



PASTORAL EDUCATION

January 2009 ■ A newsletter for those interested in the ministry of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

This issue's emphasis

Each issue of *Pastoral Education* emphasizes one of the 12 "Themes for Pastoral Education" from the Board for Pastoral Education. This issue emphasizes the theme "Community of Faith."

The theme states, "The church wants pastoral education undertaken in an environment of prayer and care, with worship at the center, and with the proper integration of biblical theology and pastoral practice. Pastoral education is a learning-living preparation where one is taught to think theologically and to focus on a few foundational aspects more deeply (reading basic texts, great books, and writing theological papers). Pastoral education also engages persons in rich practical experiences relevant to pastoral ministry. Students in preparation for the pastoral ministry also must come to understand themselves and learn to evaluate and improve themselves, become adept at asking the right questions, and live in a spirit of trust with others."

All 12 themes are available online at www.lcms.org/pastoraleducation

The Formation of Pastor-Theologians

This issue of *Pastoral Education* emphasizes the formation of pastor-theologians. Did the previous sentence produce in you a negative reaction? If so, is it the "theologian" portion of "pastor-theologian" that produced the negative reaction? Perhaps you think of a theologian as someone who knows little about the practical realities of life; someone who uses theological jargon that is incomprehensible to most people; someone who answers questions no one is asking. You might even hear someone lament, "We don't need more theologians. We need more pastors."

Properly understood, a pastor-theologian is not a contradiction in terms. Pastors are resident theologians for their people in the very best sense of the term. They continually mine the depths of God's Word and wrestle with how it is to be rightly understood, faithfully expressed, and properly applied. They are keenly aware of the realities, often harsh realities of life, having personally experienced them. They see all of life through the lens

of God's Word, and they invite all people to see life through that same lens. At the focal point of that lens is a gracious God who "shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

A pastor-theologian is not easily produced. When describing how one should study theology, Martin Luther prescribed a three-fold approach: *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* (prayer, meditation, trial). Pastor-theologians pray in all humility for the Holy Spirit's guidance to proper understanding of God's Word. They study, reflect upon, discuss, and study again that same Word. They endure trial, and as a result they, as Luther expressed it, "not only know and understand, but also experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is: it is wisdom supreme."

A pastor-theologian faithfully, humbly, lovingly, skillfully brings the truths of God's Word to the lives of people. What a blessing as a Synod to have two

seminaries, two communities of faith, that are dedicated to the formation of pastor-theologians!

Dr. Glen Thomas
Executive Director
Board for Pastoral Education



Dr. Glen Thomas

Theology and pastoral practice come together in vicarage experience

Take the talents and experiences that students bring to the seminaries, add theological study and then mix well in a parish experience under the oversight of an experienced pastor. It's the process of integrating biblical theology and pastoral practice.

In the traditional seminary model, vicarage is served during the third year of a four-year Master of Divinity (M.Div.)

program. Some students will serve a deferred vicarage, which is done during the fourth year and may lead to a call in the same parish. Students in distance education programs, such as the new Specific Ministry Program, are designated as vicars and serve in a congregational ministry as a vicar from the beginning of their programs.

"You talk about vicarages being the

merging and melding of the theological and the practical," observes Dr. Richard Nuffer, director of vicarage at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. "When I debrief students after their vicarages, a huge number say it has been the best year of their seminary experience. Some say it has been the best year of their life."

Nuffer sees the vicarage experience as a time of "huge growth." He says it confirms men in their choice of vocation. Vocational formation begins during study on campus, but vicarage helps the men to know they can do pastoral ministry and will love doing it. "That's the thing that's beautiful," he comments.

Dr. Glenn Nielsen, director of vicarage and internships at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, says, "Vicarage and internship are the opportunities to take what's learned in classes and from the students' own past experiences in the church to combine with the skills and abilities the Lord has given them—and begin to develop that capacity for carrying out the acts of ministry."

Nielsen, who supervises vicarages and deaconess internships, describes the experiences as both education and service.

The education comes through the opportunities for students to learn about who they are and how their skills flow out of the theology—the Law and Gospel dynamic—from their classroom experiences. The vicars or deaconess interns also see how experienced church workers serve in their congregations and institutions and learn why they use certain methodologies and techniques.

"We can call it educational and formative, but as soon as you're handling God's Word, you're bringing ministry into action," Nielsen states. "That is serving and making an impact because God's Word is powerful."

Nuffer says congregations also play a part in the educational process. "The most supportive ones understand the vicarage year is also an opportunity for them to be in mission," he says. "They see it as participating in the education of pastors who will bring people to faith all over the country, sometimes all over the world. When people in a congregation understand that they are teaching, the student has a richer experience."

Nuffer comments that vicarage experience and field education help put "feet" on the theology. While theology is academic, he believes that good theology is always centered in Jesus Christ, the Savior that everyone needs, and therefore theology is practical. Mission trips in this country and overseas also give students insights into the application of their theol-

(Continued on Page 2.)



Dr. Glenn Nielsen, director of vicarage and internships at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, meets with fourth-year student Kevin Hintze, who served his vicarage at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Boca Raton, Fla. (Photo by Lois Engfehr)

MEET THE SEMINARY PROFESSOR:

DR. CHARLES GIESCHEN

Pastor remains central to being professor and scholar

Although he exchanged the pulpit for a classroom lectern, Dr. Charles Gieschen understands himself to be a pastor who is a professor of New Testament and chairman of the Department of Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

"I tell my students they can call me Dr. Gieschen or Pastor Gieschen," he comments. "Just because I'm no longer serving a parish, I haven't placed the pastoral office on the shelf. It is central to my identity as a seminary professor."

As he engages his students in biblical texts, he emphasizes that such study is important for the life of the church. "I want students to be faithful proclaimers and teachers of these texts, knowing them so well they can use them to proclaim the reality of Christ in whatever situations they may encounter, whether in a hospital or a home," Gieschen says.

His comment also illustrates his approach to parish ministry and scholarly research. After graduating from the seminary in 1984, he earned a Master of Theology degree in New Testament and Early Judaism at Princeton Theological Seminary. Then he served as associate and senior pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Traverse City, Mich., for 11 years.

"One of the challenges I faced early in my pastoral ministry was a slight tug toward further in-depth study of the Scriptures," Gieschen comments. Because he enjoyed his ministry at Trinity, he pursued a doctorate in biblical literature on a part-time basis at the University of Michigan. He approached his graduate study as additional learning to help him be a lifelong student and teacher of the Scriptures in the church.

Even after 12 years of seminary teaching, he still misses the weekend

worship and community that comes with being a parish pastor. As for day-to-day ministry, it continues through mentoring students in and out of the classroom—something he considers essential to being a seminary professor. "I don't stress my role as a New Testament scholar as much as my role as a pastor who seeks to be well-prepared in understanding the Scriptures," he comments.

"That said, I think it is important for pastors and seminary professors to be conversant with the wide range of biblical scholarship," says Gieschen, who has authored one book, edited another, and published many scholarly articles and devotional writings. He is currently writing the Concordia Commentary on 1-2 Thesalonians and serves as associate editor of the seminary journal. "I try to be aware of biblical teaching in our Synod and in academia across the world. I attend some international conferences because I think it is important for a Lutheran professor like me to be engaged in the dialog and debate among biblical scholars."

Two years after joining the Fort Wayne faculty, Gieschen led an archaeological dig in Israel for seminary students. He subsequently organized annual expeditions for students and professors. These were put on hold in 2001 because of violence in Israel, but Gieschen hopes the LCMS seminaries and universities will participate in a joint dig in the future.

"My archaeological dig experience in Israel has helped bring alive the reality—the history and geography—of biblical texts," he comments.

Amid these interests, Gieschen's major focus is the classroom. For several years he taught the summer intensive Greek program, which brought many contacts with new students. "I know that the first professors of a seminary curriculum, particularly the Greek professor, can be an important foundational influence on pastoral formation," he adds.

Gieschen says the new seminary curriculum and the courses he teaches emphasize the four New Testament

gospels. "We are integrating our teaching with what a pastor will preach and teach, which draws especially on of the gospels," he observes. He also team-teaches courses on Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The courses integrate the study of biblical texts, history, and doctrine with the life of the church.

Gieschen enjoys being part of the "non-graded" curriculum—student learning outside of the classroom, from chapel to coffee breaks. He oversees an extra-curricular monthly seminar on the Scriptures where students present papers for discussion. The seminar models the kind of collegial study that pastors can do in circuit or district pastoral conferences, he says.

On a personal level, Gieschen says he's an early riser, so his seminary vocation—his pastoral vocation—gets him up in the morning. "But what keeps me up in the late afternoons and evenings are my children," he continues.

Gieschen coaches the soccer teams for both his son Stephan, 13, and daughter Lauren, 11. In addition to Christian ethics, "Coach" Gieschen encourages a competitive attitude in his players so that they develop physically and emotionally. "I'm a strong advocate of team sports because it helps children learn very practically the whole pattern of confession and forgiveness; otherwise it's hard to keep unity on a team."

His wife, Kristi, is an actress, which occasionally takes her out of town. "My wife's commitment to our family allows me to serve the church in the ways I do. There are times, however, when I need to tend the home fires alone so she can pursue her interests," he says. "That's my vocation as husband and father."

Gieschen also serves on the school board at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne. Involved in Lutheran elementary schools since the start of his ministry, he says, "I'm very appreciative of our Lutheran principals and teachers. My service on the school board keeps me in touch with congregational life and that enriches my teaching of future pastors."



At Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Dr. Charles Gieschen, left, enjoys the "non-graded" curriculum—contacts outside the classroom. Gieschen, a professor of New Testament, takes a coffee break with deaconess Sarah Schultz, seminarian Evan Goeglein and seminarian Christopher Gillespie. (Photo by Colleen Bartzsch)

THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL PRACTICE

(Continued from Page 1.)

ogy.

"I like to say that if our curriculum is pastoral rather than purely academic, I believe we are headed in the right direction," he says.

Nuffer notes how revisions in the curriculum at Fort Wayne seek to be more holistic in terms of doctrine and practice. In the past, men listened, read, and studied; then they took a test or wrote a paper.

"How many papers and how many tests will there be when the man is on vicarage or is a parish pastor?" he says. "So, while students are still studying and learning the same information, the emphasis is placed more on speaking the faith."

In his classes, he may ask students to observe experienced pastors and teachers, and then interview them about their preparation and methods. In class he asks students to talk about their learning instead of reading their papers. He employs more panel discussions. His objective: "They learn to discuss and listen and care."

"The whole faculty has been made aware that everything they teach is in preparation for actual service," he says. "For example, in a historical course, the professor may point out parallels to current national or world situations."

Nielsen notes that the vicarage or internship helps to bridge the transition

from academic life to full-time ministry. It's moving from a "syllabus mentality" where students complete a number of classes during an academic term, take a test, and then relax to prepare for the next term.

"In ministry you don't have that kind of clear break," he says. "As a pastor or deaconess, it's moving from an academic setting where somebody tells them what to do, to a parish setting where they need

to plan and carry out a schedule. They see this is a ministry and that it has an impact beyond a grade. Now, they see it's not just what you learned in books or classroom, but those things are valuable because you use them in a real life situation."

Nielsen talks of "habitus" and developing the ability, or capacity, to bring inner knowledge and skills to a particular office. A person who is trained to work in a convenience store learns certain methods, then more or less repeats them. On the other hand, the minister relies on the wisdom and inner capacity to benefit the people.

To "think theologically," the pastor taps knowledge from Scripture and theology, not as a simple way to answer every question, but a source to apply in the context—whether it is one-on-one, with a couple, in the congregation, or



Seminarian Craig Zandl, left, points out a learning objective during a vicarage interview with Dr. Richard Nuffer, director of vicarage at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Nuffer says vicarage helps men to know they can do pastoral ministry. (Photo by Colleen Bartzsch)

MEET THE SEMINARY PROFESSOR

A continuing series of articles designed to provide greater familiarity with the faculty members serving at the LCMS seminaries in Fort Wayne and St. Louis.

in the community.

"Thinking theologically is to have that knowledge with eyes wide open and bring that Word to bear in a faithful way to the people," he explains. "It's not just a rote application but thoughtful approaches to our theology that are beneficial to the variety of needs that people will have."

The seminaries use similar methods to match students with traditional vicarage experiences and locations, taking into account the student's interests and family circumstances. Supervising pastors provide evaluations of the vicar's work and the seminaries interview students once they complete their experience. In addition, leaders in the vicarage congregations complete evaluations that guide students in their personal growth.

While they may have varied methods for conducting and overseeing their respective vicarage programs, the two seminaries are in regular contact. "Glenn [Nielsen] and I work together hand-in-glove," says Nuffer. "We've been doing this for 11 years now. When I have a problem, I talk to him and when he has a problem, he talks to me. We work together very easily."

JOINT SEMINARY FUND: Messengers Giving Society

"In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19 ESV).

Martin Luther wrote, "Lord Jesus, during Your earthly ministry You called men to be Your apostles, and still today You call men to be pastors in Your church—to proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness of sins, to baptize, to nourish your people with your Holy Supper, and to minister in countless ways to your flock."

Standing on the foundation laid by the prophets and the apostles, these modern-day messengers of our Lord proclaim the Word by pointing to the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They lead God's people toward their inheritance—to a new Jerusalem, adorned in precious stones of jasper, sapphire, emerald, topaz, and amethyst—a holy city where God dwells and sin is no more.

Members of the Messengers Giving Society serve our Lord's Church by ensuring that pastors are prepared to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The LCMS Joint Seminary Fund's Messengers Giving Society provides our seminaries

with consistent funding essential for the support of pastoral education. These gifts afford the resources and flexibility to address the areas of greatest need:

- providing financial aid-tuition assistance to seminary students
- teaching and researching
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- operating and constructing education facilities
- identifying and recruiting highly qualified faculty
- providing continuing education and distance education opportunities.

Your prayers and committed support make a definitive difference at our seminaries each day. In turn, our seminaries work diligently in preparing pastors to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Out of gratitude to our Lord for the love and mercy He has shown, please prayerfully consider making a gift today. As a member of the *Messengers Giving*

Society, you will make a financial commitment at a level you choose for one year. Members are encouraged to renew their gift each year.

Individuals, families, groups, and congregations may participate by offering



Rev. Paul Kienker

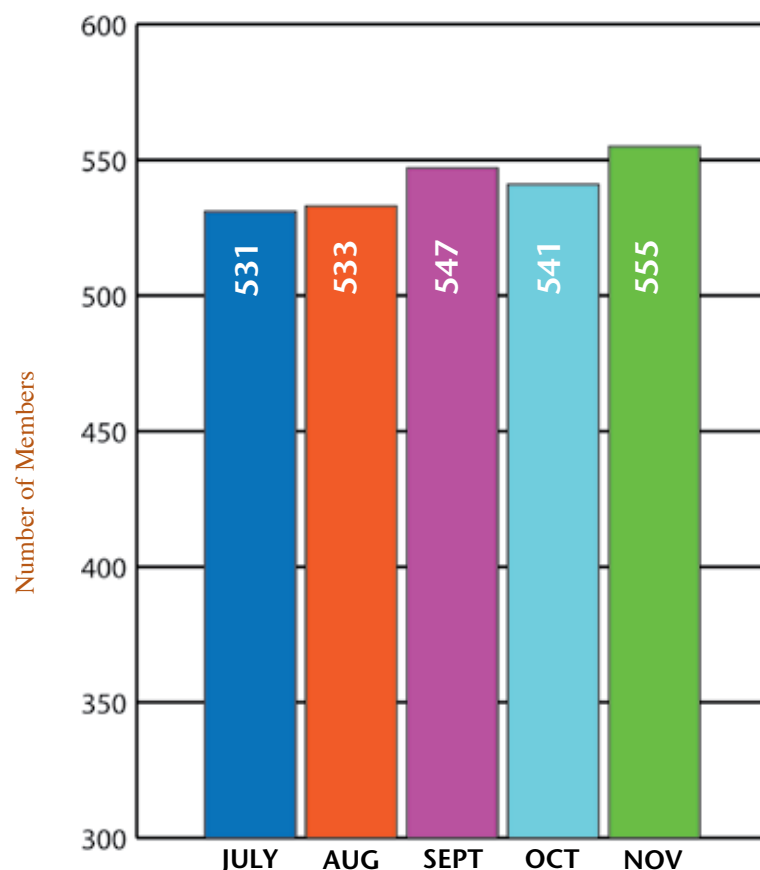
a single gift, or by pledging an amount that is offered over a scheduled period of time. A variety of offering plans are available.

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MESSENGERS GIVING SOCIETY 2008



MESSENGERS GIVING SOCIETY OPPORTUNITIES

Giving Level	Monthly Gift	Annual Gift
Jasper	\$15+	\$180+
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Emerald	\$50+	\$600+
Topaz	\$100+	\$1,200+
Amethyst	\$200+	\$2,400+

CTS, FORT WAYNE

CTS offers opportunities for visitation and formation

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, invites guests to see and experience the seminary campus during one of the numerous opportunities for growth and education presented on an annual basis.

January provides a number of visitation opportunities. A Lenten Preaching Seminar will be offered on January 19. Focusing on a famous hymn by Martin Luther, "Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice," the workshop suggests resources for pastors preparing for the Lenten season.

Visitors are invited to stay for the seminary's Symposia, which will be held January 20–23. This annual conference attracts hundreds of Lutheran pastors, deaconesses, teachers, and lay people each year. "They find the lectures and camaraderie a welcome help in their parish work," commented Rev. Stephen Hand, director of public relations at the seminary.

College students are encouraged to visit as well. Christ Academy College and Phoebe Academy College, academies for college-age men and women considering service to the church, will be held January 23–25. "Attendees will sit in on classes, interact with professors, worship in chapel, and discover what

life as a pastor or deaconess will be like," Hand stated.

High school youth are welcomed to the seminary campus as well. For over 10 years, high school-aged men from around the world spend two weeks on campus during Christ Academy, studying about Christ and exploring the possibility of becoming a pastor. This year's academy is June 14–27.

Prospective seminary students are encouraged to attend the Invitational Campus Visit weekends each spring and fall. These weekends allow prospective students to get a firsthand look at the seminary's curriculum, financial aid, housing, relocation assistance, employment opportunities, and seminary life in general.

Lay people will find plenty to do at the seminary as well. There are dozens of retreats each year, highlighting everything from music to altar guilds to apologetics. Each month, the seminary hosts a Sunday brunch to welcome the entire community to be its guests for tasty food and stimulating conversation.

Additional information on campus visitation opportunities may be obtained online at www.ctsfw.edu or by calling 260-452-2250.

CONCORDIA, ST. LOUIS

Campaign receives \$4 million challenge grant

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has announced that the Charles E. Benidt Foundation, Elm Grove, Wis., has committed a challenge grant of \$4 million to the seminary. It is designated for the "Place" component of the seminary's *How Will They Hear?* campaign.

Commenting on this significant grant, Mrs. Beatrice Benidt, Benidt Foundation board chair, said, "On behalf of the board members of the Charles E. Benidt Foundation, we are pleased to provide this matching/challenge grant to Concordia Seminary and pray that it helps to achieve the seminary's ambitious \$77 million campaign goal."

The specifications of the matching gift state that the Benidt Foundation will provide \$3 million if the campaign is successful in raising \$3 million in gifts or commitments from other sources. However, the Benidt Foundation also specified that by so doing, an additional \$1 million will be provided at the conclusion of the five-year grant period—for a total challenge grant of \$4 million. The match is a-dollar-for-dollar match, up to the maximum of \$3 million. The foundation will honor commitments payable over a multi-year period.

This is the second major gift pro-

vided through Charles Benidt. In 1997, the Gregg H. Benidt Memorial Chair in Homiletics and Literature was funded. Dr. Dean Nadasdy was the first to hold the chair. Dr. Dale Meyer held the chair for seven years prior to being called in 2005 to serve as seminary president. Dr. David Schmitt now holds the Benidt chair. "We are truly blessed by the Benidt Foundation," commented Meyer. "I know they gave serious and careful thought to our proposal, and in so doing realized the need for significant capital improvements and renovation on this campus. The Benidt Foundation's pledge challenges us to intensify our efforts to help fund a very important part of the campaign."

The "Place" component of the \$77 million campaign calls for raising \$17.75 million for high-priority renovations of buildings, facilities, and infrastructure, and for technological transformation of the campus in order to deliver the finest electronic resources for theological education on campus and to remote settings.

For more information, visit the *How Will They Hear?* Web site, www.HowWillTheyHear.org, or call Seminary Advancement at (800) 822-5287.



Seminarian Marty Measel, right, and his family visit a member's farm during his vicarage in Nebraska. The Measel family includes his wife, Jill, and their sons Andrew, 8, Elliot, 5, and Isaac, 3.

Vicarage provides lessons in professional and personal sides of ministry

After a year on vicarage, Marty Measel has a better grasp on what he's learned and how to use what he's learned, plus a sense of how to build on the foundation of his seminary education.

"The obvious thing was practical application—how things work in the real world," recounts Measel, who served his vicarage in a dual parish in Nebraska—Trinity Lutheran Church, Elgin, and Grace Lutheran Church, Neligh.

As an active layman at his home church, he had some perspective from serving on the church council and board of elders, but he was impressed and "almost scared" as he realized the amount of preparation a pastor has to do for sermons, Bible studies, meetings, confirmation, and even shut-in calls.

"You have to learn very quickly to be more efficient with your time," he says, noting the time required just for sermon preparation for weekly worship, two sermons a week during Advent and Lenten seasons, plus occasional funerals or special services.

"I imagine this is rather common among vicars," he continues. "The first couple sermons took me 25 to 30 hours to write. By the last few months, I was preaching every other Sunday and was writing sermons in about 10 to 12 hours, depending on the text.

"That was good practical experience, with some coaching from the pastor, to learn how to prepare," he continues. "You don't have the luxury like you have at the seminary of taking as long as you want to work on your assignment."

Built on seminary classes dealing with exegesis, systematics, and church history, he found the practical classes, and especially vicarage, gave him practice in "thinking theologically." On a shut-in call or when a member has a question, he says, "You have to be able to think quickly, apply something, give them comfort from the Gospel, and then leave them with a prayer and a Bible passage they can read and ponder."

The ability to respond in those situations is becoming "slightly easier" after a year on vicarage and two years at the seminary, Measel says. "I think it will become even easier as I preach through the lectionary and just become more familiar with my people.

"The academic classes give us the foundation," he observes. "By knowing the

people, the community and the context, you can begin to apply these learnings. You have to know the academics, but you have to know the people as well."

After six months into the vicarage, Measel says he came to understand the joys and challenges in the communities and among the members of the congregations. "Instead of writing sermons or doing Bible studies or writing papers in a vacuum, now you have people," he comments. "That's the whole point of ministry, of course—to bring Jesus Christ to people."

He believes his experience was "absolutely, hands down" a well-rounded experience. He credits the small-town experience, plus the willingness of Pastor David Kuhfal, his supervisor, to involve him in every aspect of ministry. He made shut-in and hospital calls, preached, rotated with teaching Bible studies, taught confirmation, led youth groups and attended meetings of church boards and committees. He also participated in community events.

Measel realizes a pastor has to manage his time carefully for both his family and the church. "I need to schedule time for the family and, except in cases of emergency, I need to hold that time sacred," he observes. "My wife is very good about requiring us to take vacations. I need that time off to be with my family and to recuperate. Very definitely, that was a personal learning on vicarage."

Measel, his wife, Jill, and their sons Andrew, 8, Elliot, 5, and Isaac, 3, also learned about rural and small-town America. They lived in Sterling Heights, Mich., before Measel decided to leave his architecture business and study to become a pastor.

"It was definitely a different culture than we were used to. We enjoyed it very much," he comments. When he began his vicarage, the Measel family was pictured in the local newspaper. He was surprised to have the local grocer greet him by name the following week. "I was impressed because in suburbia anywhere, you're not going to have a cashier or grocer recognize you.

"They are very friendly and close-knit people and helpful to each other," he adds. "They would come over and help me rake leaves, for example. I speak very highly of both congregations—full of loving people who were supportive of their pastor and their vicar."

Pastor encourages congregation to model grace in service

In a metropolitan New York City community where lifestyles leave little time beyond earning a living or caring for family, Rev. Edward Obermueller is trying to get people to take "a second look" at the church and the grace that God gives through Jesus Christ.

Since graduating from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, five years ago, Obermueller has served Trinity Lutheran Church in Morris Plains, N.J. He describes the community as "very high intensity," where people don't seem to have a lot of extra space in their lives for anything, let alone spiritual things.

"It really is a challenge to achieve community in an atmosphere like this because everyone is extra protective of their time and reluctant to let go of any resources unless there is a really good reason," Obermueller says. "So the challenge for the church is to find ways to enter into that situation and find ways to speak to that."

Trinity, a congregation of about 200 members, is seeking to gain the attention of its neighbors by emphasizing activities for the community, especially family activities.

Tucked into a neighborhood location, the church lacks the visibility of being on a main thoroughfare. "We're in the neighborhood, so we have to capitalize on the fact that we are a neighborhood church and we are doing things for the neighborhood," he remarks.

The pastor sees the community activities as a way to model grace—the grace that distinguishes Lutheran theology. As he teaches and describes the Lutheran doctrines on grace alone, Scripture alone and faith alone, Obermueller seeks to fuel an ongoing reformation.

Obermueller credits his formation at Concordia Seminary with helping him to see that God's grace changes lives when people experience it. "Grace is not just an idea," he observes. "Beyond preaching grace from the pulpit, the next step is to lead the people in actually experiencing that gift. People will then model and extend that grace to others when they are given opportunities to come together around service, fellowship, and family-strengthening activities."

Last fall, Trinity re-oriented its traditional Oktoberfest toward a community service instead of an event only for members. The event included a "pumpkin patch" where children wore their Halloween costumes, families made crafts together, food was catered by a popular area restaurant, and adults could even sample German specialty beer. The event provided financial resources to the church and opened doors for communicating the Gospel to its neighbors.

Obermueller visited area merchants to ask them for financial sponsorship. The sponsoring process not only helped spread the word about the event, but became a catalyst for telling others about the Lutheran Church. "That was a surprise," he says. "I would recommend that every pastor try it and see what happens!"

About the event, he says, "We live in a community that is family-oriented and if we provide a family-strengthening event, people seem to be waiting to sign up. The church's reputation is also built up and honored, which is the precursor for gaining back the ears of people to hear about Christ. We are just grateful to God for helping that event succeed."

Even with shrinking economic conditions, Obermueller said the merchants were still willing to contribute to an event for the community. "As the world economy contracts, God's economy expands," he adds. "The kingdom of God does not work according to the rules of what is happening in the rest of the world."

That realization, he adds, comes through applying seminary learning to the real world, and his training at Concordia Seminary prepared him for that sort of theological reflection.

"A large part of the pastor's job is to interpret Scripture for the people," he comments. "We certainly must do this through preaching, but I'm increasingly convinced that it also must be done in the whole life of the congregation. For us to become a really missional church—a serving church—for the community, we have to show what it means to experience God's grace."

Vacation Bible school last summer caught the attention of the local newspaper because members of the congregation were taking time off work to put on the event. Trinity also helped sponsor a 5K run to benefit Habitat for Humanity and opened its facilities for registration. "This is the first step in getting back on the map," Obermueller says. "It's so much fun along the way."

Obermueller and his wife, Erin, have two sons—Aidan, 5 and Soren, 2. Erin teaches English at Concordia College, Bronxville, N.Y.



Drawing from his experience as an artist (www.eoartistry.com), Pastor Edward Obermueller says the church has to reflect the image of Christ to the community. His congregation, Trinity, in Morris Plains, N.J., is seeking to serve the neighborhood as it shares the Gospel.

The LCMS Board for Pastoral Education advocates and coordinates the formation of pastors, missionaries, and other church servants to serve the mission and ministry needs of Christ's church. *Pastoral Education* is published four times a year as an insert in the *Reporter* by LCMS Board for Pastoral Education, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122.

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