

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

Rev. Paul R. Harris – 512-453-3835 Church; 512-251-4204 Home
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The State of the Synod

This is the title for an extra thick September 2013 *Lutheran Witness*. It will accurately tell you the state of our Synod in terms of numbers and above all else dollars, but it does not reflect the state of our Synod doctrinally. This article will.

Several encouraging/discouraging resolutions came out of the 2013 Synodical Convention held in July. The convention reports reads like a Dickens's novel. It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Resolution 4-10 calls for each district president to "be encouraged to address the congregation's administration of the Lord's Supper...; and that those practices not in harmony with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions be addressed fraternally and evangelically." Bravo! But you can hear the wiggle-room? Those pastors and churches who identify themselves as practicing open Communion claim they do so in harmony with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions as does the ELCA. And how is our district president, who has publicly written against closed Communion, going to encourage any pastor to change to closed Communion fraternally, evangelically, or otherwise?

Resolution 2-12A addressed the issue of women serving in combat and it was adopted 947 to 63. Bravo! For over 10 years Trinity sent resolutions in asking that the LCMS reject this practice as being contrary to the Order of Creation, i.e. it is contrary to the order of creation for women to be called on, except in an emergency, to defend men. It is women and children first. I can't find the actual text of the resolution, but from the pusillanimous comments from an Army chaplain I would say it does not reject women in combat as contrary to Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions. The chaplain praised the resolution because it gives women the freedom to serve in combat while recognizing that this might bother the conscience of others. This is the Bill Clinton argument against abortion. I'm opposed to it, but others may feel differently. This line of argument only works with things God has not spoken about, i.e. you can't say, "I personally oppose child abuse, but others may feel differently."

Resolution 4-05 is by far the best. It encourages further discussion between the LCMS and the Wisconsin and Evangelical Lutheran Synods. This is the first time in thirty years that I have seen such a resolution.

By far the worst resolution was Omnibus Resolution A. This is where the convention dumped 50 resolutions referring

them to a board, commission, or individual to study or implement. This was the fate of our women in combat resolution in 2003, 2004, 2007, and 2010. It was referred to the CTCR, and their response was a one time article in the *Lutheran Witness* giving pros and cons. There was one resolution dumped there this year that dealt with 3 resolutions which brought up the subject of continuing to be in fellowship with the AALC, a group that splintered from the ELCA years ago. I want you to read the resolutions for yourself.

To Review AALC Relationship
Whereas, The primary objective of Synod is, "under Scripture and Lutheran confessions," to "conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:10)" Constitution, Art. III 1); and **Whereas**, The true unity of the Church is found in the pure teaching of the Gospel and right administration of the sacraments (AC 7); and **Whereas**, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and The American Association of Lutheran Churches (The AALC) declared themselves to be in full altar and pulpit fellowship in 2007, jointly stating that the two church bodies are in full agreement in doctrine and practice; and **Whereas**, "No resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned" (Art. VII 1); and

Whereas, Three congregations of the Montana District of the LCMS minister in communities in which there are also AALC congregations; And **Whereas**, There are significant questions on the part of our pastors and congregations concerning the doctrine and practice of The AALC congregations, including significant differences in Communion practice, unionistic worship practices, and teaching on lodge membership; therefore be it **Resolved**, That where formal altar and pulpit fellowship ties have been established but true unity remains in question, the congregations of the district patiently and humbly seek that true unity with neighboring congregations through joint study under the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions; And be it further **Resolved**, That congregations of the district be reminded that in situations where resolutions of the Synod are truly inexpedient to the faithful teaching and practice of the member congregation, such resolutions of the Synod are not to be followed; and be it finally **Resolved**, That the Montana District of the LCMS memorialize the 2013 LCMS convention to direct the Synod President to reconsider fellowship with The AALC. **Montana District**

To Evaluate Fellowship with AALC

Whereas, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in convention from 1967 through 1995 has repeatedly reaffirmed its historic position of close(d) Communion; and **Whereas**, The 2007 LCMS convention entered into fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches (The AALC), which officially does not practice close(d) Communion (“Do you practice open or closed communion? We practice ‘responsible communion,’ which is neither open nor closed” <http://taalc.org/FAQ/>

[CommunionInTheAALC.html](#)]); and **Whereas**, Remaining in fellowship with a church body that does not practice close(d) Communion is inconsistent with our LCMS practice of close(d) Communion; and **Whereas**, The AALC sends its theological students to Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne for pastoral education and maintains its national office on its campus; therefore be it **Resolved**, That the Synod in convention direct the CTCR, Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne to give a theological evaluation and opinion about reentering discussions with The AALC and remaining or breaking fellowship with The AALC, to be presented at the 2016 LCMS convention; And be it further **Resolved**, That the Synod encourage the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne to discuss the matter of our differences in whom we admit to the altar in Holy Communion with The AALC students and officials in their midst. **Zion Lutheran Chippewa Falls, WI**

To Address Doctrinal and Fellowship Differences with AALC

Whereas, The LCMS declared altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Association of Lutheran Churches (The AALC) at the 2007 LCMS convention, approving Res. 3-01; and **Whereas**, A congregation of The AALC has opened in Gillette, Wyoming, such congregation being named Abiding Grace; and **Whereas**, It is known that Abiding Grace is being served by a layman, defined by the AALC Policy and Procedures Manual (chapter 8, page 14, found on the AALC Web site, [TAALC.org](http://taalc.org)) as an “Unrostered Licensed Lay Minister” who is “approved for temporary, short-term Word and Sacrament ministry”; and **Whereas**, On the AALC Web site, in response to

the question “Do you practice open or closed communion?” the following answer is given, “We practice ‘responsible communion,’ which is neither open or closed. That is, according to the Bible we have a responsibility to tell people what we believe (‘we receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ with the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of sin’), based on Matthew 26:26–28, Mark 14:22–24, Luke 22:19–20, 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, 1 Corinthians 11:23–28. The person has responsibility to check with the Bible to ensure that it does teach that, and that the person agrees with that. Administration is left with the local pastor as part of his pastoral care”; and **Whereas**, Augsburg Confession Art. XIV, “Ecclesiastical Order,” which confesses that “nobody should preach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called,” is being violated by a layperson being allowed to administer the Lord’s Supper and to publicly preach in the church; and **Whereas**, The stated communion practice of The AALC is incongruent with that of the LCMS as stated in adopted 2007 Res. 3-09, which says in part, **Resolved**, that all pastors and congregations who have established and practice communion fellowship contrary to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions be encouraged by the 2007 LCMS convention to immediately cease such practice and return to the faithful practice and administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion by practicing close(d) Communion”; and **Whereas**, The Wyoming District president, at the request of the Powder River Circuit of the Wyoming District, has made repeated attempts to contact The AALC for answers to the question of why these practices are permitted, but no answers have been provided to clarify or explain; therefore be it

Resolved, That all congregations and pastors of the Wyoming District be aware of these existing doctrine and fellowship issues; And be it further **Resolved**, That the Wyoming District memorialize the LCMS to address these doctrine and fellowship differences with the leadership of The AALC as soon as possible; and be it finally **Resolved**, That the Wyoming District memorialize the LCMS that if the doctrine and fellowship differences cannot be resolved, altar and pulpit fellowship with The AALC be declared broken.
Wyoming District

All three resolutions were referred to the Office of the President. It is to be hoped and prayed that he will but an immediate end to our fellowship with the AALC until full agreement can be reached. (If a member of the AALC were to present themselves for Communion at Trinity, I would not commune them.) The point is that two whole districts of the LCMS and one lone congregation, pastored by a son of our congregation Rev. Clint Stark, can send in resolutions citing an egregious acceptance of false doctrine and practice in our midst, and a handful of people on a floor committee can keep it off the convention floor. This is why the State of our Synod is pretty much what has been for the past 30 years: Interested more in numbers and dollars than doctrine and souls.

Explore God But Not Too Closely

Posted on September 16, 2013
by Rev. Paul R. Harris

I can't get away from exploregod.com. It's in the mail, phone messages, emails, and on billboards and radio. It's a pan-Christian movement meant to appeal to what used to be called "seekers." LCMS churches are participating in this movement. The same sermon series is being presented by hundreds of churches in the metro Austin area. Does Life Have a Purpose? Is There a God? Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering? Is Christianity Too Narrow in Our Culture? Is Jesus Really God? Is the Bible Reliable? Can I Know God Personally? Yes all these churches are in favor of exploring God, but not too closely.

The churches of exploregod.com desire to present a united faith to those outside the faith. That this is the purpose of the three ecumenical creeds I'll let go. But what can't be let go of is the fact that from the very beginning the Church has been faced with division. First there was Cain from Abel, then Abraham from his family, and eventually Northern Israel from Judea. Separation is an integral part of what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is not the Baha'i faith, Hinduism, or a Utopian movement. It's about the Truth, both His Person and Work. Denominations arose, Christians separated from one another already in the days of the apostles because we can't all agree on what the Truth is. Wishing we did, as I do, as Paul did, as Jesus does, doesn't make it so, or help make it so.

As usual with these noble movements to unite, the truth gets out. Read their Statement of Faith. Here's what is says under Salvation:

We believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior from sin. He provided forgiveness and atonement from our sins on the cross and rose again to provide life and justification. Apart from Christ, there is no salvation. All men are under condemnation through person [personal?] sin, and deliverance from condemnation comes only by the righteousness of Christ and not human merit. This righteousness is bestowed upon or credited to the believer by grace through faith. The Spirit regenerates or gives new life to the one who makes this life commitment to Jesus, and he is kept by God's grace forever. This salvation is complete in Heaven where the believer, as a resurrected, glorified body, will spend eternity reigning and rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16-19, 5:24, 6:47, 10:28-30; 1 John 3:2-3).

<http://www.exploregod.com/statement-of-faith> (10SEP13).

Did you catch the truth getting out? "The Spirit regenerates or gives new life to the one who makes this life commitment to Jesus, and he is kept by God's grace forever." Here the doctrine of baptismal regeneration is denied or at least ignored. Here decision theology is implied. Here once saved always saved is asserted. Here grace is presented apart from the Means

of Grace. But hey, at least they will reach some they wouldn't have otherwise, but the question is: reach them with what?

What you should be asking yourself is this. Why are LCMS churches allowed to publicly align themselves with a Statement of Faith that contradicts our own? It might be because this dumb downed approach has already been accepted by us. You find it in Lutheranism 101 which is a shameless mimicking of the Anglican Alpha Course that was so successful pastors in the LCMS were using it. Of course, they used it like they used A Purpose Driven Life or the two score other fads that have washed over the LCMS in the last three decades: with Lutheran presuppositions, Lutheran substance, Lutheran criticism. Why not just use Luther's catechism instead? That way you'd be sure whose God you were exploring.

Will The Real Koinonia Project Please Stand Up?

It was on April 6th in the year of our Lord 1576 that the effort to address the divisions in doctrine and practice among Lutherans in the 16th century began in the City of Torgau, Germany, which ultimately culminated in writing the Formula of Concord. It was this effort – led by Jacob Andreas, Martin Chemnitz, Nicolas Selnecker, and David Chytraeus – that LCMS President Matthew Harrison pointed to as a model

to help our Synod reconcile its many differences of doctrine and practice in his pre-election document "It's Time."

Much effort has gone into the Koinonia Project over the last three years, but not much has been accomplished. Indeed, one wonders how many more iterations of the Koinonia Project proposal will be forthcoming since we are now on proposal number 10.1 at last count. This raises the question as to when the proposed ten year long process will even begin? But more disconcerting are the questions, when will it end and how?

While the congregations of the ACELC truly applaud the goals of the Koinonia Project to re-establish unity in doctrine and practice in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, this effort seems to have lost its way in many respects.

The first problem with the Koinonia Project is that the findings of a poorly written and sometimes quite misguided document called, "The Final Report of the Task Force on Harmony" was made part of the Koinonia Project. This document was mandated by the 2007 Synodical Convention as an effort, not of the grass roots of laymen and pastors of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, nor even of the well-qualified theological faculties of our two seminaries, but a hand-picked, Church-Growth-stacked group of 12 men who could not seem to bring themselves to see that one possibility of establishing harmony might be to come to an agreement under Holy Scripture and our Confessions

respecting the issues that divide us. Instead, we were told that such an agreement is really "concord," not "harmony" and as such was outside the scope of their assignment. Additionally, the task force wanted to canonize "diversity" as a value in and of itself. Thus, the Final Report asks the CTCR to, "...produce a study on 'The Theology of Difference,'" and also concludes, "Ultimately, each of us, every Synodical entity, and every congregation needs to recognize and celebrate God-pleasing diversity." It should be clear to any reasonably objective observer that our problem isn't our diversity, but rather our lack of unity.

The second problem with the Koinonia Project is found in its unrealistically long time frame to even identify the problems that divide us. Honestly, this isn't rocket science. I doubt that it would take any group of three pastors less than an hour to point out the obvious areas of disagreement that exist in our Synod. We've been talking about them for decades!

The third problem with the Koinonia Project is that there is no mechanism in place for coming to conclusions and resolutions for the issues that divide us. At the end of the process that resulted in the formulation of the Formula of Concord a document was developed that accepted a Scriptural conclusion and rejected false teaching on each controverted issue. Then the theologians and princes either signed their agreement to it or they

didn't. Those that signed knew they were in agreement with their fellow signers and that they were not in agreement with those who didn't sign. Unfortunately, the Koinonia Project seems to have no way to know either when they have finished their task or how to deal with remaining differences when it is over.

What a contrast to the way the Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (ACELC) have sought to bring about unity, concord, and harmony! In Matthew Harrison's document "It's Time" he writes on page 11 about the composition of the Koinonia Project group:

"In fact, given the current status of things, it might even be best if this group were to form of its own accord, and thus without the accusation or even suspicion of machination."

This is exactly what the ACELC has done! We took President Harrison at his word and began in 2010 to do precisely what he wants the Koinonia Project to do. The ACELC has already done the work of clearly articulating the issues that are dividing our Synod. We have already documented the fact that the identified errors truly exist within our Synod, and we have clearly stated what the Word of God says respecting each issue of contention. We have developed study materials for broad-based, grass roots pastors' conferences, laymen, and even the Council of Presidents to use, and we have done all of this completely in

the open, without any secrecy of any kind and willingly put our names to our work.

The ACELC makes our goals for bringing about unity, concord, and harmony within our Synod crystal clear:

"To This End We Seek To:

- Accurately identify errors in doctrine and practice among us,
- make those identified errors publicly known throughout the Synod,
- promote wide-ranging discussion of these errors at every level of Synod – especially at pastors' circuit conferences, circuit forums, district pastors' conferences, and the like,
- and work within and alongside official Synodical structures, avenues, and efforts in a complementary effort to bring about renewed unity in doctrine and practice among us." (ACELC Statement on home page of website)

While the Koinonia Project does not seem to have any end in sight nor any way to determine if the process has come to a conclusion, the 23 congregations of the ACELC will insist that each and every issue finally be resolved under the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions and not simply indefinitely studied and discussed without ever coming to a conclusion. Nor would we find it acceptable to conclude such an effort by doing what has been done so many times in the past by simply crafting language which

seeks to leave opposing views as equally valid. This would be a facade of unity, not true unity.

If you or your congregation would like to help the ACELC in its continuing effort to restore honest harmony, concord, and unity that truly reflects the God we worship and His intention for unity and peace among His children, then we urge you to visit our website at:

www.ancelc.net and consider the following:

- Become an Associate Member of the ACELC.
- Talk with your pastor (or if you are a pastor) talk with your Elders about the work of the ACELC, encouraging them to study the materials available to you on our website.
- Invite a speaker from the ACELC to visit your congregation to help your members understand the work in which we are engaged.
- Consider having your congregation vote to join the ACELC so that our collective voice within The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod will grow still stronger.

Only as we join together to assist our Synod both in engaging and understanding the issues that divide us, can we ever hope to effectively re-establish the unity in doctrine and practice we once enjoyed as a Synod – and which, under the grace of God, we hope to enjoy once again.

By the end of May, 1577 (slightly more than one year

from the first meeting the previous April), the work of writing the Formula of Concord was completed. It didn't take ten years or more but it did unify the Lutherans of that time. We of the ACELC pray that God would so bless our Synod with such an effort in our day.

Rev. Richard A. Bolland
 Assistant Pastor - Emeritus Gloria
 Christi Lutheran Church
 Greeley, Colorado

The Greatest Martyr on Earth

An Advent-Lent Sermon Series
 on the Third Chief Part
 Of Luther's Small Catechism

Luther called the Lord's Prayer the greatest martyr on earth because of all the ways Christians have abused this wonderful gift. You have those who dismiss it in favor of what they consider more noble prayers made up in their own hearts. There are others who use the Lord's Prayer repetitiously as if God does hear because of much speaking. Then there is us who don't think about what we are praying, might not know what we are asking for, or might not really care (?). In all these ways the Lord's Prayer is martyred.

In our 2013-2014 Advent – Lent sermon studies we will look at the Lord's Prayer and Luther's explanation of it in a refreshing light. We will devote our Midweek Advent and Lent services to this. These services are important for three reasons. 1) From my conversations with you, I'm convinced we could

hardly be called a people of prayer. (N. B. I said "we" not "you.") 2) And this one is all on me. I give the Lord's Prayer short shrift in my catechetical classes. My only excuse is that I am following others in this practice, but I feel I am cheating you. 3) How often we say, "I'll pray for you," or ask someone to pray for us, yet St. Paul said of himself and us, "We do not know what we ought to pray for" (Romans 8:26). 4) Every public figure whether politician, sports announcer, or talk show hosts says that victims of a tragedy "are in our prayers." The inference that everybody has their prayers is disconcerting to me. It's like the adage that if everyone is responsible than really no one is. If everyone is indeed praying, then in point of fact probably no one is.

Service times are 7:30 PM. Usually, Ash Wednesday being a notable exception, we are "done" by 8:15. You can be out of here before 8:30 PM if you so choose.

Dec. 4 The Address
 "Father Always"

Dec. 11 1st Petition
 "*Nomen Dei Est Deus Ipse*"

Dec. 18 2nd Petition
 "A Breath of Fresh Air"

Mar. 5 3rd Petition "To us and Through Us"

Mar. 12 4th Petition
 "*Bramafam*"

Mar. 19 5th Petition "As not Because"

Mar. 26 6th Petition "Despair Rightly"

Apr. 2 7th Petition "East does Meet West"

Apr. 9 The Conclusion
 "The Right Stuff"

SMP: Unfortunate Consequences

The Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program was established during the 2007 Synodical convention as the brainchild of the Ablaze! program of the previous Synodical administration. As such it was designed to provide a pathway to ordination that did not require a rigorous academic program of preparation and was available to men who did not wish to abandon their previous occupations to become residential students at our Synod's seminaries. Now, five years later, the first graduating classes have left the seminaries and have entered the ministerium of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is time to look back and see how it is working thus far. The predecessor of the SMP program was the Distance Education Leading To Ordination (DELTO) program. It was intended to be a means by which small parishes in isolated geographic locations would receive laymen who provided Word and Sacrament ministry who, while serving, would continue their education toward ordination. wish him the Lord's continued blessings. Not so the SMP program. The Ablaze! initiative

sought to identify ten percent of specifically "missional" LCMS congregations (about 600 Ablaze! Covenant Congregations) committed to the more Church Growth oriented model of "doing church." Each of these Covenant Congregations were to spawn four additional congregations (formed in their own Church Growth image). How were these congregations to be staffed with pastors who would carry on the missional task as the mother congregations intended? The answer was the Specific Ministry Pastor program.

The language of the Synodical resolution adopted in 2007 (5-01B) made that very clear when it said:

In addition to the original objective of the Distance Education Leading To Ordination (DELTO) Program to provide pastoral ministry where full-time ministry cannot be maintained, such specific ministries will include such categories as church planter, staff pastor, and others as needs arise. (2007 Convention Proceedings, p. 134.)

Thus, the SMP program was specifically designed with the primary intent to increase the influence (and congregational delegates) from Church Growth oriented congregations within the LCMS. Do the math: 600 congregations x 4 new congregations = 2,400 additional congregations and additional delegates to various district conventions and a significant increase in Church Growth oriented Synodical delegates. This might well have broken the 52% to 48% voting margins by which

major decisions are made at our Synodical Conventions. The end result of this effort was to have been the permanent change of emphasis toward the Church Growth principles within the Missouri Synod.

Enter the 2010 Synodical Convention and challenger to President Kieschnick, Rev. Matthew C. Harrison. With the election of President Harrison a renewed emphasis on Word and Sacrament ministry took hold in Synod. The theology of glory personified by the Ablaze! program rapidly disappeared from the view of most of Synod, but the SMP program still survives.

The latest enrollment of seminarians at our two seminaries currently stands at:

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne: 55 General Ministry seminarians (four of whom are in an alternate route programs), and five new SMP students. There are a total of 30 SMP seminarians enrolled. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis: 88 General Ministry seminarians (eight of whom are in an alternate route programs), and 31 SMP seminarians. There are a total of 114 SMP seminarians enrolled.

Recently, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, released a list of its first class of SMP graduates. Of the thirteen graduates only six will serve as solo pastors, two of whom will serve congregations of 246 and 183 baptized members (quite large enough to support their own General Ministry—four year residential seminary—Pastor). Only four SMP men will serve small congregations ranging in baptized

membership from 36 to 103. The majority of the SMP graduates will be serving in multiple pastor congregations ranging in baptismal membership from 74 to 4,789. Clearly, the original intent of serving small, geographically isolated congregations has gone by the way for the most part.

At our St. Louis Seminary, only three of eleven SMP graduates will serve as solo pastors serving congregations of 30 and 149 baptized members with the third man serving a congregation with no baptized members. Four SMP graduates will serve with another pastor in congregations ranging in baptized membership from 164 to 846. Another graduate will serve in a congregation who only has two pastors listed on the Synodical website, but on their church website there are four pastors and a total of 202 baptized members. The most interesting situation is a congregation in San Antonio, Texas, that lists a total of five pastors (three of whom are new SMP graduates) serving 1,141 baptized members.

Perhaps the most important unfortunate consequence of the SMP program is the loss of the Scriptural sense of vocation for the Office of the Holy Ministry as a singular commitment. Commitment has taken a back seat to convenience. Our Lord said in Luke 9:62, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." That goes double for those desiring to enter the pastorate. Virtually every General Ministry seminarian has been faced

with the decision to abandon all that has gone on before in his life and risk everything to head for the seminary. This is a commitment by the seminarian's entire family. The SMP program asks for no such risk. The SMP seminarian keeps his "day job," keeps the family home and demands comparatively little either from himself or his family.

For the General Ministry seminarian it's an "All In" proposition. The family must pull up roots, often move across the country, settle in a strange place often far away from family and friends, and this is frequently done with great financial hardship. The SMP lack of commitment and lack of singular commitment to a sense of vocation is underscored by the minimal on-campus requirements for the SMP seminarian who is only required to spend two weeks per summer on campus. Our pastors need to be "All In." They need to take their hand off of the plough and become the well-educated pastors they need to be for the sake of the Church.

Another unfortunate consequence of the SMP program is the provision of an academically inadequate preparation for the Pastoral Office. In a day and in a culture as religiously pluralistic and increasingly pagan as ours is, this is the worst possible time in which to inadequately prepare men for the highest office in the church. The General Ministry Pastor is required to take a minimum of 139 credit hours. The SMP seminarian is required to take only the equivalent of 24 credit hours prior to ordination and an addi-

tional 24 hours following his ordination. Thus, the SMP graduate has only 34 percent of the academic preparation of the General Ministry Pastor. What had to be removed from the curriculum in order to achieve the lessened requirements of the SMP program? Let's break it down:

Let's use a couple of analogies: airline pilots and brain surgeons. Would you consider placing your life into the hands of either an airline pilot or a brain surgeon if that individual had only one third of his academic preparation? Of course you wouldn't! Then why in the world would anyone want to place his eternal soul into the hands of a pastor who only has one third of the preparation he really needs to be a pastor?

No one questions the motivation of the SMP seminarians to serve the Lord, nor does anyone question the quality of the seminary professors who teach them. However, there is a minimum competency achieved through adequate pastoral formation that simply cannot be crammed into the equivalent of 48 credit hours of instruction.

It is also an extremely unfortunate consequence of the SMP program that men must compromise their sacred ordination vows to swear faithfulness to knowledge they do not have and which they do not fully understand. Holy Scripture is quite clear about the character of sacred vows:

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold

him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

(Exodus 20:7)

Ordination vows are most certainly not a mere formality, nor a rite of passage. They are a sacred promise to God and before His people to keep His Word without equivocation or compromise. SMP seminarians are being asked after only eight classes:

P: Do you confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to be a true exposition of Holy Scripture and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? And do you confess that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord—as these are contained in the Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this one scriptural faith?

R. Yes, I make these Confessions my own because they are in accord with the Word of God.

("Ordination," Lutheran Service Book Agenda, p. 166, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 2006)

With only two doctrine classes and one in the Lutheran Confessions prior to taking the above vow, how can it be possible to take this vow with a clear conscience? Frankly, it is difficult enough to take this vow for General Ministry Pastor seminarians who have six such classes under their belt before

they even have their vicarage and nine classes when they have completed their course of study.

Another unfortunate consequence of the SMP program is the unintended consequence that enrollment in the General Ministry Pastor program (three years of residential study and a year of Vicarage) at both of our seminaries is declining. Prospective seminarians are human. Given the choice of making the commitment to the pastoral vocation requiring relocation of their families, leaving home and community, and (in most cases) a previous career; some will opt for the less demanding course of study that makes such a level of vocational commitment unnecessary. It's just easier; therefore, the path of least resistance is taken. However, the financial bread and butter of the seminaries are the four year residential General Ministry Pastor seminarians. For already cash-strapped seminaries, this is an additional burden that is unnecessary. More importantly, this means that as the years go by, more and more SMP seminarians will enter the Office of the

Holy Ministry which, in turn, will result in a greater and greater percentage of inadequately prepared pastors on the Synodical roster. Originally, SMP men were tied to the congregation from which they originated and to which they were first called, but that is no longer the case.

The 2010 Synodical convention removed the restrictions on calling SMP men and we are already seeing calls extended and accepted to serve in other congregations. It becomes necessary to wonder how long the formal distinction between General Ministry Pastors and Specific Ministry Pastors will be maintained. Such a removal of these designations is only one Synodical convention away.

Moreover, when some at the seminaries were voicing support for the passage of the SMP program, it was said that the faculty would do their best to convince SMP seminarians to transfer the General Ministry Pastor program. Thus far no such conversions have been reported. Some at the seminaries have also quietly voiced their concern that communications between the mentoring pastors for

SMP seminarians and the seminaries have been woefully inadequate.

Conclusion

The Specific Ministry Pastor program was founded to advance the convictions of the Ablaze! Covenant Congregation's plans for a more widespread adoption of Church Growth principles within the LCMS. In some cases it is still serving that purpose. Along the way the excellent preparation of pastors for the Office of the Holy Ministry—a historical point of pride for our Synod—has been sacrificed.

Perhaps it would be wise to listen to God's Word with respect to the ordination of pastors in the Church: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands," (I Timothy 5:22)

Rev. Richard A. Bolland
Assistant Pastor-Emeritus
Gloria Christi Lutheran Church, Greeley, Colorado
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Trinity Lutheran Church
1207 West 45th Street
Austin, TX 78756
512.453.3835
www.trinityaustin.com

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October 2013

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
			10 AM Bible Stories 6:30 PM Choir 7:15 PM Revelation II			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Church Dinner	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation		PASTOR	ON	VACATION	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
			10 AM Bible Stories 6:30 PM Choir 7:15 PM Revelation II			
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation	Church Council Budget Meeting 6:30 PM	10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II Choir 6:30 PM		Wedding Rehearsal 7:00 PM	Inman- Turnquist Wed- ding 5:30 PM
27	28	29	30	31		
	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation		10 AM Bible Stories 7:15 PM Revelation II Choir 6:30 PM			

November 2013

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
All Saints Dinner 5:00 PM	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation	Voters Meeting 7:00 PM	10 AM Bible Stories 6:30 PM Choir 7:15 PM Revelation II			
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation		10 AM Bible Stories 6:30 PM Choir 7:15 PM Revelation II			
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation		10 AM Bible Stories 6:30 PM Choir 7:15 PM Revelation II			
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	5:00 PM JR. Confirmation		Holy Commu- nion Thanksgiv- ing Service 7:30 PM Choir 6:30 PM			

