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Presidential Search Underway

Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr., president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), announced September 28, 2023, that he is retiring from the presidency at the conclusion of the 2023–24 academic year. He will continue to serve CTSFW as a faculty member. To read the full news release, visit ctsfw.edu/news.

A call for nominations for the Seminary's 17th president will be available this November in Synod publications and at ctsfw.edu.

For the Life of the World

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

FEATURES

4 Virtues of the Pastoral Office

Geoffrey R. Boyle

We want our pastors to be good, Christian men. And our pastoral ministry students at the Seminary want to be such men. They pray for it, confess their failures, and strive for it again and again. But there's more to being a pastor—more virtues specific to this calling and this office. I've tried to sum up various lists of virtues—both general virtues of the “good man” as well as those specific to the pastoral office—into three somewhat provocative admonitions for students: Don't be weird. Don't be weak. Don't be a jerk. The guys get it.

7 Called to Trust His Word

Daniel P. Fickenscher

We're not called to be indifferent. (The concerned brother of Matthew 18 is far from that. Perhaps just as great as his desire to protect his brother's reputation is his persistence.) But we are called to trust that the Word of the Lord will not return to Him empty. It's not our word. It's not our wit. It's not our personality. It's the Lord who is going to bring sheep back to His flock, souls into His kingdom. Resting on this truth pastors are free to be self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, sober, gentle, and so on.

10 Celebrating Twenty Years of Deaconess Formation

James G. Bushur

Every human being is created to share in the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for his Father. We are made to be loved and to love. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God . . . because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Built on this foundation, deaconess formation boils down to certain fundamental questions. How do we prepare deaconess students to facilitate the bonds of divine love that bind the church together? How do we form students to love the person in front of them no matter the context or the circumstances?

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Called to Trust His Word

Daniel R. Fickenscher



Photo: Erik M. Lunsford/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

We're probably all at least somewhat familiar with the list Paul gives us in his first letter to Timothy of qualities that he expects of pastors. He writes, "an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" (1 Tim. 3:2–3). He goes on to mention, among other things, the necessity of maintaining a Christian home. These all seem appropriate for the pastoral office. We need men who serve as examples of what graciously loving one's neighbor looks like, and we certainly don't want preachers who put up obstacles to the Gospel through their conduct.

But as you reflect on these qualifications a bit more, you might realize how incredibly high Paul has set the bar. Given the job description of pastors, one might say that Paul is expecting too much of us. If pastors are entrusted with the eternal care of dozens, hundreds, and sometimes even thousands of souls, how can they also be expected to maintain a decent demeanor? When a guy's dealing with members turning away from God's gifts, sexual perversions seeping into his congregation, difficult elders, half-hearted support from the district office, Lutheran schools not playing nice with

Lutheran churches, hate from outside and inside the congregation, etc., etc., can Paul then be so bold as to demand that the pastor also be friendly?

Of course, behind Paul's qualifications is the certainty that, ultimately, it's not the pastor but God who is going to make happen what needs to happen. Yes, the pastor has been given lots to do, but he hasn't been given the job of changing people's hearts. It's not up to him to convince his congregation and community that we deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment. It's not left to him to illumine our hearts with the shining Gospel that Jesus is our Savior. God has simply given pastors, and all Christians, His words of truth that we then repeat and through which He works.

Those of us who use the three-year lectionary heard this fall from Matthew 18:1–20. There's a lot going on in that text: becoming like children to be great in the kingdom of heaven, cutting off hands and feet to avoid the hell of fire, the Shepherd who leaves the 99 in search of the one lost sheep, telling your brother his fault, and more. One connection we don't want to miss is that between the Shepherd and telling your brother his fault, Jesus teaches us to realize that He as the Shepherd doesn't so much seek out the lost sheep through hidden, mysterious ways but rather through Christians, the brothers, proclaiming the Shepherd's words of Law and Gospel. As the Shepherd goes in search of sheep, Jesus calls us to "go and tell [the brother] his fault." We pastors are reminded that while, yes, we do physically go to call straying sinners to repentance, it's God the Shepherd who is ultimately doing the searching. We're just servants sent with a task.

As the text continues, the lesson in humility continues. Jesus explains that sometimes the erring brother isn't going to listen to you or your pastor in that one-on-one conversation. He might even ignore the call to repentance from two or three more brothers and then that of the whole church. Pastors are reminded that we may not get the results we, and maybe our members, expect. Not every sermon, visit, and outreach event will

produce the same results that Jonah saw in Nineveh and Peter saw at Pentecost. Jesus lays that out clearly, and that ought to give us pastors a great sense of relief.

We're not called to be indifferent. (The concerned brother of Matthew 18 is far from that. Perhaps just as great as his desire to protect his brother's reputation is his persistence.) But we are called to trust that the Word of the Lord will not return to Him empty. It's not our word. It's not our wit. It's not our personality. Jesus makes no mention of changing up the message when you return to the unrepentant brother with the two or three others and then the church. He doesn't say, "Well, you blew it. Next time you better be more clever, more convincing." Presumably each call to repentance is

Jesus teaches us to realize that He as the Shepherd doesn't so much seek out the lost sheep through hidden, mysterious ways but rather through Christians, the brothers, proclaiming the Shepherd's words of Law and Gospel. As the Shepherd goes in search of sheep, Jesus calls us to "go and tell [the brother] his fault." We pastors are reminded that while, yes, we do physically go to call straying sinners to repentance, it's God the Shepherd who is ultimately doing the searching. We're just servants sent with a task.


more or less the same message, just with more witnesses. It's the Lord who is going to bring sheep back to His flock, souls into His kingdom. Resting on this truth pastors are free to be self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, sober, gentle, and so on.

I've had the uncommon privilege of returning to my vicarage congregation as a pastor after serving at another congregation for a few years. When I began as a vicar, there was an ongoing conversation with a family over getting an eight-year-old son/grandson baptized, a conversation that began at his birth.

My vicarage year passed with several nudges pointing out the eternal blessings of baptism, but still no baptism occurred. Nearly three more years, which were peppered with sermons highlighting those blessings, went by, but still no baptism.

When I returned as an associate pastor I wrote two letters, one to the parents and one to the child piggybacking off the Lord's call to baptize that we had just heard on Trinity Sunday. I laid out several clear baptismal passages: John 3:5; Titus 3:4–7; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21; and Acts 2:38. Soon after receiving the letters the family agreed that they wanted the child to be baptized! In the words of Matthew 18, we rejoiced for we had gained our brother! What a joy it was to do that baptism.

With every one of those conversations, sermons, and letters there was a lot on the line; the certainty and comfort of the forgiveness of sins and adoption as sons of God were on the line. Imagine if it had really been up to me and the other pastors to change the hearts of everyone involved in that decision, to convince them that overcoming the hindrances was worth the blessings of baptism. We would've been at our wits' end. We wouldn't have been able to sleep. We would've been a wreck. We would've been far from what Paul expects from us. Being self-controlled, respectable, and gentle would've been impossible. And no doubt our stressed, quarrelsome nature would've chased the family away years ago.

There was a need for patient, approachable teaching. We as pastors of this family did not take the hindrances to the baptism lightly, but we also trusted that God's Word is powerful. It would not and did not return to Him empty. Working with this certainty, we are free to be the undershepherds that Paul expects us to be. 

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