professors typically have agreed that they will not accept more than one off-campus assignment per semester, although in summer they can accept as many teaching opportunities as they feel their schedule can handle. So far, almost every request has been able to be honored since the circuits or conferences are willing to be flexible on choices of professor and courses or workshops.

One more development for the future in formal offerings from WLS would be the impending launch of online courses. Ten of seventeen WLS faculty members have either completed or enrolled in a master's level course on the theory of online education. Two faculty members have completed a second course in which the final project is designing at least portions

¹⁵ The 200 percent growth in attendance from 2008 to 2009 has been a wonderful gift of God and, I believe, is further evidence of an encouraging trend in our synod. However, two large workshops for teachers and counselors about Internet addictions account for about one third of that growth in 2009.

of a ready-to-go online course. Several other professors plan to take the second course during 2010. WLS' first online CPE course will be offered this summer.

In order to finish up the picture of continuing education efforts at WLS, we need to consider resources provided by the seminary for informal learning. For 106 years the faculty of WLS has edited a professional journal for pastors. During its first years it was all (or almost all) in German and was called the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. While more and more of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* was written in English as the synod slowly made the transition from being primarily German-speaking to being primarily English-speaking, the name was not changed to *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (WLQ) until Volume 57, published in 1960! Throughout more than a century, this quarterly journal has focused on offering scholarly and informative essays (as well as exemplary sermons) on issues important to gospel ministry. The WLQ also offers news and comments on issues in the broader Christian church as well as book reviews of current works in various theological disciplines. Currently, subscriptions are at 1,800.

Other informal opportunities provided by the seminary include offering open access to our theological library to all called workers in the synod. Library workers are regularly shipping requested books and other resources to called workers who are working on individual projects as well as writing assignments for seminars, circuits, conferences, or district conventions. The most popular part of the WLS library Web site is a digital library of past essays written in our synod on almost every theological issue. While the collection had for many years been gathered in hard copy format and housed at the library, when the library went digital in the late 1990s, bit by bit that hard copy essay collection was scanned and offered in both pdf and rtf formats on the library portion of the WLS Web site.

The final informal continuing education provided by the seminary comes in the form of the larger individual writing projects in which faculty members have been involved. Books such as a recently released two-volume exegetical commentary on Psalms by an Old Testament professor, John Brug, continue to serve our pastors.

Allow me to bring this third section to a close with a brief list of strengths and weaknesses in CPE in the WELS and at WLS with particular focus on what is being offered to our pastors.

- I. Strengths of Continuing Professional Education in the WELS
 - A. For the third time in the past twenty years, continuing professional education is now on the radar screen of synodical leaders—with possibly the strongest and highest profile it has ever had.
 - B. We are beginning to learn to celebrate the many different ways that called workers are already learning rather than seeing continuing education only as a function of formal or nonformal events.
 - C. A significant number of younger pastors appear to be specially attuned to the importance of continuing education. These younger pastors display a willingness to work together for ministry growth with other pastors. God may be providing a crucial tipping point for significant progress.
 - D. The pattern of the CPE of those in the teaching ministry serves as a standard to which other called workers can aspire.

II. Weaknesses of Continuing Professional Education in the WELS

- A. Even with the recent resolution, the needed money and manpower for a high-quality continuing education effort is still lacking. For all the effort and expense the synod puts into careful curricula in pre-service training, we fall seriously short in that same commitment to post-graduate education.
- B. A reduction of the synodical annual budget from 38 million dollars to 30 million dollars in the current recession makes it a very difficult time to secure adequate funding.
- C. In the current budget cuts, the Parish Services division of the synod suffered some of the severest cuts. This further reduced in money and manpower one of the key players in continuing education in the WELS.
- D. There are still a significant percentage of our pastors for whom continuing education may not be a very high priority, or at least for whom planning and organizing that activity is a skill yet to be learned or put to use. A theological rationale for growth in ministry skills and abilities that avoids the danger of selfish motives and does not denigrate the efficacy of the means of grace is needed to help pastors sort through those issues.
- E. There appears to be a significant need simply to help many pastors return to a sound plan of personal growth in the Scriptures. As research indicates (see the next chapter), personal devotional time is being badly squeezed by the busyness of life. Without this sine qua non of personal growth in the Word, all other efforts in continuing education would easily be useless or counterproductive.

III. Strengths of Continuing Professional Education at WLS

- A. The lecture-only method of instruction both in undergraduate and post-graduate education has, for the most part, disappeared. While we still have much room for growth in variety of methods for teaching and assessment, professors are seeking to teach in ways more in keeping with how adults learn. We are turning out more graduates who know that education means more than sitting in front of an expert and saying “teach me.”
- B. Our synod and seminary have always valued parish pastoral experience more than the possession of academic credentials (which, as has been noted above and will be mentioned also below, brings with it some potential weaknesses and challenges!). Every professor on campus has at least ten years of experience in congregations or mission fields of the synod. Several professors have more than twice that many years of pastoral experience. This means that the typical perceived divide between the ivory towers of an academic seminary and the real world of the parish ministry is not as much of a challenge for WLS and the WELS. Our seminary and its faculty are held in very high regard by the pastors of our church body.
- C. Revisions to the curriculum scheduled to be implemented during the 2011-2012 school year offer potentially significant improvements toward helping our students grow in the skills of self-directed, lifelong learning.

IV. Weaknesses of Continuing Professional Education at WLS

- A. While offering continuing education to called workers of our fellowship is one of our two stated purposes for existing as a school, not a single one of our professors

has even one quarter of his call devoted to these efforts. We are significantly unbalanced in manpower and funding.¹⁶

- B. While great strides have been made, we still tend to design courses and learning events that appeal more to those who prefer abstract thinking than to those whose preferred method of learning is testing things out by experience. This reflects that our faculty is made up of those who did quite well in the academic environment of seminary when they were in school (when lecture still tended to dominate at WLS). By default, we tend to revert to teaching as we were taught.
- C. Closely related to the previous point is the fact that our professors were trained as parish pastors, not post-secondary educators. While helping faculty members grow in mastering various teaching and assessment strategies is not an unusual challenge for seminaries, the non-academic background of most of WLS' incoming professors means the challenge is two-fold. When our professors first arrive on campus, they need to work hard to dig deeply into their assigned disciplines since such in-depth study did not typically occur before their call to teach. At the same time, they also need to grow in teaching in ways that help their students to thrive in learning the subject matter. We have much room to grow in designing methods to assist new professors in navigating that dual challenge.

¹⁶ In the last two months of 2009, grant proposals were submitted that would significantly change this picture. God willing, it appears very likely that 2010 will see a WLS professor appointed as a Director of Continuing Education with half of his workload being devoted to continuing education. The grants would also make it possible for other professors to be given release time so as to be able to develop and teach online CPE courses. Progress has begun toward breaking up the money-and-manpower-logjam that has hindered growth in our CPE program at WLS!

- D. Because most of our professors (fifteen out of our current seventeen professors) begin their ministry at WLS with no advanced academic study in the disciplines in which they are called to teach (the plural is intentional since by design we want all our professors teaching in one “practical” and one “theoretical” department), it remains a challenge for them to find time and opportunity to pursue study in those disciplines beyond the work of preparing for class. This can make it challenging to be prepared to offer levels of instruction for CPE that are truly an advance beyond our basic MDiv curriculum. One former WLS president was fond of referring to Summer Quarter as the continuing professional education of our faculty. That is certainly true. But it may not be sufficient today.
- E. To the degree that we do not do a better job of helping our undergraduates to become self-directed, lifelong learners, we may perpetuate for all too many the erroneous idea that true learning ends when the diploma is received.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH

The broad input gained through the research was critical to insure that the program of CPE designed by this project is as useful as possible for WELS pastors.

Methodology Used to Gather Input

This project was designed to incorporate some of the advantages of triangulation in research (Bailey 2007, 77) by seeking input from three distinct groups: those who preach, those who listen to preaching, and those who provide CPE to preachers. Each group has a unique part to play in this project. It is obvious that this project would go nowhere without seeking the input of those who are busy about the work of preaching Sunday after Sunday. The assumption was that those who are actively striving to do that work well will have much to share that can prove helpful to their brothers. In addition, without those in the pew, preaching the gospel has no purpose since “faith comes from hearing the message” (Rom 10:17). Those who listen to preaching have important insights to share to help preachers know where their words are hitting the mark and where we are in danger of merely discharging our guns into the air while hearts are left untouched. Those who provide CPE in preaching were the final key link in the chain. They were included with the assumption that they would have much to share in what seems to work and what does not work in seeking to help preachers grow in reaching the hearts of their hearers.

When it came to determining the best way to gain input from those three distinct groups, the project adopted a mixed-methods approach. The research commenced with qualitative research (in particular, in-person and telephone interviews) in order to gain more in-depth insight into the challenges facing preachers in the 21st century. The plan was to use the insight gained to inform the design of the more quantitative survey that would be used with a broader base of active parish pastors. While it had been hoped to complete all interviews before administering the survey, scheduling challenges led to completing a significant portion of the interviews after the survey was completed. While this was a change from design, an unexpected benefit became apparent. While the early interviews did help shape the design of the survey questions, the findings of the survey also helped shape and focus the interviews that followed. In this way, the benefits of a mixed-methods approach were even greater.

The research began in September 2008 with pilot interviews being conducted with two WELS pastors who serve in the area around WLS. The goal of the pilot interviews was to grow in my interview skills as well as find whether the interview questions were clear and whether the input received in response to those questions would be truly helpful for the project.¹ The most significant insight gained from the pilot interviews was that capturing the interviews with a digital recorder would be essential. That change took place between the first and second pilot interview. This change allowed for a complete transcription to be produced of all interviews. This allowed insights to be gained in later listening and reading that might have been overlooked when initially taking notes.

¹The invitation letter and interview questions used can be found in appendix 2.

Once the pilot interviews were completed, telephone interviews were conducted in October and November of 2008 with three active parish pastors, who were randomly selected by a WLS administrative assistant from the same WLS graduating classes who would later be the subject of the more quantitative survey. The pastors selected for the interviews were then excluded from the eligible pool of pastors to be included in the survey. The graduating classes were from 1983, 1993, and 2003. The classes were selected to represent pastors with five, fifteen, and twenty-five years of experience in the ministry. By interviewing (and later surveying) three different experience levels of pastors, the hope was to discover not only their joys and concerns in preaching but to see if those joys and concerns shifted as a pastor's preaching ministry developed with experience. Also, with an eye on the ultimate goal of a program of CPE in preaching, the interviews sought to uncover any steps each of these pastors had taken to improve his preaching during his years of ministry. The pastors were also asked what they wish had been available that would have been helpful to their growth as preachers. A final key element was to ask each interviewee how WLS could be a better partner to assist him in growing in preaching.

During October and November, interviews were also conducted with the five other WLS professors who teach homiletics as well as the seminary president (who taught homiletics before becoming president). While the same interview protocol was used as with the active parish pastors, there were many unique insights gained here since these interviewees focus a significant part of their professional career toward helping students gain basic competence in preaching as well as helping pastors grow in those same skills. Interviews were also conducted during that same time with four WELS administrators (the administrator of the Commission

on Worship, the chairman of the Commission on Worship, the administrator of the Board for Parish Services, and the vice president of the synod who is charged with overseeing continuing education in the WELS). All of these men had spent years pondering how to provide better CPE to our pastors. After the completion of the survey, additional interviews were conducted in June 2009 with two WELS mission counselors and one WELS Parish Assistance consultant. I had overlooked them as potential interviewees in my initial design, but these three men proved to be especially valuable interviewees. They deal regularly in the field with many different pastors and congregations, and, not surprisingly, they had some of the richest insights of all when it came to seeing the big picture of the relative health of preaching in the WELS.

In addition, in order to gain insights from others beyond our synod, interviews were conducted with multiple seminary professors and synod officials from two other denominations. These interviews proved an invaluable resource not only because they helped confirm that the pastors of our synod are not unique in the joys and challenges they face in preaching, but also because they opened the path to resources and ideas developed by others that could be adapted for use within the WELS. Seminaries and church bodies were selected that had a high view of Scripture, a love for the biblical languages, and a strong concern for the proclamation of the gospel.

Once the painstaking (but critical) process of transcribing all the interviews was completed, the interviews were read and reread for common themes. A list of ideas and resources for growing in preaching, developed by trial and error in the field, began to develop. As I poured over about 250 pages of interview transcripts, more and more the conviction grew that my task was not to impose on pastors a program of CPE in preaching developed

from scratch at our seminary. Instead, what was emerging was a plan that at its heart would offer brothers in ministry multiple options for growth in preaching that would use methods and tools that other practitioners in the field were already using. The strategic advantage of such an approach could be critical in helping many pastors see this whole project not as some ivory tower professorial dreaming but as the fruit of work being done in parishes and pulpits just like theirs.

Before moving on to the more quantitative survey work done for this research project, two related challenges must be noted. As a seminary professor interviewing parish pastors, it was critical to be aware of the twin issues of reactivity and reflexivity (Bailey 2007, 6, 20). It would stand to reason that pastors might want to give a good impression when speaking to a seminary professor, especially when I was the professor who taught basic homiletics to all three of the 2003 graduates. While it would be a self-deceiving illusion to believe that all reactivity and reflexivity could be rendered null and void, I worked hard to set the interviewees at ease. The length of the interviews (almost all at least thirty minutes and many exceeding forty minutes) allowed time for pastors to grow more comfortable in speaking openly and honestly about their joys and challenges in preaching. And while reflexivity was no doubt at work to skew the discussion to some degree, the fact that I had a prior cordial working relationship with all but one of the pastors allowed the interviews at least to some greater degree to have the feel of two brothers in ministry discussing a topic near and dear to their hearts.

While the initial interviews were taking place, a preliminary draft of the more quantitative survey was developed and field tested with three area WELS pastors.² As more and more input was gained from the earlier interviews, the survey was modified accordingly. The final draft of the survey was field-tested by twenty-one seminary seniors from my systematic theology section.³ These masters of divinity students provided critical insight into improving the clarity of the directions and questions as well as giving a helpful benchmark for the length of time it would take for a typical pastor to complete the survey.

Other preparations for the survey were handled by three able administrative assistants at WLS. A decision was made in early October to administer the survey using an online survey Web site. One administrative assistant spent countless hours revising what was a paper survey so that it matched the online format. Already before the interviews began, another administrative assistant developed a list of all active parish pastors in the 1983, 1993, and 2003 WLS graduating classes. After randomly selecting from each of those classes the three parish pastors who were interviewed, she prepared an alphabetical list of the remaining active parish pastors from each class. She then selected every third pastor on the list to be included in the survey. This gave us a potential pool of thirty-eight survey respondents. In order to reduce reactivity and reflexivity, we made it known to those who were invited to

²The final version of the documents used with the online survey can be found in appendix 3.

³Those seniors had just completed their off-campus vicar year in which they intern under an experienced pastor. They would have preached about twenty to thirty sermons during that year.

participate that at no time before, during, or after the survey, would the names of the survey participants be shared with me.

During the last week of October, a third WLS administrative assistant used e-mail to invite the selected pastors to participate. The e-mail included basic information about the survey and a link to the Web site where the survey could be completed. There was also an attached letter from me with more detailed information about the doctoral project and the role of the survey in that project. We took pains to acknowledge in all our communications that we were asking a significant commitment of time from those asked to complete the survey. The survey included ninety questions, with a considerable number seeking more extensive information than merely selecting predetermined choices. We anticipated that it would take thirty to forty-five minutes for a pastor to complete the survey in its entirety. For that reason, we were delighted and thankful when thirty of the thirty-eight pastors invited completed the entire survey, a 78.9 percent response rate! It is also significant to note that all twelve of the geographic districts of the WELS were represented by at least one respondent. That is important to note, since the responses are not coming just from those who live in close geographic proximity to WLS and its on-campus educational resources.

Once the survey results were received, the individual and composite responses were studied and restudied. The fact that all survey responses were received electronically allowed for easy sorting. It was relatively easy to evaluate answers by the different years of experience of those answering the survey. It was also helpful to read the survey responses and compare them to the interview transcripts—especially the interviews of the pastors. There were no major discrepancies discovered between the responses given in the survey and the

input from those who were interviewed. This helped confirm that relatively reliable information was being gained in both the interviews and the survey.

The final leg of the triangulated research was a Delphi group conducted with lay women and men during November 2008 through January 2009. The final two questions of the survey had asked each pastor to supply the name of a spiritually mature man and a spiritually mature woman from his congregation. Within the invitation letter attached to the e-mail, and again within the survey, the pastor was informed about how the Delphi group would be formed so that he would know why the names were being sought. From the names provided by the pastors, the first forty lay people (twenty men and twenty women) were asked to participate in the Delphi group.⁴ During the first round, the lay people were asked to list up to five strengths and five weaknesses of preaching in the WELS from their perspective. The respondents also indicated their gender so as to note any differences in preaching issues identified by women and men. Of those invited to participate, twenty-three participated in this first round.

When the input had been received from the first round, I prepared a summary of all the strengths and weaknesses listed by respondents. Common answers were listed only once, while trying to make sure not to combine into a single statement what were truly unique strengths or weaknesses. A second letter was then sent out that listed the twenty-seven unique strengths and twenty-nine unique weaknesses that the lay people had identified. The strengths and weaknesses were not listed in any particular order. This second letter was again sent to

⁴ Documents related to the Delphi group can be found in appendix 4.

all who had been asked to participate in the first round. The task for the recipients this time was to choose from the list of strengths the ten they believed to be the most important *and* that they believed were regularly found in the preaching they heard in the WELS. For the weaknesses, they were also to choose the ten they thought were the most critical weaknesses of preaching as they observed it in the WELS.

Twenty-nine responses were received from the second round of mailing. The original plan had been to identify the top ten strengths and weaknesses for prioritizing by the group during the third round. However, when I tallied the second round responses, there were seven strengths that had been noted by more than half of the respondents. Among the weaknesses, there were six weaknesses that were marked by over half of the respondents and one additional weakness that lacked just one vote from being listed by a majority. That led to the decision to ask them to prioritize in the final mailing only the top seven strengths and weaknesses. When I put together the final mailing, I listed strengths and weaknesses in order from the most frequently selected to the least frequently selected, although I did not indicate that to the members of the Delphi group. In that final mailing, they were asked to rate the strengths from one through seven in terms of what they believed to be the most important strengths of preaching in that list. In regard to the weaknesses, they were asked to prioritize this list from one to seven in regard to what they believed were the greatest challenges to preaching in our midst. The respondents were once again (just as in the first round) asked to indicate their gender so that any potential differences in rating between women and men could be noted.

It would be less than honest not to note here that the slight difference in how they were asked to rate the final lists was a flaw in the design. The final list of prioritized

strengths would be based more on conviction of what they believed was important in preaching, rather than what they observed as actual strengths in the preaching they heard. On the other hand, the list of weaknesses would more directly reflect their evaluation of the preaching that they heard. While the information gained would still be invaluable for the project, as the information is used it will be important to remember the difference caused by my less-than-precise wording.

Twenty-four responded to this third round. From these responses three prioritized lists were developed showing how men, women, and the group as a whole prioritized the strengths and weaknesses.⁵ The results were then studied in relation to input received from the interviews and survey.

One more item of note needs to be mentioned before moving on to the conclusions drawn from this research. While I tried to sign the letters prepared by my administrative assistant without noting the names at the top of the letters, several lay people went out of their way to respond with signed notes acknowledging with thanks this opportunity to give their input on preaching in the WELS. In fact, one lay man indicated that he would love to discuss the issues in much greater detail. Seizing the opportunity presented, a very fruitful (and lengthy!) telephone interview was conducted. This man had served for several years on the WELS Coordinating Council, which oversees the spending of the synod's budget for its various national and worldwide ministry efforts. He possesses an evident love for the gospel and its proclamation. His keen insights will be noted in several places as the key issues are identified in the last section of this chapter.

⁵These prioritized lists are also included in appendix 4.