

# Church and Ministry

Week 3: Becoming a Pastor



Warm up question

What training have you gone through for a vocation?



# Becoming a Pastor

The process for becoming a pastor has been different through the ages of the church. Sometimes it looked more like an apprenticeship, other times, more like an academic degree. Yet, there has always been a process that has included vetting and training the individual who feels called to the office. Today we will take a look at how that process plays out in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

*For the sake of ease, we will explore the “traditional route” first, and then consider alternate routes to pastoral ministry.*



# The Inner Call

It all starts with something that we deem “the inner call”. This inner call is when Paul tells Timothy that “if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3).

This inner call is not considered to be ultimately trustworthy. It is a call to explore the office of the ministry, not a call into the office itself. However, without the inner call no pastor would ever become a pastor.



# Requirements and Applications

In order to become a pastor, certain requirements must be met and applications have to be made. Generally speaking, a life above reproach and decent grades are what the seminary is looking for. There are questionnaires that help someone seeking the pastoral ministry.

Since going to the seminary is an academic degree, seminarians must apply to their seminary of choice including transcripts and GRE scores.

Additionally, seminarians fill out an application that addresses issues of morality and ethics such as sexuality, indebtedness, divorce, and other possible halts.



# Interviews and Recommendations

In order to be accepted to a seminary in the LCMS, one must complete a pre-seminary interview in your district with a committee that is comprised of at least one pastor, one other professional church worker, and two lay people. If the would-be seminarian is already married, his wife must attend this interview.

The would-be seminarian must also receive letters of recommendation from his home church pastor, District President, and LCMS Concordia System University President (if applicable).



# Equivalency Tests

Officially, a seminarian must have a working knowledge of the Old Testament, New Testament, Basic Lutheran Theology, Greek, and Hebrew in order to attend the seminary. To prove this knowledge, the seminarian will take “equivalency tests” which he must pass with a 70% or better. If a seminarian fails an equivalency test, he may retake it. If he fails twice, he must wait 6 months before trying again.

Some tests, especially Hebrew and Greek, can be handled through “Zero Credit” courses at the seminary.



# Seminary - The First Two Years

The traditional practice in the LCMS is for seminary students to have two academic years, followed by a vicarage (internship) year, and then a final academic year.

In the first two academic years, the seminarian takes a full course load of graduate level classes. In addition to this, the seminarian must complete field work requirements. There are generally two types of field work: one at a local church and others at hospitals, schools, and other non-church facilities.



# Seminary - Vicarage

Normally the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of seminary training for a pastor is to go on “vicarage”. Seminarians are assigned vicarage placements after a few short conversations with the vicarage placement officer. The seminarian is graded on a “pass/fail” basis for his vicarage.

During vicarage, the seminarian is provided a “bishop” or “supervisor” - a pastor whose job it is to shape and form the seminarian. Vicarage experiences differ, but generally speaking the vicar is allowed to do most tasks that an ordained pastor does.



# Seminary - 4<sup>th</sup> Year

If the seminarian passes his vicarage year, he is invited back to the seminary for his 4<sup>th</sup> and final year of seminary training. During this time, most field work requirements are minimized or canceled all together. More elective classes are taken during this year.

During this year the seminarian is also invited in for a series of interviews about placement as well as interviews for candidacy.

In order to be declared ready to be a pastor, the seminarian must not only do well in his classes, but must also be determined to be a candidate by the faculty of the seminary. In a secret meeting, the faculty votes on the candidacy of the seminarian. Given that it appears that the seminarian looks like he will pass his classes and is not holding on to heretical opinions, the seminarian will be considered a candidate.



# The External Call

A seminarian may achieve his Master of Divinity degree and be considered a candidate, but he is not considered to be a pastor yet. In order to be considered a pastor, he must receive a call from a local congregation.

Normally speaking this happens through a series of interviews with a local congregation that is seeking a pastor. This external call finally validates the inner call that the pastor thought he felt early in the process.



# Alternate Routes

Several alternate routes to ministry exist. Most do not confer an academic degree upon the pastor, but a certificate. These alternate routes often include less classroom time and are mostly conferred upon 2<sup>nd</sup> career pastors.

There are also alternate routes that include more schooling during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, followed by a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year vicarage in which the pastor most often stays at the vicarage placement (called a “convertible vicarage”).



# Specific Ministry Pastor

One of the most controversial alternate routes is the “Specific Ministry Pastor” program. This alternate route program is largely a distance-learning program that allows for the seminarian to serve the congregation early in his training. SMP’s are to be raised up from congregations themselves, often from congregations that could not otherwise afford a traditionally trained pastor. SMP’s must always be supervised by a traditionally trained pastor and SMP’s may not take calls to other congregations (except in extreme cases).



# Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology

The Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) is an alternate route similar to SMP. However, this route is only available to seminarians who would be serving an underserved ethnic or immigrant population where they live. Here in Florida Georgia, we have several Haitian EIIT pastors serving in South Florida. The Nebraska District routinely sends Somalese pastors. EIIT pastors are allowed to take a call, unlike the SMP pastors.

