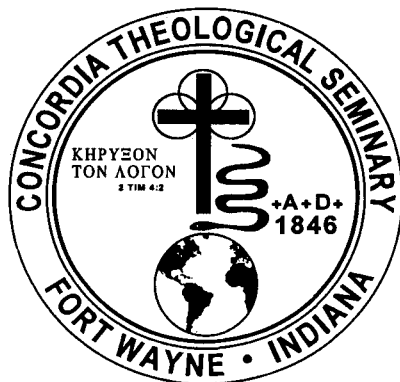


# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



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## A Letter on Pastoral Assistance

The Secretary of the Faculty,  
Concordia Theological Seminary,  
Fort Wayne, Indiana,  
15 February 2001.

The Special Task Force to Study the Need  
for Pastoral Assistance Where Full-Time  
Ministry Cannot be Maintained,  
The Board for Higher Education,  
The International Center of The  
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,  
Saint Louis, Missouri.

Dear Sirs:

The faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary received from you quite recently a draft of a "Convention Memorial to Establish the Position of 'Assistant Pastor' Where Full-Time Pastoral Ministry Cannot be Maintained" which was dated 12 January 2001. The members of the faculty have studied your proposal carefully, and a complete meeting was dedicated to its discussion on 13 February 2001. The faculty appreciates very much the opportunity to respond to the proposal although, of course, the date by which you required a reaction has necessarily precluded any response more elaborate than the one which I am sending you herewith.

It is, then, in the first place, my responsibility, as the secretary of the faculty, to inform you of its adoption of the following resolution, with no dissenting vote or voice, in its most recent meeting:

Following careful study of the "Convention Memorial to Establish the Position of 'Assistant Pastor' Where Full-Time Pastoral Ministry Cannot Be Maintained" drafted by the "Task Force to Study the Need for Pastoral Assistance Where Full-Time Ministry Cannot be Maintained" on 12 January 2001, the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary is obliged to oppose the proposal on the following grounds:

- (1.) The position of "assistant pastors" of the nature proposed is something unknown in the previous history of the synod or of the Lutheran Church as a whole or, indeed, of the Christian Church in general. The introduction of such a drastic

innovation would clearly require, at the very least, careful study by the theological faculties of the synod. An appropriate respect for the doctrine and practice of all preceding generations of the synod necessarily precludes the submission of such a proposal to the convention which is to be held within six months.

(2.) The alterations which the proposal would require to the constitution and bylaws of the synod would be numerous and extreme. Although some of the places in which amendments would be necessary have been intimated in the proposal, others remain unidentified. Since, moreover, in every case the precise language of the suggested revision is as yet to be determined, the task force will clearly agree that the faculty has as yet had no opportunity to respond to its proposals in precise terms. Nor is such a response possible until such time as the faculty learns the exact nature of the alterations which the task force desires to make to the constitution and bylaws of the synod.

(3.) The seminary, in cooperation with the synod, has already addressed precisely those problems which the task force in its proposal has identified as confronting the church today. For it was specifically the needs of people who would otherwise lack pastor care which lead the synod and seminary to establish the program known as DELTO. It now requires only the support of the various districts of the synod to make this program operative anywhere in the synod where a given district feels the aforesaid needs.

I have, in addition, been commissioned by the faculty to express its consensus on several other points which are at the same time integrally related to those stated in its formal resolution. I am, in consequence, relaying to you those reactions on which there was complete concord in the faculty. Some of the impediments to the proposal in question are the same as those which the faculty has discerned in previous proposals to alter the ministerium of the synod. I refer, above all, to the "Response to an 'Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate'" which, following its submission to your task force, was published as the official opinion of the faculty in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (63: 3 [July 1999], pages 205-220). We gratefully recognize that some of the objections which we raised to the "ordained diaconate" are inapplicable to the proposal which is now

before us. At the same time, however, some of objections which we raised then still obtain now. The consensus of the faculty, then, is that the proposal in question, while evincing the good intentions of the task force, is unwarranted and counterproductive for various reasons which include the following:

(1.) The supposed needs which would require such drastic innovation as you propose have never been demonstrated in any impartial manner on the basis of verifiable statistical evidence. Members of the faculty and staff of this seminary who are particularly involved in the recruiting and calling of pastors have, as you are aware, previously demonstrated (a.) that the numbers of pastoral vacancies cited by some outside the seminary are misleading and (b.) that the extrapolations made from these numbers (that the seminaries are incapable of meeting the needs) are unjustifiable. There is, in fact, no reason to think that the challenges today are any more daunting than those in the days of the founding fathers of the synod, when communication and transportation were much more difficult than now.

(2.) A return to the historic position and practice of the synod would greatly ameliorate, or fully satisfy, the needs of the church. As the faculty has observed heretofore (in its "Response to an 'Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate'"), "... an alternative means to alleviate the desperate situation of immigrants would be to call an ordained pastor for a particular group from the Lutheran Church (if one exists) in the country of origin of the immigrants. The 'overture' offers little explanation as to why additional missionaries or pastors could not be called by the synod to already existing congregations through which surrounding pockets of people might be reached (in line with the concept of Wilhelm Loehe). The church needs to address the ambivalent relationship between theology and mission-strategy. The mission-strategy of the synod must be realigned and modified to agree with the overriding theological principles of the synod" (*opere citato*). Other Orthodox Lutheran methods of serving isolated congregations (whether geographically or ethnically so), which were employed in the first century of the synod, would be itinerant pastors and, in instances of true necessity, lay readers (in which case, however, the traditional nomenclature and function should be retained). The shortage of clergy would be greatly

alleviated, if not eliminated, by the return to the parish of all ordained men in the synod who hold positions which are now full-time but were not so in the days of Dr. C. F. W. Walther and his colleagues. If districts now are too large to be supervised by presidents who remain pastors, then the districts may easily be divided, as they were in the early years of the synod.

(3.) The nomenclature of "assistant pastor" will necessarily lead to confusion. The designation incorporates the word "pastor" and has previously been applied to men who are equally as well prepared to be pastors as senior pastors and associate pastors. Obviously, therefore, the term will fail to distinguish, in the perception and usage of the people, those who have no theological education from those pastors who do. Whether he has studied four years in the seminary or nary a day, the man will receive and accept the title of "pastor" with equal alacrity.

(4.) A confusion in the proposal concerning the nature of the pastoral call and ordination results in two different kinds of call and ordination (as appears especially from page 3). Particularly objectionable is the way in which the continuation of the "call" of the "assistant pastor" depends upon the mutable pleasure of the congregation, the "supervising" pastor, and the district president. The annual review, in fact, on which the "continued service" of the "assistant pastor" rests makes his supposed call no more divine than the licensing of preachers which was so vehemently condemned by the founding fathers of the synod. The faculty, for example, in its "Response to an 'Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate'" quotes Dr. C. F. W. Walther, as describing the granting of licenses as "unbiblical, unscrupulous, and soul-destroying" (*opere citato*). The proposal, in this way and others, ignores the transparochial character of ordination as an action of the whole ministerium on behalf of the whole church of God (as was, again, argued in the aforesaid response). The overture, indeed, thereby undermines the divinity of the pastoral call.

(5.) We dare never forget that one of the primary reasons for the foundation of the synod was the training of pastors by the two seminaries which have produced the vast majority of its pastors in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two of the first actions of the newly founded Evangelical Lutheran Synod of

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Missouri, Ohio, and Other States were to solicit and then to receive with thanks the ownership of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. The faculty of the seminary consists in pastors who have received divine calls from the church as a whole specifically to prepare the future pastors of the church. The proposal now in question could produce a sizable proportion, or indeed a majority, of pastors in the synod certified and trained (to the extent that they receive training) by groups and individuals who possess no divine calls of this nature.

(6.) The Book of Concord calls the preaching of the Word of God the "highest office" in the church. According, specifically, to the German version of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, "the very greatest, holiest, most necessary, highest worship of God, which God has required as the greatest in the First and Second Commandments, is to preach the Word of God; for the office of preaching is the highest office in the church" (Article XV: 42). Subsequently, therefore, the same version of the Apology censures the opponents of the Augustana for ordaining pastors with inadequate preparation: "they care nothing about how one teaches or preaches, they care nothing about how the Christian use of the sacraments is to be preserved, they ordain crude asses; Christian doctrine, therefore, has declined, because the churches are not supplied with competent preachers" (Article XXVIII: 3). The traditional description, in fact, in the Lutheran Church of the pastoral ministry as the highest office in the church is an accurate encapsulation of the teachings of Sacred Scripture itself and of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the holy ministry of the Word of God and sacraments of Christ. The proposal now before us fails to do justice to such a conception of the ministry and, specifically, to the premium placed upon competent and responsible preaching of the gospel by Sacred Scripture and the Book of Concord. The proposal, in fact, requires less of pastoral candidates — in knowledge of Scripture and Confession and competence in applying them — than is required, quite rightly, of various others in the church, such as those preparing to be school-teachers and deaconesses.

(7.) Holy Scripture itself demands of pastors a level of competence which considerably surpasses the criteria of admission established

in the proposal now being made. For the Word of God requires, among the various qualifications of any man desiring the office of bishop, that he be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). We fail to comprehend how any man can be able to teach who is himself untaught. We are concerned firstly for the welfare of the church of God (which may be subjected more easily to unscriptural teaching), but secondly, too, for the welfare of men pushed into a divine office which they are unprepared to fulfil. For the Apostle James expressly warns us against assuming or dispensing the holy ministry too lightly: "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). We can, in consequence, by no means bring ourselves to endorse the call and ordination of men who as yet know not what they do. For the Apostle Paul warns Saint Timothy and us: "Lay hands hastily on no man, nor share in the sins of others; keep yourself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22). We, for our part, desire to keep ourselves, by the grace of God, as undefiled as we can by the errors in doctrine and practice of unprepared pastors upon whom hands have been laid too quickly.

In fine, again, the consensus of the faculty is that the proposal in question, while evincing the good intentions of the task force, is unwarranted and counterproductive. We should hope that, instead of such proposals, the special task force would recommend and the Board of Higher Education would provide the full subsidy to both seminaries of the synod which they originally received. The seminaries would then be able once again, by the grace of God, to attract and prepare enough men to serve as truly able ministers of the New Testament in all the parishes of the synod and in all the additional settings to which the synod wishes to bring the ministry of the Word of God and the sacraments of Jesus Christ. Commending, then, the thinking of the faculty on these matters to your careful and prayerful consideration, I remain, in Christ,

Respectfully yours,

Douglas McC.L. Judisch  
Secretary of the Faculty

[The preceding letter was presented to the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in the course of its regular meeting of 19 February 2001. Following some discussion of the text itself and related matters, the faculty accepted the letter by consensus. D. McC. L. J.]