

## A Curriculum From and For the Church

The 2005-2006 academic year at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, witnessed the inauguration of a new curriculum that had been in the making for the better part of a decade. Over thirty years had elapsed since the seminary last revised its curriculum. Changes in society and in the church as well as a more diverse student body — many of these students are fairly new to the Lutheran Church — prompted faculty reflection on the adequacy of a curriculum to form the minds and hearts of future pastors for ministry in the new century. Curricular changes were not made lightly or without deliberation and some spirited debate. The process spanned several years as it engaged the faculty in the reading and discussion of a wide array of writers involved in theological education and pastoral formation in North America and abroad.<sup>1</sup>

A significant text in process was Reinhard Huetter's *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*<sup>2</sup>. Huetter develops the argument that doctrine is not a theoretical abstraction but is embodied in the concrete practices of the church— liturgy, preaching, pastoral care, catechesis, and mission. Huetter's insights forged out of his engagement with George Lindbeck, Oswald Bayer, Erik Peterson were provocative in faculty discussion and formative for a curriculum centered in the practices of the church. As the seminary's mission is "the preparation of pastors for the congregations and missions of the LCMS....Its programs and services offer an understanding of Christian faith which is Christ-centered and biblically-based, confessionally Lutheran and evangelically active,"<sup>3</sup> the curriculum is shaped by the realities that constitute the church, that is, the preaching of Christ crucified and the administration of the sacraments. A curriculum governed by the gifts of Christ in Word and Sacrament is intentional in reflecting both the life of the pastor and that of the congregation<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The faculty read and engaged a number of articles and chapters of seminal books on theological education and pastoral formation including: David P. Scaer, "A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern" 63 *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (October 1999), 269-280; Edward Farly, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001); Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 35-152; L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (editors), *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001); John W. Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?" in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (July 2002), 255-268; Preus, Robert D. *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism- Volume I: A study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 194-225; Yeago, David. "The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited" *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church* edited by James J. Buckley and David Yeago (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 49-93. Although published after the curriculum review committee had completed its work, the new book *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Formation* edited by Charles Foster et al (Stanford, California: Jossey-Bass, 2006) appears to confirm the overall orientation of the CTS curriculum.

<sup>2</sup> See Reinhard Huetter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Concordia Theological Seminary: Academic Catalog 2005-2006* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2005), 20.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that CTS now includes a Master of Arts degree leading to certification as a deaconess in the LCMS. Diaconal students take many of the courses required of Master of Divinity students. In the

Worship, therefore, is not a devotional addendum to the study of the theology but the matrix for such study. Kramer Chapel dominates the campus of Concordia Theological Seminary not only architecturally but thematically as academic rigor is not separated from the life of faith nurtured by sermon and sacrament and doxologically expressed in the daily offices. The curriculum integrates exegetical and dogmatic studies, historical investigation of the church's traditions and the development of pastoral skills with the ongoing worship life of the church centered in font, pulpit, and altar. This is the key to our revised curriculum.

The CTS curriculum seeks to catechize students into God's means of grace in a fundamental and holistic manner. It assumes regular participation in the Divine Service and the prayer offices of the church. Recognizing the fact that our culture is increasingly biblically illiterate and that a goodly number of students are fairly new to the Lutheran Church or have been inadequately catechized in their home congregations, the curriculum makes engagement with primary texts, especially the Holy Scriptures and the Small Catechism a priority. The seminary does not exist to produce religious technicians, ecclesial managers or psychological therapists but thinking and speaking pastors who are able to articulate the truth of the Gospel with competence and accuracy in a world that is fragmented and often chaotic. Our seminary president, Dean Wenthe along with our academic dean, William Weinrich provided excellent leadership to achieve this goal.<sup>5</sup> The revised curriculum aims at forming students in their ability to think and act theologically with good skills, both critical and analytic. The classroom and the seminary community should prepare the student to express the truth of the faith both orally and in writing.

There is less emphasis on isagogics and more emphasis on the reading, interpretation and proclamation of texts, especially the texts of the Gospels. Both plenary lectures and small working groups will be used in these classes as students are led to see how doctrine is derived from the biblical texts. Three Gospel courses are required (Gospel I: Matthew; Gospel II: Mark/Luke; Gospel III: John) and each student participates in four quarters of New Testament Greek Readings, one-hour seminars of no more than six students. These seminars are devoted to the translation and interpretation of the Gospel lection for the coming Sunday in the church year with a view toward preaching. Thus the seminar provides the student with a model for ongoing study. These seminars are taught by faculty members from all disciplines, not only by the exegetes. Ability in Greek is a prerequisite for enrollment in the Master of Divinity program. Two courses of Hebrew are part of the required curriculum.

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place of such courses as Hebrew, homiletics and pastoral theology, the deaconess students take courses in the history of the office of deaconess, deaconess practice, and human care seminars. The deaconesses are also in a separate field education tract and complete an internship rather than a vicarage.

<sup>5</sup> See Dean Wenthe, "More Than Leader, Administrator, and Therapist: The Scriptural Substance of the Pastoral Office" in *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer* edited by Dean O. Wenthe et al (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 200), 199-213.

There are no independent courses in isagogics or hermeneutics in the revised curriculum as these are covered within the exegetical courses. In addition to the Gospel courses, there are two required courses in the Pentateuch, and one course each on Pauline epistles, the major prophets, and the Psalms. The Psalms course is interdisciplinary as it taught by an exegete and a practical theologian so that the use of the psalms in worship and pastoral care is highlighted.

A required course in catechetics focuses extensively on the use of the Small Catechism. It is expected that all students will be able to recite the six chief parts as well as the daily prayers by heart. The student is being catechized into the texts of the Catechism even as he is being prepared to teach it. The catechetics course approaches the Catechism not so much as a text book or educational resource but as a book of doctrine, prayer and life so that the future pastor develops the habitus of a catechist<sup>6</sup>.

The teaching of liturgy has an expanded place in the new curriculum. Student assessments from recent years reflected the need for more depth in the study and practices of worship than was given in the one required course in the previous curriculum. The new curriculum has two required courses in liturgics. Liturgics I is devoted to the biblical foundations, historical development and theological significance of the liturgy as well as instruction in the basics of officiating at the Divine Service and prayer offices. Liturgics II attends to the church year, hymnody, and worship planning.

Three required courses in the Lutheran Confessions introduce students to the historical background, doctrinal content and ongoing relevance of the documents in the Book of Concord. The three courses in dogmatics follow a traditional, creedal outline in equipping students with the knowledge of Christian doctrine and practice in the ability to think theologically and articulate the confession of Christ with faithfulness, clarity and coherence.

David Yeago has described pastoral theology as the hands and feet of dogmatics<sup>7</sup> so the practical courses endeavor to ground students in church practices that reflect our confession of Christ and enable him to distinguish law and gospel in proclamation and pastoral care to articulate the faith in our culture with integrity. Pastoral Theology I is, in large part, based on the Agenda that will accompany the *Lutheran Service Book* scheduled for publication later this year. This course begins with the rite of ordination as the map for pastoral identity and work. The liturgical forms of Baptism, confirmation, confession/absolution, marriage, visitation of the sick, commendation of the dying, and

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<sup>6</sup> For further development of this point see John T. Pless, "Fidelity to the Catechism in Prayer and Teaching" *Lutheran Forum* (Fall 2005), 8-15.

<sup>7</sup> "Systematic theology is the tongue and mind of practical theology: it expounds the message to which we desire to be faithful. But practical theology is the hands and feet of systematic theology. It is the necessary fulfillment of all systematic theology, which must always intend to be in some sense church dogmatics, thinking interior and useful to the life of the church. David Yeago, "Testing the Spirits: Practical Theology and the Crucified and Risen God" in *dialog* (Fall 1983), 252. Also see Gerhard Sauter, *Gateways to Dogmatics: Reasoning Theologically for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 95-180.

Christian burial constitute the chief loci of the syllabus. Pastoral Theology II uses case studies to hone the student's ability to engage in spiritual diagnosis and make appropriate applications of the Gospel. Pastoral Theology I and II are supplemented by a required course in pastoral counseling. A course entitled "Pastor, Congregation and Synod" replaces the previous course in parish administration. This class attends to issues of churchmanship as well as "kingdom of the left hand" aspects of congregational life.

Three courses in homiletics provide instruction in the theology of preaching especially the right distinction between the law and the gospel, sermon design and delivery. Theological foundations and missional approaches consistent with Lutheran theology are at the heart of the course of an introductory course in missions and evangelism. Theological ethics lays the foundation for a Lutheran approach to ethics in a postmodern world that is wary of assertions of absolute truth. Working from the premise that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the "boundary and basis"<sup>8</sup> also for ethics, this course aims at assisting the student in thinking theologically about contemporary moral issues. A course in the previous curriculum, "Religious Bodies in America" has been replaced by a new course, "Ministry in a Pluralistic Context." Whereas the older course was basically a course in comparative symbolics, the new course takes up the challenges of so-called post denominational Christianity, world religions, new religious movements, competing world views and cultural diversity with a view toward apologetics and missionary proclamation.

An overview of church history is provided in three sequential courses with an additional required course on the Lutheran Church in America as well as at least one history elective. The historical dimension of the curriculum demonstrates the catholicity of the church and examines the ways in which God's people have confronted error and confessed Christ in the past. A new feature of this curriculum is a seminar on Luther's writings. The topic for this seminar would vary as a variety of instructors would select key treatises from the corpus of Luther's writings for more intensive examination. For example, a systematic theologian might offer a seminar on "The Bondage of the Will" while a New Testament scholar might choose to host a seminar on Luther's lectures on John or a homiletics professor might investigate Luther's Advent sermons. It is hoped that this seminar will not only lead the student into a more in depth knowledge of a specific area of Luther studies but that it will equip him with the tools for continued study of the preeminent teacher of our church and his significance for pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps the distinguishing feature of the CTS curriculum is the sequence of courses known as Theologia. These courses will be taught by a team of lecturers from the four departments. Theologia I is a first-year course based on Baptism. Theologia II focuses on preaching while Theologia III is built around the Lord's Supper. Each of these courses will be integrative in nature as components of exegesis, historical theology, systematic

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<sup>8</sup> Here the work of Oswald Bayer is particularly helpful. See his chapter, "Justification: Basis and Boundary of Theology" in *By Faith Alone: Essays in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde* edited by Joseph Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 2004), 67-85 and "Luther's Ethics as Pastoral Care" *Lutheran Quarterly* (Summer 1990), 125-142.

reflection, and liturgical/pastoral practice are brought together. For example, in Theologia I, students will exegete key New Testament baptismal pericopes, examine historic baptismal liturgies, homilies and other patristic texts, study the doctrine of Baptism in Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, and reflect on current baptismal practices. The course will utilize both plenary lectures and smaller weekly seminars similar to the format of the Gospel courses. The Theologia sequence indicates how deeply the curriculum is committed to the pastoral acts of Baptism, preaching and the Lord's Supper.

Another integrative aspect of the curriculum is field education and vicarage. Field education at CTS consists of involvement in a local congregation for the first six quarters of each seminarian's career. Quarters three and four also include an institutional component as the student works in a hospital or nursing home/rehabilitation center. The experience in the field is linked with specific classes. For example, a student enrolled in catechetics is expected to teach the Catechism in his field education setting. Required one-hour plenary lectures for first and second year students each week works with specific readings to future enhance theological development and pastoral formation (see appendix). In the first year, there is an intentional move from vocation to office (first quarter) to the character of the pastor and his work (second quarter) to the theology of the cross as the framework for understanding pastoral life and work (third quarter). The focus of the second year is on classical themes in pastoral care, using Luther's letters in both first and second quarters. The third quarter provides occasion to discuss the confessional nature of the pastor's work, demonstrating that doctrine and practice cannot be divorced. An intentional and pronounced goal of field education is to shape the spiritual life of the pastor using Luther's well-known triad, *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*.<sup>9</sup>

One of the more controversial aspects of the new curriculum is the reduction of electivity. The highly structured curriculum leaves room for only two electives. However the majority of the faculty agreed with the proposal as the new curriculum covers a broader range of topics in the required courses. Also offsetting the lack of electives are the six required modules on a range of practical issues such as stewardship, the pastor and the media, various ethnic ministries, particular issues in social ministry, specialized topics in pastoral care, time management, strategic planning processes, and ministries to special groups (youth, older adults, singles, military, campus, disabled etc.). The modules are of six hours each, often offered on a Saturday and taught by a visiting pastor or layperson with proven expertise in the field.

Supplementing the formal curriculum is the place of the "ungraded curriculum," that is, those occasions both spontaneous as well as planned that allow for mentoring, exposure to contemporary theological issues, and involvement in church life, mission outreach and Christian service. Among the planned events would be the seminary's annual symposia in January, the Good Shepherd Institute's conference each November, regular Wednesday

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<sup>9</sup> See John T. Pless, "The Triangular Shape of the Pastor's Devotional Life" *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay: Essays in Honor of Ronald Feuerhahn on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* edited by Bart Day et al (Houston, Texas: Feuerhahn Festschrift Committee, 2002), 317-331.

morning convocations and a number of mission and servant events both in the USA and abroad.

The four traditional departments that have characterized theological education since the time of Schleiermacher<sup>10</sup> are maintained but the boundaries have become much more fluid in the revised curriculum. In presenting the new curriculum to the faculty, the curriculum review committee articulated what it believed to its distinct advantages:

- It is primarily churchly *and* academic, i.e, holistic, in nature, rather than disjointed and disciplinarian;
- It purposefully addresses our post-Christian society and world;
- It forms students through an understanding of baptismal, sacramental identity;
- It is built upon a participation in the life of God Himself;
- It is highly interactive between faculty and student;
- It emphasizes primary texts and source documents, rather than secondary sources;
- It is ultimately concerned with pastoral education and formation rather than the simple imparting of information;
- It involves students from the beginning as novitiates, moving them toward the pastoral office;
- It models what a pastor actually does in the parish;
- It is shaped by the constitutive realities of the church's own life- Baptism, preaching, and the Lord's Supper;
- It involves mentoring, spiritual formation and relational aspects (Memo from the Curriculum Review Committee- March 27, 2002).

The curriculum review committee at CTS believes that the new curriculum is responsive to the needs of the church for pastors whose hearts and minds have been molded by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and strengthened for intelligent and compassionate shepherding of the Lord's flock and the missionary confession of Christ Jesus in an unbelieving world. The curriculum endeavors to instill in the students "the virtues of the ordained life"<sup>11</sup> as the student not only studies the Word but lives in the Word as part of the baptized community gathered on campus for prayer and study.

Making the transition to a new curriculum is not without significant challenges as it calls for adjustments on the part of students, professors and administrators. Certainly it will challenge professors to continue to work in a collegial fashion, broadened their view beyond the discipline of their academic specialization to more fully taken into account the purpose of theological education for the life of the church in the world. It will, no doubt, take a few years to refine and further develop the pattern of theological education and pastoral formation that we have set for ourselves. Yet we believe that it is well worth the effort in order that the LCMS might have well-formed pastors who work with

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<sup>10</sup> See Farley, 73-98.

<sup>11</sup> See William Willimon, *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

confessional integrity as able ministers of the New Testament in a complex and chaotic world.

Appendix: Field Education as Component in the Revised Curriculum

	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter
First Year Weekly Lecture	Vocation & Pastoral Formation; the Life of Prayer. Key Texts: <i>The Minister's Prayer Book</i> edited by John Doberstein; <i>Luther on Vocation</i> by Gustaf Wingren	The Character of the Lutheran Pastor. Key Text: <i>The Hammer of God</i> by Bo Giertz (small group discussions of this book)	Theology of the Cross and the Pastoral Office. Key Text: <i>On Being a Theologian of the Cross</i> by Gerhard Forde
First Year Contextual Activities	Get acquainted with congregation, orientation with pastor	Assist with liturgy. Accompany pastor on hospital/nursing home visits, evangelism and delinquent member visits	Institutional visits Observe/attend congregational board meetings.
Second Year Weekly Lecture	Classical Pastoral Care. Key Text: <i>Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel</i> edited by Theodore Tappert	Luther letters continued.	Confession and Office. Key Texts: <i>The Lonely Way-</i> Vol. II by Hermann Sasse
Second Year Contextual Activities	Institutional visits continue. Preach	Teach Sunday School, Bible class, and/or Catechism	Preach. Observe funeral.

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