

Report of the Task Force on Formation to the Lower Susquehanna Synod Council

In December 2007 Ronald R. Price, Vice President of the Lower Susquehanna Synod, appointed a Task Force on Formation directing it to prepare a report to the Synod Council on the formation of candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and the Ministry of Word and Service. The task force, composed of six members of this synod, one faculty member of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and one resource person, the Region 8, Coordinator, met eleven times over a period of almost two years. The report of the task force follows.

1. *Formation as a Priority*

Made righteous through the free gift of grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone, the people of God are called into community so that they might be formed and shaped through the life-giving power of the event of God in Word and the grace of his Holy Sacraments and through mutual conversation and consolation. Through such means God works faith in us, leading us into knowledge of his Son, Jesus Christ, and guiding and strengthening us to live lives of faithfulness in him.

To obtain such faith and to receive such grace, God instituted the office of the Holy Ministry (*Augsburg Confession* [CA] 5) and, by extension, all other ministries that serve to form and shape God's holy people. This ministry is considered a call, a *vocare*, from God. In our Lutheran understanding, such a call is understood first to be applied to all of God's people, *vocatio universalis*, but more specifically, in the understanding of CA 5, as a specific call to servant leadership in the Church, *vocatio specialis*.

The setting apart of those called into such ministry is not optional in our understanding but is considered to be essential, for it is the very work of God. "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments." (CA 5) Later, Martin Luther gave added weight to this understanding when, in *On the Councils and the Church*, he established the office of ministry as one of the seven marks of the Church.

If the office of ministry plays an essential role in the life of the Church, being the means by which God has chosen to make available faith in Christ Jesus, the grace of his sacraments and the forgiveness of sins, it seems logical that the formation of those called into servant leadership in the Church should be one of the highest priorities of the Church. It is formation into nothing less than servant leadership, for it is clear from the Augsburg Confession (5) that the only reason for such an office to exist is to provide those means made available by God to his people. This formation, then, is into an understanding that those called into such ministry, whereby they are set apart for the sake of the gospel, do not exist for themselves but exist only for the sake of others. Those called into such ministry are the means by which God's grace is made available in order that others might come to faith.

2. *Spiritual Retreat*

To help with the formation of pastoral/diaconal identity in our candidates for ministry and to help re-form these candidates to the cruciform way of life, we highly recommend an annual spiritual retreat be held for candidates, together with the Candidacy Committee. Included in each retreat would be specifics in the framework for formation into the Holy Office of Ministry within the one holy, catholic, apostolic Church. Although the format of this retreat would remain the same from year to year, the theme would change so candidates would have opportunity to address a number of faith and life/ministry issues.

In order to explain what formation is, a letter with an accompanying brochure would be sent from the Candidacy Committee to candidates before they begin the candidacy process. Included in the letter or brochure would be the rationale for and description of what it means to live in such a way as to be open to being re-formed in spiritual and vocational formation. The letter or brochure also would include practical information about the retreat, such as what to wear.

During the retreat there would be presentation and discussion on formation to ministry, including the connecting of heart and mind while discerning call and ministry. Multiple communities of formation would be recognized and encouraged. The fact that formation takes time and resources would be acknowledged.

One aspect of formation, being formed by tradition, includes traditional forms of worship. Thus, during the annual spiritual retreat candidates and committee would worship as a community, including the Eucharist, Matins, Vespers, and Compline. A variety of resources that form and shape the Church would be used, not just one worship book.

In order to pool resources, the retreat could be scheduled with other synods in Region 8, perhaps as an overnight.

In planning for the retreat, cost would need to be determined, including the cost for candidates in seminaries outside our synod. The cost would be included in the annual budget of the synod.

All candidates under the care of our Candidacy Committee must attend at least one spiritual retreat in order to be helped in their formation in the historic traditions and practices of the Church.

3. Endorsement Panels

Endorsement panels, which normally take place during a candidate's second year of seminary, are a partnership between the seminaries and synodical Candidacy Committees. Timing for these panels depends on at which seminary a candidate is studying and when the course on Lutheran Confessions is taught. The Task Force on Formation highly recommends that students at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (LTSG) write their Endorsement Essay after completing their Confessions course and submit their essays by January 10. Endorsement panels and Candidacy Committee decision are to be completed by February 10. The LTSG dean and director of internship/professor of field education have given their consent to this schedule for the Endorsement Essays and panels.

The timing of Endorsement Panels is of importance because prior to taking and passing the required course in Lutheran Confessions candidates often are not able to communicate Lutheran theology and do not understand the basics of Lutheran doctrine. Candidates must receive Endorsement from the Candidacy Committee before participating in the Internship Matching Workshop and being assigned for internship. It is imperative that candidates understand Lutheran theology and be able to preach and teach in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions when they preach, teach, and do other forms of ministry on internship. Furthermore, candidates for ordination write their senior Approval Essay prior to completing internship.

Endorsement panels would use a common set of questions for the candidates in addition to the questions in the ELCA *Candidacy Manual*, and candidates' answers would be judged by common parameters. The common set of questions would be sent to candidates ahead of time so they can prepare well for their meeting with the committee. Possible questions include the following: 1) What is the Church? 2) What does it mean to be Lutheran? 3) What is ordination/consecration/commissioning and what does it mean? 4) What is the Lutheran understanding of the sacraments? 5) What is the theology of the cross? Other relevant questions also may be asked.

4. *Financial Coaching*

Stewardship is an important aspect of formation to the pastoral office and to other leadership positions in the Church. If a pastor or other rostered leader cannot handle his/her own finances well and properly, how can this one who is called to lead work effectively with a congregation or other ministry calling body. Student debts and other family debts will need to be addressed in addition to budget planning and follow through.

At present, LTSG and Luther Seminary provide financial coaching to their students; in the future, all seminaries may provide this help. Our Candidacy Committee may use the Stewardship of Life Institute (SOLI) and LTSG for financial coaching in addition to Kathy Hefner, who has been providing it for our candidates for the past several years. The committee can insist on financial coaching for the seminarians under our care at LTSG, and the seminary will provide for it. As part of this coaching, a plan for financial wellness/stability will be discussed.

Retired Bishop A. Donald Main administers the financial coaching component for SOLI and for LTSG. There are plans to bring SOLI together, representing all seminaries and financial people.

The title of the workbook prepared for students going on internship is *Competencies of a Well-Formed Stewardship Leader*. The subtitle is *A Guide for Roster Candidates*. LTSG already has given this workbook to our interns. For other seminaries, it will be another year or two until the program is implemented fully.

5. *The Role of Community*

As we confess in the Apostles Creed, we are part of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The Church is embodied in community. Formation into the Office of Word and Sacrament and into Word and Service ministries takes place in real, not virtual, community. Accountability to the community/communities/ministerium is essential to formation and to ongoing life and ministry. While a candidate is in seminary, the seminary community is the prime community for formation. Following ordination/consecration/commissioning the ministerium of rostered leaders within our synod, other ELCA synods and ELCA churchwide becomes the prime community for on-going formation.

Candidacy Committee relators, as an aspect of community, are of great importance to the formation of candidates for ministry. Relators need to invest time and effort on behalf of the candidates assigned to them, in part, as nurturers. Communication between the candidate and relator needs to occur on a regular basis, but especially before and after the candidate meets with the Candidacy Committee.

6. First Call Theological Education (FCTE)

It is of great importance to the continuing formation of those newly ordained, consecrated, and commissioned to have well-trained, quality FCTE Colleague Group leaders who can serve as mentors and examples. There need to be training sessions/workshops to assist these leaders in gaining a clear understanding of the function and purpose of colleague groups.

FCTE Colleague Groups are an important community/ministerium for continuing formation during the first three years after ordination/consecration/commissioning. These groups are to be an avenue for establishing and continuing community with the ministerium, a logical continuation of the formal process of formation begun during candidacy. This peer community can help keep pastors and other rostered leaders from becoming ‘Lone Rangers.’ It also can be a setting in which they can learn how to network through the conference, the dean, etc. and to grow in their understanding of their responsibility to the wider community within the Church.

Colleague group expectations should be spelled out, and accountability to these expectations should be maintained. Participation in colleague groups should be required of all who are newly ordained, consecrated, and commissioned. This requirement needs to have teeth, meaning that one should not be considered for another call if one does not participate regularly in a colleague group.

Study/continuing education are an important aspect of colleague group expectations. Congregations and other ministry settings should help show this importance through their provision of funding and time for the person they have called to serve. Participants in colleague groups should read and study relevant and up-to-date materials. Colleague groups should seek out appropriate teaching theologians to teach on various aspects of ministry. The main topics to be covered are ministry context; ministry skills; ministry identity; how these aspects of ministry work with the baptized; boundaries and boundary issues, including being enmeshed and being disconnected; and a review of promises/vows made at ordination, consecration, or commissioning.

Please see the attached paper by Linman or the ELCA Board of Pensions Wholeness Wheel for how one intends to live into one’s spiritual and vocational formation.

An important aspect of FCTE Colleague Groups is mutual conversation and consolation, including colleague support for the colleague group leader.

Another essential component for colleague groups is prayer life and faith formation, how to be fed as a newly ordained/consecrated/commissioned leader in order to feed. Aspects of this component include devotional life and worship as participant with the community, including conference opportunities; Holy Tuesday Re-affirmation of Vows; and synodical ordinations, consecrations, and commissionings. Communal prayer and worship also are a vital aspect of colleague group meetings.

7. Funding for Internship Sites

Each year the synodical ministry plan (budget) should include at least \$10,000 for funding specific internship sites. In the past, such funding occurred annually in the ministry plan. In addition, perhaps larger, more wealthy congregations could help with financing internships in other, smaller congregations, as also used to occur. It is understood that this funding might not be needed every year.

Funding for specific internship sites would be used for one or two unique learning sites per year. Because Horizon internships are decreasing in number, inner city urban settings are one kind of unique learning sites.

There should be specific criteria for both congregations and internship supervisors in order to be selected. For example, a supervisor would need to be willing to be in a devotional relationship with the intern, with intentional time for devotions to be established and viewed as foundational and not merely a 'hoop' through which the intern is to jump. Congregations selected for financial help are those that could not afford to be internship sites with such help but could provide an excellent learning experience and opportunity for a seminarian.

8. Spiritual Direction/Directors

It is of utmost importance for the Candidacy Committee to read, discuss, and approve the attached *Lower Susquehanna Synod Spiritual Formation in the Candidacy Process* document and all its included attachments. Furthermore, this synod's Candidacy Committee should set up and have an ad hoc task force on spirituality and formation to review the document on a regular basis and to see that the components of the report are being implemented.

The Candidacy Committee should maintain a list of recommended spiritual directors for use by the committee only, review the list annually, and have a mechanism for having the list revised

9. Sense of Stewardship

Please see the attached paper, *Competencies in a Well-Formed Stewardship Leader*. Candidates use this ELCA pamphlet in seminary; we can use it in our synodical candidacy formation process. Stewardship is included in the internship experience.

10. Spouses

For spouses of candidates for both Word and Sacrament and Word and Service ministries, realities of life include stresses and joys. There can be tension between the vows the seminarian will make at ordination, consecration, or commissioning and the vows made in marriage. Married candidates for ministry have a vocation as spouse and, perhaps, parent in addition to their vocation as seminarian. It must be recognized that needs are different for the newly married and those who have been married longer. Seminarians and spouses alike need to recognize that the spouse's role in a congregation or other ministry setting will be discerned by the spouse or it will be chosen for him/her.

Among others, topics to be addressed by seminarians and spouses include living with restricted budgets, being hospitable, boundaries, and the spouse as a public person. One suggestion for spouses is to read a biography of Katarina von Bora Luther, which can be applicable to both male and female spouses.

The Candidacy Committee and/or its designates should have conversations with spouses of candidates under the care of the committee, encouraging spouses, who themselves become public persons by virtue of their marriage to one who is preparing for rostered ministry within the Church, to have a voice and to know how to be heard and when to be quiet. Mechanisms for hearing and speaking should be encouraged.

11. Post-Denial Care for Denied Candidates

When an individual candidate for ministry is denied by the Candidacy Committee, the person or persons assigned to provide post-denial care for this candidate should emphasize with him/her the ministry of the baptized and the role of the laity in the Church. It should be made known to denied candidates that prayers are being raised on their behalf. It also should be made clear with the candidate that discernment is a community process, not just an individual process. When needed, a mediator should be used who will know both sides, that of the candidate and that of the committee acting on behalf of the Church.

12. Continuing Care for Candidates after Approval and before Ordination/Consecration/Commissioning

Candidacy Committee relators should continue to provide care and support to candidates assigned to them until a candidate is ordained, consecrated, or commissioned. Likewise, the bishop of this synod and a designated assistant to the bishop should provide spiritual and financial support and care for approved candidates either assigned to the synod or awaiting assignment. An approved candidate's home congregation and pastor should be encouraged also to provide care and support during what can be a stressful time for an individual.

Prepared and submitted by the Lower Susquehanna Synod Council Task Force on Formation the Eve of Reformation Day, October, 30 2009.

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Appendices:

“Church Vocations Conference August 12-15, 2002”

“Church Vocations Conference August 7,8-10, 2006”

“Competencies in a well-formed stewardship leader”

“Lower Susquehanna Synod Spiritual Formation in the Candidacy Process”

“Resources used for Lower Susquehanna Synod Spiritual Formation in Candidacy Process”

“Selected Resources for Use in the Formation of Candidates”

“Spiritual and Vocational Formation in the Candidacy Process” (Jonathan Linman – 3 separate sources)