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Forming Resilient Rostered Ministers: a Proposed Model for First Call Ministry Formation for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod-ELCA

Christian A. Timm

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FORMING RESILIENT ROSTERED MINISTERS: A PROPOSED MODEL FOR
FIRST CALL MINISTRY FORMATION FOR THE NORTH/WEST LOWER
MICHIGAN SYNOD-ELCA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

CHRISTINE A TIMM

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George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Christine Ann Timm

has been approved by
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Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Deborah Loyd, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Dan Brunner, DPhil

Lead Mentor: Leonard I. Sweet, PhD

Expert Advisor: Tricia Gates-Brown

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To my beloved, Craig,
our children Matt, Brian, and Holly
and Mom, Dad, Job and Jim
whose love and support have always encouraged me to reach higher

To the first call pastors
whom I have been privileged to accompany on their way

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and the call to Word and Sacrament ministry
when I feared the call might no longer be there.

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ABSTRACT

According to the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth selected twelve men to be his disciples. Three years later, one of the twelve had betrayed Jesus and ended his own life—representing an apostolic attrition rate of eight percent.

One challenge to Christian denominations today is the attrition rate of trained pastors and deacons serving in congregational settings. Research suggests that up to 50 percent of pastors leave congregational ministry within ten years of their ordination. Other sources dispute these figures. Although up to 20% may leave congregational ministry in favor of specialized ministries, further study, or retirement, a significant number report leaving because conflict and/or financial struggles simply wear them down or cause them to question whether the call was still upon them.

This dissertation examines the rate of first call clergy attrition in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and offers a strategy that a synod can use to support its first call pastors and deacons in developing greater resilience in their first call and continuing to pursue their vocation as ordained ministers. Section One examines the available data on ELCA candidacy and attrition as well as some of the challenges reported by first-call pastors, especially those in the millennial generation. Section Two surveys current education strategies employed by the ELCA and other denominations for the first two to three years of pastoral ministry. Section Three makes scriptural and theological case for continuing review of first call formation and proposes a theory to undergird formation today. Sections Four and Five offer a strategy for a three-year first call formation curriculum designed to assist first call pastors and deacons to develop more resilient

leadership and find joy in God's call to public ministry for as long as God intends. Tables, a Glossary and the four-part strategy and supporting material are found in the appendix.

SECTION ONE:

THE PROBLEM

Carrie¹ sat between us-her seminary classmate/now colleague in ministry and her assigned pastoral mentor. We shared a hasty lunch while in attendance at the annual professional leaders' meeting of the judicatory. It was a cold, snowy January day, just days before the annual meeting at the congregation Carrie had served for eighteen months.

Those eighteen months had not been easy ones for her. Because there was no congregation deemed to fit her gifts and experience near her husband's full-time employment, Carrie had interviewed with a congregation nearly two hours from their home. The congregation extended Carrie a call to serve as their pastor, and she accepted, believing that her husband would be able to secure employment close to this congregation. The two newlyweds commuted twice a week to be together. He would arrive Sunday evening after completing his duties as a director of music in a large suburban congregation, staying one night. Then Carrie would commute down to him on Friday evenings, again for one night. The "one-night-stands" were wearing them down, to the point where Carrie began staying until Sunday morning and driving directly to the church.

One November morning as Carrie drove to the church, she lost control of her car. She could not remember whether she dozed off or if her mind was wandering. Her small sedan spun wildly into a tree. She managed to get out of the car, which was not drivable, and call the council president of the congregation. He rushed to her aid. When he saw the

¹ Not the subject's real name.

car, he could not believe that she was able to walk away from the accident. But not only did she walk away...she had the president drive her to church, where she led both services of worship. The trauma of the accident began to catch up with her a few hours later. The post-traumatic stress would remain with her for several months.

Now in January, facing the annual congregational meeting, Carrie had the feeling that something was amiss. There had been some concerns with staff through the year that she felt that she had handled appropriately. She was a skilled and dedicated pastor to the people there. But as she described the conversations around the budget and her compensation, as a pastor of 28 years, I knew she was headed into a contentious situation. Both her classmate and I talked through the agenda of the meeting with her and offered some suggestions to her about how she might prepare for the meeting.

A few days after the meeting, I spoke with Carrie again. I had prayed with her that day at the leaders' event and for her and the congregation on the day of their annual meeting. Unfortunately, the meeting had not gone well. When the budget (which includes the pastor's compensation package) was presented for adoption, a long discussion ensued. Members asked whether a performance review of the pastor had been conducted. Because the person chairing the meeting had little experience in leading this type of meeting, he was unable to prevent the conversation from steering off-course. What had been a discussion of the budget became a large group evaluation of Pastor Carrie's ministry. It was ultimately determined that Carrie would not receive what would have been her first increase in compensation in eighteen months of service.

When we spoke, she expressed deep hurt and a sense of having been ambushed. She felt demoralized and unappreciated. She had prepared for four years to answer the

call to ministry. But her experiences in ministry thus far-the inability to find a call near her husband, their commuter marriage, her accident, the challenges of the congregation, and finally the annual meeting debacle-led her to seriously question whether she would continue in pastoral ministry.

This dissertation will explore the question: *How can a denomination best support its first call pastors and deacons in developing resilience in ministry?* It will focus specifically on the denominational synod in which I serve as an assistant to the Bishop², the North/West Lower Michigan Synod³ of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America⁴. The Artifact will offer a strategy with curriculum for First Call Minister Formation with particular concern for and attention to those who have been ordained before the age of 35.

Statistics on Clergy Attrition

Every year, men and women like Carrie complete three or more years of training in seminaries and theological schools and are certified for call to a local congregation of their denomination. Every year, men and women leave pastoral ministry earlier than intended for reasons other than a change of vocation or retirement. A 2007 Duke University study found that 85% of seminary graduates entering the ministry leave within five years and 90% of all pastors will not stay to retirement.⁵ Several other studies cited

² See glossary of terms in Appendix.

³ See glossary of terms.

⁴ See glossary of terms.

⁵ Kristen Stewart, "Keeping Your Pastor: An Emerging Challenge," *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences* 13 no. 3: 112-127, accessed April 18, 2014, [http://www.oak.edu/~oakedu/assets/ck/files/Stewart+\(SU+09\).pdf](http://www.oak.edu/~oakedu/assets/ck/files/Stewart+(SU+09).pdf).

in this report, including Alban Institute and Fuller Seminary studies, found that 50% of pastors leave ministry within the first five years.⁶

Other research does not support the above findings, most notably a 2012 report by Faucett, Corwyn, and Poling, which maintains that pastors enjoy high satisfaction with their work and therefore lower attrition.⁷ Anecdotal evidence, gleaned from recent conversations with local pastors in several denominations, would indicate an attrition rate lower than the 2007 Duke study, and more in line with that of the Alban and Fuller studies. In what may be the most recent study available on pastoral attrition, *The State of Pastors 2017*, David Kinnaman of the Barna Group finds more positive news from the 14,000 senior pastors surveyed. “Pastors are significantly more motivated to become a better leader, more supported by people close to them, and more energized by their work than the general population of adults in the U.S.”⁸ Kinnaman further suggests that:

Pre-professional ministry training usually focuses on knowing the right content and on developing skills to accomplish ministry tasks. As important as these are, they are not usually the reasons people leave ministry. Rather, ministry-killing issues are matters of life skills, behavior patterns and character.⁹

Kinnaman’s observation makes a strong case for the importance of continuing pastoral formation beyond the seminary’s “pre-professional ministry training”, formation that addresses life skills and behavior patterns. It is in the first call where a pastor’s life skills

⁶ Stewart, 112.

⁷ John M. Faucett, Robert F. Corwyn, and Tom H. Poling, “Clergy Role Stress: Interactive Effects of Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict on Intrinsic Job Satisfaction,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62 (2012): 291–304, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://0-web.b.ebscohost.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/ehost/detail?vid=2&sid=caf7b35e-725d-4c2c-98dc-55f0902a8aca%40sessionmgr114&hid=108&bdata=JnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#db=aph&AN=87356859>

⁸ Hal Seed, *8 Easy Ways to Be a Resilient Pastor*, accessed May 2, 2017, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.pastormentor.com/resilient-pastor>.

⁹ Ibid.

and behavior will be joined faithfully or otherwise to ministry responsibilities, and where character will be forged by the demands and delights inherent in that call.

ELCA Data on Attrition

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America manages statistics on pastors through its Office of Research and Evaluation. The information in Table 1.1¹⁰ was provided upon request in January 2015. At first glance, the attrition rates reported for ELCA rostered ministers¹¹ entering ministry during their third and early-fourth decades of life appear lower than the reports of pastors' attrition rates in other denominations, yet still statistically significant. Even taking into account an average of 20% of pastors who may proceed to further education or other "specialized ministry" (ministry in a non-congregational setting), the attrition rates for younger pastors ordained between the years 1988 and 2003 ranged from a low of 6.4% in 1993 to a high of 16% in 2003.

When the data is further analyzed by gender, marked differences emerge: women clergy attrition rate for those ordained in 1988 were 23%, compared to 7% of men. Of those ordained in 1993, 16% of women were no longer serving in congregations 10 years later, as compared to only 3% of men. Of those ordained in 1998, 9% of women and 10% of men did not continue in congregational ministry to the ten-year mark. Of those ordained in 2003, 36% of women left congregational ministry before ten years had elapsed; only 4% of men left.

Analysis conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) office of Research and Evaluation in 2013 reviewed the records of 2,455 pastors ordained

¹⁰ See Table 1.1 in Appendix.

¹¹ See glossary of terms in Appendix.

between January 1, 2001 and July 1, 2008. The research found that, five years after their ordination, 4.8% of those pastors were no longer on the ELCA clergy roster.¹²

Current, more detailed statistics on first-call pastors in the ELCA were made available in July 2017. The research, summarized on Table 1.2¹³, tracks persons from the point of application for candidacy as a rostered minister (pastor or deacon)¹⁴ through their current status in leadership in the ELCA for the period from January 1, 2010 through May 23, 2017. This data reports the current status of those who, with application for candidacy in a given year, began what is generally at least a four-year process of study and contextual education. Therefore, those who made application for Candidacy in the year 2010 would have been likely to receive and begin their first call no earlier than 2014 unless they were TEEM candidates who were serving in what the ELCA terms “emerging ministries” while completing their formal theological studies. Emerging ministries include rural, urban, and multi-cultural congregations without ordained ministers where the bishop has identified a pastoral leader in formation from within the congregation.

The most recent data offers a detailed view of the process from application for candidacy to first call. Just under 60% of those men and women who began the candidacy process in 2010 are serving in congregational or non-congregational calls, with 64% of them having held a call at some point. Over 35% did not advance to ordination or

¹² Marty Smith, email message to Research Associate Christine Ummel Hosler, October 28, 2013. The 4.8% figure includes both pastors who left alone and those who took their congregations with them in leaving the denomination. During the time period analyzed, the ELCA experienced a higher than normal number of pastors leaving the roster because of the August 2009 vote by the Churchwide Assembly allowing congregations to call and ordain gays and lesbians in committed monogamous relationships to serve as clergy.

¹³ See Table 1.2 in Appendix.

¹⁴ See glossary of terms in Appendix.

consecration. It may be possible that a more robust ELCA Candidacy process has helped to reduce attrition after ordination by discerning that fewer persons have demonstrated appropriate gifts and/or lack the resilience needed for ordained or consecrated ministry.

This data from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is consistent with attrition reports provided by at least two other denominations who are full-communion partners with the ELCA.¹⁵ United Methodist pastor and researcher Rolf Memming's 1998 research of 7,147 Methodist pastors revealed that 7.2% of those ordained between 1974 and 1983 left public ministry altogether within ten years of ordination.¹⁶ A 2013 study of 10 of the 63 annual conferences of the United Methodist Church reported that only 1% had left ordained ministry within the first five years.¹⁷ In 2013, the Office of Research of the Church Pension Group of the Episcopal Church USA reported that 9% of employable clergy ordained in the denomination since 2001 had left the ministry.¹⁸

What accounts for reports of clergy attrition rates ranging from as low as 1% to as high as 50%? One research analyst has suggested that the higher percentages correspond to evangelical and nondenominational pastors leaving ministry prematurely. The report attributes their higher rate of departure to the fact that they do not have denominational structures that provide salary guidelines and other means of support that help them work through challenging situations.¹⁹ Further, when compared with the field of medicine and

¹⁵ See Glossary of terms in appendix.

¹⁶ Transition into Ministry Project, "How Many Quit? Estimating the Clergy Attrition Rate," Lilly Endowment, accessed October 27, 2015, <http://into-action.net/research/many-quit-estimating-clergy-attrition-rate/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

education, whose attrition rates range from 4% for nurses, 17% for physicians, and 29% for teachers, the comparatively low clergy attrition rates in the ELCA seem to be good news.

In a review of the 35 rostered ministers who have begun their ministry in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the ELCA since 2010, none had been removed from the roster. Three have been on leave from call: two for family leave and one for medical leave. The pastor on medical leave received support from the synod staff and returned to active ministry within a year.

Given this data, a case could be made for abandoning further research on this ministry problem, as statistics suggest that there may be no problem to address! Credit for lower attrition rates may be given to those responsible for the ELCA candidacy process, which works diligently to identify and endorse only the most capable pastors and deacons, as noted above. Credit may also be given to seminaries for more faithfully preparing leaders for public ministry. Finally, credit ought to be given to the First Call Theological Education currently in place in the synod. However, as this study will assert, many of these leaders bring perspectives on what it means to be a pastor that are challenging to denominational leaders and people in the ministry settings they enter. It would appear that today's candidates bring greater anxiety over undergraduate and seminary debt to their first calls than pastors of the previous generation. They will encounter more anxiety in many cases as the congregations they serve face financial shortfalls and budget reductions. Finally, they and their families may struggle to find the spousal employment opportunities, advanced medical care, and educational opportunities they need in the places where congregations have called them to serve.

For these reasons, the ministry question *How can a denomination best support its first call pastors and deacons in developing resilience in ministry?* continues to be a valid one. For pastors new to ministry in the ELCA, the time for consideration of this question couldn't be more important.

What Is Resilience and Why Is It Important?

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is:

The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means ‘bouncing back’ from difficult experiences.²⁰

The word and its variants derive from the Latin verb *resilire*, which means to jump back or recoil. The Oxford English Dictionary traces a wide range of uses for the word from the 16th century forward, ranging from abandonment of a course of action (1529) to the power of a material to resist an impulsive force (1824).²¹

Both resilience and its variant resiliency refer to the human ability to rebound from adversity. However, “resiliency” refers more specifically to the capacity or tendency to rebound, while “resilience” is defined as the act of rebounding.²²

Southwick and Charney have identified ten resilience factors which help people rebound in the face of adversity:

- 1) Realistic optimism
- 2) Facing fear
- 3) A moral compass
- 4) Religion and spirituality
- 5) Social support

²⁰ “The Road to Resilience,” American Psychological Association, accessed December 1, 2017, www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx.

²¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “resiliency.”

²² *Ibid.*

- 6) Resilient role models
- 7) Physical fitness
- 8) Brain fitness
- 9) Cognitive and emotional flexibility
- 10) Meaning and purpose²³

Their extensive interviews with former prisoners of war, survivors of the September 11, 2001 attack on New York City's Twin Towers, and persons stricken with health crises support the argument that the capacity for resilience can be increased by developing these factors in one's life.

After the unexpected death of her husband, Facebook's Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg co-authored with Adam Grant a 2017 bestselling book, titled *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*. She writes, "Resilience is the strength and speed of our response to adversity—and we can build it. It isn't about having a backbone. It's about strengthening the muscles around our backbone."²⁴ Sandberg and Grant assert: "We plant the seeds of resilience in the ways we process negative events...recognizing that negative events aren't personal, pervasive, or permanent makes people less likely to get depressed and better able to cope."²⁵

While Sandberg and other contemporary authors²⁶ have brought the concept of resilience to the forefront in the past few years, study of the connection between

²³ Steven M. Southwick and Dennis S. Charney, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press, 2012), 13.

²⁴ Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant, *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy* (New York: Knopf, 2017), 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁶ General Stanley McChrystal authored the 2015 best-seller *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Portfolio, 2015) in which he wrote extensively about resilience as a key to organizational change in a complex society.

resilience and clergy well-being and effectiveness dates back at least to 2003 with the work of Meek, McMinn, Brower et al. Their study identified three significant challenges that ordained ministers face in their work, which necessitate developing and maintaining resilience:

- 1) Ministry is a very demanding helping vocation, where clergy serve as “therapists on call” in their communities, though without the extensive training.
- 2) Many clergy experience family stresses, including financial strain, lack of privacy for their families and frequent moves.
- 3) Clergy often deal with unrealistic expectations, both self-imposed and those of their congregation members.²⁷

The concept of resilience is a hope-filled one, as by definition it suggests that all people have the capacity to “bounce back” in the face of challenge, disappointment, and loss. That capacity can actually be increased as people face adversity.

Vocation—The Call to Ministry

Christian pastoral ministry is unique among types of employment because it is a vocation—a holy calling believed to come from the God who stands at the center of the Christian faith. This vocation, or calling, often becomes more focused over an extended period of time, and with the influence of others who share faith in God. This makes the pathway to ordained ministry, upon which people discern whether or not they are chosen for this work, somewhat distinct from other careers that people may choose based on income potential, prestige, or preferred work conditions.

²⁷ Katheryn Rhoads Meek, Mark R. McMinn, Craig M. Brower, Todd D. Burnett, Barrett W. McRay, Michael L. Ramey, David W. Swanson, and Dennise D. Villa, “Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 31 no. 4 (Winter 2003): 339-347, accessed April 12, 2014, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/ehost/detail?vid=5&sid=8b3b3504-f7094179bae612f8b1afb%40sessionmgr111&hid=125&bdata=JnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#db=aph&AN=11986737>.

Gregg Lavoy writes of this process of discernment:

The critical challenge of discernment-knowing whether our calls are true or false, knowing how and when to respond to them, knowing whether a call belongs to us or not-requires that we also tread a path *between* two essential questions: 'What is right for me?' and 'Where am I willing to be led?' Discernment also requires that we ask these two questions continually and devotedly...²⁸

The two essential questions Lavoy identifies with the task of discernment are not limited to persons considering a call to rostered ministry; they accurately describe the process for potential candidates and those who will participate in the discernment process with them. The nature of Christian ministry as a response to a call from God for a season or for a lifetime suggests that discernment is a process that continues throughout one's lifetime.

Lutheran Christians believe and teach that all who are baptized into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have a vocation, a calling to live out their faith in their own spheres of influence. Dr. Katherine Kleinhans notes, "Martin Luther is generally credited with the recovery of the word 'vocation' for general Christian use. Jurgen Moltmann identifies vocation as 'the third great insight of the Lutheran Reformation,' after word and sacrament."²⁹ Luther interpreted God's call to an individual to be uniquely connected to their abilities and responsibilities. He emphatically denounced the well-worn hierarchy of his day that elevated service in the church above work in the home or the community, declaring that "every occupation has its own honor before God, as well as its own requirements and duties."³⁰ The roles of mother, student, shoe-maker,

²⁸ Gregg Lavoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 7.

²⁹ Kathryn Kleinhans, "The Work of a Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective," *Word and World* 25 no. 4 (Fall 2005): 394-402, accessed December 1, 2017, https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/25-4_Work_and_Witness/25-4_Kleinhans.pdf.

³⁰ Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School 1530," vol. 46 of *Luther's Works*, American Edition, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 246.

computer programmer, pastor and public official are all faithful responses to God's call in baptism. The common thread for all vocations is God's intent that they be exercised as a mission for the sake of the neighbor. Dr. Leonard Sweet speaks to vocation and mission in this way:

To be alive is to be gifted with a mission...a magical, engrossing mission that leads to adventure, sacrifice, frustration, fulfillment, and holiness. Being missional is not something you do to get something done, like grow a church or sign the succeed-creed. Missional is who you are, because it is who God is.³¹

In one of two studies designed to identify pastoral resilience, Meek and her associates report that 42% of respondents recalled a distinct moment of calling to ordained ministry, while 58% described a sense of calling that developed over a period of months or even years.³² Whether one's call from God can be tied to a specific point in time or a more extended process, the sureness of that calling is one of the factors that contributes to resilience in ministry.

Many who enter seminary or theological school to train to be pastors or deacons of the Church will point to at least one pastor who was a role model for them. Their pastor may have been the first to ask them whether God might be calling them into rostered ministry. They may have also mentored them in aspects of congregational ministry—taking them on pastoral visits or teaching them how to develop and preach a sermon. Those who answer a call to ministry also have generally positive experiences of God's leading them through local congregations and even outside of them. Their congregations may have provided social support, a factor for resilience.

³¹ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church*, Loc. 962, Kindle.

²⁵ Meek, McMinn, et al.

Autobiographies and memoirs of pastoral ministry penned by Nadia Bolz-Weber and Eugene Peterson, among others, bear witness to divine guidance and inspiration during discernment. Bolz-Weber speaks of her journey from the fundamentalist congregation of her childhood through experimentation with Wicca to a deeply healing Twelve-Step community toward a call to be a pastor to “her people”:

I felt guided by God the whole time I sojourned outside of the church. The divine source of my life and my identity perhaps knew that I needed to bask in a female face of God for a good long while outside the church before I ever could return to it whole and be able to see the divine feminine in my own tradition.³³

Peterson has particularly powerful memories of a different kind of local congregation which served as a social support when he accompanied his mother to weekly Sunday night services she led in rural Montana during the Great Depression:

I loved it. It was high adventure for me. Especially in winter, when there was an edge of danger in the driving and an aura of huddled coziness in the bare halls heated by barrel stoves. I loved the stories. I loved the songs. I loved being in the company of those rough-hewn men who seemed to have just stepped out of a Norwegian folk tale. I loved being with my passionate mother, who was having such a good time telling lumberjacks and miners about God.³⁴

Many who respond affirmatively to a call to public ministry³⁵ report having observed pastors being respected for their work and both they and their families being deeply loved. They have likely witnessed pastors dealing with conflict but have also seen that conflict resolved or at least managed effectively. Conflict in a congregation is and always will be a part of life; psychologists consistently remind us that conflict should not

³³ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint* (New York: Jericho Books, 2013), 15.

³⁴ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins e-Books, 2011), 32.

³⁵ See glossary of terms in Appendix.

be seen as something inherently bad. It is an inevitable part of any close relationship, especially relationships in which people have a strong personal investment.³⁶

Some who respond to a call to public ministry bring experiences of adversity through which they have experienced the faithfulness of God through the pastors and deacons and members of their congregations or communities. Those who ministered to them in their distress became God's means of offering deliverance, consolation in the face of loss, and resurrection hope, functioning as resilient role models. The hardships through which these candidates for ministry have persevered have also been a means of developing resilience, which will serve them well when they become pastors and deacons themselves.

The Call to Be Pastor of a Congregation

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, persons are certified for call to a congregation upon completing a four-or-more-year course of seminary study and an approval decision by their synod candidacy committee. The challenges of sharing the discernment process with the candidacy committee, the academic demands of seminary, the residential moves often required, and debt in excess of \$30,000 that many students accrue can be daunting.³⁷ Those who study the characteristics of resilience suggest that when people feel they have some personal control over manageable challenges, their capacity for resilience is increased, even in the face of anxieties like these.³⁸

³⁶ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2005), Location 961, Kindle.

³⁷ Adam DeHoek, *Stewards of Abundance: Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Seminarian Debt and Efforts to Reduce It* (Chicago: Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2014), 26-27.

³⁸ Southwick and Charney, 198.

Candidates complete a profile that describes their faith journey, convictions about life and ministry, skills and interests, and any geographical preferences. Synod bishops and their assistants study these profiles, looking for candidates who "match" congregations in their synod who are seeking pastors. For several years now, there have been far fewer candidates than available calls, so it is not uncommon for several synods to vie for one promising candidate.

There is evidence that synodical leaders experience frustration with seminary faculty as well as students during this process. One seminary official shared that a regional staff person told her, "I don't listen to anything you say about your students. As far as you are concerned, they're all great!" It would appear that denominational leaders can feel vexed by the seminary staff who prepare students as well as the attitudes and needs students bring to the call process.

According to Hoge and Wenger, some denominational officials report that today's young pastors:

- 1) Have a feeling of independence and entitlement
- 2) Resist a traditionally heavy workload, looking to work no more than 40 hours per week
- 3) Resist itinerancy (the United Methodist Church system of placing pastors)
- 4) Think of ministry as a profession with upward mobility, rather than a calling
- 5) Question the system
- 6) Can be arrogant; lack a servant attitude
- 7) Are not receiving seminary training in how to deal with the culture clash most congregations will represent
- 8) Are not being taught how to deal with change in institutions.³⁹

These are rather bold and disparaging characterizations, which reveal significant differences in the ways that older leaders and newly emerging leaders view the call to

³⁹ Hoge and Wenger, loc. 1924-1975, Kindle.

congregational ministry and deference to denominational authority. The question of workload can be traced directly to an emerging re-scribing of Christian vocation. In conversations with colleagues, many pastors trained in the last century will readily order their vocation as (1) pastor, (2) spouse, (3) parent, (4) child. Pastors trained more recently, especially those of the millennial generation, will more often order their vocation as (1) child of God, (2) spouse, (3) parent, (4) pastor. This reordering justifies the younger pastor's conviction that a forty-hour workweek, allowing more time for cultivation of one's spiritual life and key relationships, is faithful to his or her calling. The testing of denominational authority appears to be a common theme, not only with millennial pastors, but among more and more people who have become disillusioned by authority figures in all aspects of society.

A major source of conflict between ELCA bishops and candidates is the expectation of some candidates that they must restrict to a call in a particular location, usually because of spousal employment and/or other family needs. Some bishops refuse to accept candidates who limit their placement. Others do their best to place them within proximity. When this is not possible, pastors may accept a call that requires them to commute between their family home and the community where they serve. Commuting pastors often maintain an apartment or parsonage near the church where they stay five to six days each week, reuniting with their family members the remainder of the week. As one might expect, first-call rostered ministers in these situations often report significant feelings of isolation, one of the three greatest contributing factors to pastors leaving local church ministry.

Denominational officials work diligently to assure the best possible match between pastor and congregation and try their best to find candidates who match congregations seeking them. Good matches usually mean contented congregations and pastors who remain in those congregations for longer periods of time. Kennon Callahan describes the marks of an excellent match:

- 1) The pastor and the people fall in love with each other, developing “a healthy, constructive relationship of trust, respect, appreciation, and genuine love with one another.”
- 2) The pastor’s competencies mesh with the objectives and hopes of the congregation and the congregation’s mission in the community.
- 3) The pastor and the people are mutually growing in mission, living beyond themselves
- 4) The pastor and the people are experiencing the grace of God, the compassion of Christ, and the healing hope of the Holy Spirit and extending these gifts beyond themselves into their communities.⁴⁰

As bishops and their staff become more familiar with the history, strengths and growth edges of the congregations who are seeking first call pastors, they are more capable of seeking and recommending candidates who can make matches like these happen.

Sometimes those matches are made easily and quickly-candidates may receive and accept a call to a parish before they graduate from seminary! But there are times and places where there are more pastors available for call than there are calls for them. And there are also times when candidates and/or congregations recognize that there is not enough in common for a good match to take place and a call is not extended, or when extended, is declined. This lack of common ground can be associated with the gap between the seminary’s formation of expectations in student candidates and the realities of congregational life and practice.

⁴⁰ Kennon L. Callahan, *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations: Building an Excellent Match Upon Your Shared Strengths* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 9-15.

The Gap Between Seminary and Public Ministry

There is no small amount of controversy over the question of whether seminaries are adequately preparing students for pastoral ministry in today's congregations. While some studies, especially those conducted by the Association of Theological Schools, indicate that "seminary education is achieving some of its most cherished goals,"⁴¹ there are many congregation members, pastors, deacons, and bishops and their staff who believe otherwise.

Clergy couple L. Gregory Jones and Susan Pendleton Jones note:

Recent studies have shown that most pastors who leave local church ministry do so in their first five years. One obvious reason is the gap that too often exists between seminary and local congregations, creating a dynamic wherein new pastors are either ill-equipped or unwilling to appreciate the distinctive contours of their new setting and to love the people in it.⁴²

United Methodist Bishop William H. Willimon is even more direct:

The word "seminary" means literally "seed bed." Seminary was meant to be the nursery where budding theologians are cultivated and seeds are planted that will bear good fruit, God willing. Trouble is, seminaries thought they could simply overlay those governmentally patronized, culturally confirmed ways of academic thinking over the church's ways of thought, and proceed right along as if nothing had happened between the seminary as the church created it to be (a place to equip and form new pastoral leaders for the church) and the seminary as it became (another graduate/professional school).⁴³

Nearly everyone involved with training and continuing support of pastors agrees that there must be an intentional partnership between seminaries and the church at the

⁴¹ Dash, Dukes, and Smith, 69.

⁴² L. Gregory Jones and Susan Pendleton Jones, "Leadership, Pastoral Identity, and Friendship: Navigating the Transition from Seminary to the Parish," in *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings*, loc. 359, Kindle.

⁴³ William H Willimon, "Between Two Worlds," in *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings*, loc. 3887-3889, Kindle.

denominational and local congregation level. Although some seminary professors may have served as little as three years' time as parish pastors, all ELCA seminary professors are members of local congregations and regular preachers and teachers in others. Is the issue as simple as the seminary drifting too far from its roots toward an academic institution? Or have seminaries become more socially and politically progressive than the congregations they train their students to serve?

One can certainly argue that "church," as most of us have known it in our lifetime, has changed. By the late 1960's, secularization was projected to be a growing challenge to the church; many argue that this projection has now come to pass, in light of the latest poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, indicating that nearly twenty percent of the United States public and one-third of adults under thirty now self-report as religiously unaffiliated.⁴⁴ Studies too numerous to count document the decrease in weekly or even annual participation in congregational worship.

Dr. Sweet noted in a 2014 conversation: "People are very suspicious of organized religion, but are hungry to talk about spiritual things, about their concerns and questions. "Where would you go to talk about these things? No one answers: church."⁴⁵ Conversations like these *are* taking place in coffee shops and craft breweries and are becoming a means of connecting people with these questions with Christian communities where relationships of trust have been established.

⁴⁴ Pew Research Religious and Public Life Project, February 17, 2010, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>.

⁴⁵ Leonard Sweet, lecture delivered in Cambridge, UK, June 19, 2014.

Some denominational officials maintain that the current consumerist culture, focused on getting family and personal needs met, makes it a very hard time to be a pastor or deacon. They report less respect for the ministerial office. They may find themselves and their sermons compared (critically) to those of high profile Christian personalities with national exposure. There is a pronounced decrease in denominational awareness and loyalty—finding a church that meets a household’s needs outranks multi-generational ties to a denomination. Finally, there is less commitment to remain a member of one’s church when conflict arises.⁴⁶ This leads pastor and seminary faculty member Thomas G. Long to suggest,

Perhaps the greatest challenge for new ministers negotiating the gap between seminary and the church is facing the disappointment they feel in the church as an institution. In the seminary, they became inspired by images of the church as the called-out people of God, an alternative and inclusive community devoted to countercultural service and witness. But then they find themselves in congregations of very conventional people who seem far less interested in being a countercultural force than they are to selfishly demanding ministerial services to meet their latest whims and needs.⁴⁷

At the same time, it is clear that many seminary graduates expect preparation that it may not be possible to deliver outside of their own first parish. Seminaries may be able to improve on their role of preparation by teaching students how to listen more attentively to people’s stories and the clues they offer about the new culture they are entering. Students can explore ways of becoming effective rostered ministers, drawing on their contextual experience as well as insights on leadership from the world of business and charitable organizations. They can discover how to engage the souls of the people with

⁴⁶ Hoge and Wenger, loc. 2072-2099, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Thomas G. Long, “The Essential Untidiness of Ministry,” in *From Midterms to Ministry: Practical Theologians on Pastoral Beginnings*, loc. 290, Kindle.

whom they inhabit a faith community. Seminaries can teach students how to more effectively lead discussions about God, faith, and the church in today's post-Christian culture.⁴⁸

However, as Long notes, "In terms of the present, the theological school is not called to teach techniques and gimmicks but to help shape in students that theological habit of mind that enables pastors to engage whatever situations develop in ministry."⁴⁹ Kennon Callahan maintains that only in the context of the local congregation can a person truly learn what it means to be a pastor as they focus on loving, listening, and leading through visitation, preaching, facilitating change appropriately and nurturing leadership.⁵⁰

Mark E. Yurs, author of the only book I could find written expressly for the first-call congregation, suggests that "the difference between being in seminary and actually serving a church can be compared to the difference between reading a romance novel and actually falling in love. The one is theoretical; the other is experiential."⁵¹ He encourages "first churches" to claim the unique opportunity they have to help a minister "fall in love with pastoral life and work."⁵²

⁴⁸ H. Dana Fearon III and Gordon S. Mikoski, *Straining at the Oars: Case Studies in Pastoral Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2013), loc. 97-127, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Long, loc. 224, Kindle.

⁵⁰ Callahan, ix.

⁵¹ Mark E. Yurs, *Being a First Church: What a Pastor's First Congregation Should Know* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

Pastors and deacons face challenges and conflict as they live out their love for Jesus by pursuing a call to ministry. They will experience opportunities to develop resilience in their first parishes as well.

The Challenges All First-Call Pastors Face

Despite the vastly differing figures reported on clergy attrition, one needs only to ask a pastor or deacon if he or she knows a classmate from seminary or a colleague who has left rostered ministry to find that they will likely be able to name one or more. Whether data is generated from quantitative research or anecdotal conversations, the presence of conflict in the congregation is nearly always one of the top three reasons cited for clergy leaving congregational ministry. Confusion about the pastoral role and isolation round out the top three for those who leave for reasons other than pursuing ministry in specialized settings such as chaplaincy or advanced theological study.⁵³

Addressing a gathering of first-call pastors and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations they serve, Rev. Catherine Schibler-Keegan, Assistant to the Bishop-Northwestern Ohio Synod, described the distinctive characteristics of first call pastors:

- 1) First-call pastors are approved through a synod Candidacy Committee of the ELCA in a multi-year process;
- 2) They are inexperienced, yet they are the identified professional leader of the congregation which calls them;
- 3) They can be anxious and experience fear over whether they will be accepted;
- 4) They are still learning—on the job and in structured settings with synod staff and mentor groups;
- 5) They are entrusted with responsibility for teaching the Bible and theology, caring for people, and tending to relationships.

⁵³ Hoge and Wenger, loc. 2072-2099, Kindle.

- 6) They are professionally responsible for the people who have called them and to a group of colleagues, to the ELCA, and the synod.⁵⁴

These characteristics have been historically common to all first call ministers in the denomination and are similar to other U.S. mainline Christian denominations as well. The training and evaluation in preparation for pastoral ministry is rigorous; yet first call pastors can feel uncertain as they navigate the new waters of leading their first church.

There are challenges for the pastor or deacon as she moves from the realm of seminarian to that of a public leader. Willimon offers insights into this transition:

When the seminarian become a pastor, she leads an organization that has goals such as embodiment, engagement, involvement, participation and full-hearted commitment, embrace of the enemy, hospitality to the stranger, group cohesion, *koinonia*. Her discipleship is not to engage in cool consideration of Jesus but rather to follow him. If she fails to take the move from being the lone individual tending her own spiritual garden to her new role of public leader, she will have a tough time in the parish.⁵⁵

First-call ministers may also face unique challenges in balancing the needs of their family and congregation. Moving to one's first church and community means uprooting a spouse and children, possibly resulting in spousal unemployment or under-employment. Sometimes the move results in a commuter marriage, as described in the introduction. In direct response to a December 7, 2013 query on the ELCA Clergy Facebook page (a closed group with nearly 6,000 members as of December 2013), a pastor requesting anonymity shared the following about her first call:

I've only been here about 5 months, and I don't expect to be here longer than a year or two. Mostly, this is because of my spouse. My husband doesn't feel called to where we are. He found a job, but it doesn't bring him life. His opinions weren't

⁵⁴ Catherine Schibler-Keegan, "Characteristics of First Call Pastors" (lecture to pastors and congregation leaders, Sawmill Creek Resort, Huron, Ohio, November 1, 2013).

⁵⁵ William H. Willimon, "First Call: From Seminary to Parish," in *Christian Century* 125, no. 12 June 17, 2008, accessed October 25, 2013, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2008-06/first-call>.

considered by anyone other than myself during the assignment process, and this has made him bitter towards the ELCA in general—which is wearying for me. My ability to flourish in any call is so heavily dependent on my spouse and our home situation. As it should be.⁵⁶

Seminary students are taught that self-care and care of family are part of a faithful response to God's baptismal calling. However, the call process and subsequent parish experience may create stumbling blocks to the pastor and his or her efforts to uphold their families.

Financial challenges also loom large for first call pastors and deacons. In 2013, it was not uncommon for seminarians to graduate with a significant debt load, at times exceeding \$60,000.00.⁵⁷ In the North/West Lower Michigan Synod-ELCA, the average compensation package for a first call pastor in 2018 will be \$37,100.00 with a housing allowance of approximately \$12,254.00 if a parsonage is not available.⁵⁸ Using the loan repayment calculator at www.salliemae.com, the annual student loan repayment on a \$60,000.00 loan borrowed at 6% with repayment over ten years is calculated at \$7,992.00. This represents nearly 16% of a first call pastor's cash compensation, before taxes. Bishop Rick Foss of the Eastern North Dakota Synod of the ELCA, writing about his 1999 work with 28 pastors at financial risk in his synod, notes, "Ministry suffers when pastors are preoccupied with worry about soaring health insurance premiums,

⁵⁶ Facebook Messenger communication in response to a post ELCA Clergy's Facebook page, December 7, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013.

⁵⁷ Schibler-Keegan, November 1, 2013.

⁵⁸ "2018 Compensation Guidelines for Clergy, Deacons, Synodically Authorized Ministers, and Other Staff," Mitten Synod, last modified October 17, 2017, accessed December 4, 2017, <http://www.mittensynod.org/docs/CompensationGuidelines2018.pdf>.

underfunded pension plans, and the ever-present obligation to pay back student loans.”⁵⁹

A 2014 ELCA study has found that pastors who are at financial risk are less likely to be innovative in ministry, to risk challenging their congregations to deeper faithfulness.⁶⁰

Pastoral leadership may be less confident in those who are anxious about financial risk.

A congregation's financial challenges can exacerbate the first call minister's anxiety about their personal debt, current living expenses, and pension accumulations. If a congregation's financial resources manage only to hold steady or decrease, the minister's compensation package may be the first line item leaders look to reduce.

Although ELCA synod assemblies adopt annual compensation guidelines, which attempt to keep pace with the local cost of living, a congregation retains the autonomy to set its pastor's compensation package. If a congregation's attendance drops below 50 persons in worship per week, it becomes increasingly difficult to afford a full-time pastor, even a first call pastor.

A new minister may discover that his/her congregation has expectations that run counter to what seminary education formed in him/her. Willimon asserts:

Seminaries in my denomination-United Methodist-are experiencing a growing disconnect between the graduates they produce and the leadership needs of the churches these graduates serve. This disconnect causes friction between churches and their new pastors, and sometimes defeat for all concerned.⁶¹

⁵⁹ “Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders,” Lilly Endowment Annual Report 2015, accessed October 28, 2017, http://www.lillyendowment.org/annualreports/2015/LE15_economic_challenges_pastoral_leaders.pdf. In response to the increasing concern for these challenges, the Lilly Endowment formed the Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Indiana Pastors in 2007, and expanded to a national initiative in 2015, granting more than 28 million dollars to a range of denominations, pension and benefits boards, synods, dioceses, and foundations. The ELCA has formed the Resourceful Servants Initiative to offer support to candidates for ministry, rostered leaders, and congregations.

⁶⁰ Adam DeHoek, 37.

⁵⁸ Willimon, “First Call.”

This disconnect often surfaces around practices to which members have strong emotional ties-practices which seminarians are encouraged to change when they encounter them:

- 1) Display of US flag in the sanctuary
- 2) Position of the altar
- 3) Location of the baptismal font
- 4) Applause during worship
- 5) A schedule of weekly office hours
- 6) Pastor observing a weekly day (or two) off
- 7) Hymn selection and introduction of new hymns
- 8) Communion practices-frequency, style, whom do we admit and when
- 9) Pastoral visitation expectations
- 10) Use of technology in worship⁶²

When a first call congregation and its minister contend over one or more of these practices, there is the danger of unresolved conflict, contributing to failure in the pastor-congregation relationship. There is also the opportunity for pastor and congregation to become more resilient by developing flexibility, trust, and deeper connection with each other.

Finally, there is the work itself, which situates a pastor in the lives of the members of the congregation. There are moments of joy, like the baptisms of an entire family or a successful week of Vacation Bible School. There are moments of profound grief, including ministry to those with chronic illness or unemployment and tragic deaths for which a pastor must lead funerals or memorial services. Exploring the impact of grief on pastors, Miller notes that “the nature of the professional needs during the time of preparation for the funeral and the officiating of the funeral mean that the personal grief experience of the clergy is not recognized.”⁶³ She found that when a pastor cannot or

⁶² Board for Vocation and Education of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Becoming a Vital First Call Congregation* (Chicago: ELCA, n.d.), 3-4.

⁶³ Sarah Howe Miller, “Clergywomen and Grief: Local Church Pastors and Their Experiences,” (PhD diss., Texas Women’s University, 2013).

does not take time to process her emotions or find a confidante with whom she can share her pain, it can contribute to later feelings of burnout.

Those new to rostered ministry navigate a new path in their first years of service. The factors for resilience become very important in this journey. It stands to reason that those who come as second-career pastors may bring more of those factors with them. What particular gifts and needs do younger millennial pastors and deacons bring to their work?

Who is the ELCA Millennial First-Call Rostered Minister?

The millennial generation includes persons born between the years 1981 and 1996, who, in 2018, would be between the ages of 21 and 37. According to research conducted in February 2014 by the Pew Research Center, millennials are the most racially diverse generation in American, at nearly 43% non-white.⁶⁴ According to ELCA Research, nearly 45% of those who entered the ELCA's candidacy process between 2010 and 2017 were millennials.

Millennials' attitude toward faith in God and their relationship to organized religion are quite different from the Gen-X and Baby Boomer generations. Eighty-six percent report that they believe in God, only 58% with absolute certainty. Eleven percent do not believe in God. This percentage of those who do not believe is higher for this generation at this time in their lives than it was for previous generations at the same point in their lives.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "Millennials in Adulthood," Pew Research Center, last modified March 7, 2014, accessed November 28, 2014, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Thirty-six percent of those surveyed consider themselves religious persons, while 29% reported that they are not affiliated with any religion at present.⁶⁶ The non-affiliated percentage is higher than that of Gen-Xers and Baby Boomers at the same age. This information is particularly important for this essay, as it would imply that those who are millennial ELCA pastors have been called forth from a smaller pool than their older counterparts.

Millennials' racial diversity helps to explain the generation's more liberal political stance in part, but within the generation there is a range of attitudes on politics, the size and scope of government, and social issues. Sixty-eight percent of millennials support same-sex marriage, up from 44% in 2004. The study also reveals that millennials tend to be less trusting of others, with just 19% of those surveyed saying that most people can be trusted.⁶⁷ These views may place millennial ELCA pastors in ideological conflict with the people of the congregations they serve.

A final area of note in the Pew Report on Millennials concerns economic hardships faced by millennials in the aftermath of the recession of 2007-2009. The unemployment rate remains high for millennials, and in 2012 the number of young adults still living in their parents' homes reached an historic high.⁶⁸⁶⁹ Yet fully a third of millennials aged 26-33 have at least a four-year college degree, making them the best-educated generation in United States history.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Investment in education has come with a cost, however. Two-thirds of recent bachelor's degree recipients have outstanding student loans, with an average debt of about \$27,000. Higher student loan indebtedness has resulted in some candidates for ministry in the ELCA being delayed entrance to seminary by synod candidacy committees, due to the fact that most pastoral salaries cannot generate the funds needed to meet college and seminary debt repayment.

If there is one thing that is true about millennials, it is that they prefer to speak for themselves rather than allowing statistics and those who study them to define them.

Courtney A. Weller, a senior seminary student, wrote for the Nebraska Synod-ELCA website, asserting that “Millennials ARE in the Church”:

We have questions and we want to discuss them with you. As fun as it can be to go into a group of people similar to us and have our viewpoint affirmed, we also like to be challenged. One of the great things about the Church is that it gathers people from different backgrounds who have had different life experiences. That we enjoy asking questions is probably a fair assessment of our generation, and we want to discuss them with you. You don't have to agree with us and we don't have to agree with you, but we do want to talk about it.⁷⁰

Weller suggests that more millennials might visit churches if they were directly invited.

More students than I can count will tell me that they came to a service/study/event because they were invited. Very few just show up, and if they do, it is not just the existence of a ministry or free food that keeps them involved, but the people who make them feel welcome.⁷¹

Weller also encourages congregation members, once they have welcomed young adults, to get to know them beyond the stereotypes that persist.

⁷⁰ Courtney A. Weller, “Millennials ARE in the Church,” Nebraska Synod -ELCA website, June 23, 2014, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://www.nebraskasynod.org/reflections/millennials-are-in-the-church/>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Seminary graduate Emmy Kegler and second-year seminarian Eric Worringer teamed to write a pointed weblog response to the November 2014 edition of *The Lutheran* lead article, "Get Set for the Clergy Retirement Wave," authored by Charles Austin.⁷² Kegler and Worringer suggest:

Instead of concerns about retirements, systems of scarcity and anxiety, and what feels like bemoaning the loss of a "golden age," we ought to foster language and leadership systems that value the outsider perspectives of young leaders while also valuing the importance and continued relevance of those who have gone before us, as we try to navigate our Lutheran identity in this strange, new world. (We want to be heard and to be treated as valuable participants!)⁷³

The two praise Gen-Xer pastors and younger ELCA rostered leaders, perceived as having been ignored by Austin, who they believe

...grew up in a world and a church that was more secular, more skeptical, less institutional and yet still have committed to the long and hard work of being leaders in the Church in a new era. Not only that, we are glad to say that the American Lutheran church of Christendom is dying, a church marked by "Scandinavian" jokes, cultural enclaves, Lake Wobegon stoicism, and endless conflict over any number of issues.⁷⁴

As one might expect, the comments to Kegler and Worringer's post ran the gamut from praise to strong criticism of their insistence to be acknowledged in Austin's article on retirees.

A non-ELCA seminary graduate, Meghan Florian, self-described as "a Reluctant Millennial [writing] on the State of the Church," urges readers to understand that some Millennials stay in church because they feel included and because they discover that,

⁷² Charles Austin, "Get Set for the Clergy Retirement Wave," *The Lutheran*, November 2014, 19-24.

⁷³ Emmy Kegler and Eric Worringer, "The Under-35 Theses," *The Emmy Kegler blog*, October 24, 2014, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://emmykegler.blogspot.com/2014/10/the-under-35-theses.html>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

even as different as they may seem, God through the Holy Spirit calls them to be church together.⁷⁵

Summarizing these and other sources of commentary on what it means to be a Millennial practicing Christianity in the United States today, giving special attention to the voices of ELCA clergy and candidates for ordination, some common qualities that may describe ELCA Millennial pastors emerge:

- Millennials desire an authentic encounter with the living God, not fluff.
- They want to be invited and welcomed into Christian community.
- They long to be seen as individuals, not "token young adults".
- They expect to ask questions and discuss differing opinions vigorously but respectfully.
- They seek meaningful worship, challenging study, and impactful service.
- They are passionate about their faith and seek others who take faith seriously.
- They ask to be treated with a non-judgmental attitude.
- They are looking for people they can trust.

ELCA Campus Ministry pastor Russell Lackey suggests that some of these distinctive traits are intimidating to church members and even to other pastors, and that it takes courage on the part of all involved to welcome Millennials into congregations.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Given the realities of a changing church and a new generation of pastors and deacons being called into ministry by God to serve the church, it would follow that existing models of preparation for public ministry and first call education and support

⁷⁵ Meghan Florian, "A Reluctant Millennial on the State of the Church," University of Southern California Religion Dispatches blog, August 4, 2013, accessed November 17, 2014, <http://religiondispatches.org/a-reluctant-millennial-on-the-state-of-church/>

⁷⁶ Russell Lackey, "Has the Spirit Forgotten How to Call Young People?" *The Lutheran*, (November 2014): 40.

may no longer be as effective in supporting ministers' growth in resilience. Section two will identify, analyze, and evaluate these structures.

SECTION TWO:
CURRENT MEANS OF ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Candidacy for Ministry

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, one who responds to the call to ministry leadership enters into the candidacy process. The ELCA's Candidacy Manual notes,

The ELCA candidacy process is meant to be a welcoming and joyful time for people discerning how to serve through the church. It is a formalized-yet personally and relationally focused-journey that assists people in discernment for church leadership whether they ultimately become rostered or serve in other lay roles within the church.⁷⁷

Now a committee of ordained ministers and lay members of congregations joins the candidate in discerning if God is indeed calling her into ordained or consecrated service in the ELCA.

Entrance into the ELCA candidacy process includes completion of an application and essay, securing of letters of reference, personal interviews with committee members, a thorough background check, and psychological testing. Candidates are expected to begin this process before entering seminary; one is then endorsed to continue study from year to year with the approval of the candidacy committee.

Entrance is the first of three key points where a candidate is evaluated for readiness and skills needed to carry out pastoral ministry. The second, endorsement, takes place approximately 18 months into the candidate's theological training, following completion of Clinical Pastoral Education and preceding the beginning of internship. At

⁷⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Candidacy Manual," revised May 24, 2017. (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), 8.

this point, a candidacy committee faces a momentous discernment decision: does the committee believe that the candidate can faithfully and successfully navigate pastoral ministry? Because of the investment of significant time and resources on the part of the student, the seminary, and the synod, and the fact that the candidate will be interning in a congregation if endorsed, committees with significant concern or doubt about a candidate's fitness for ministry will either postpone or deny endorsement.

Postponement of endorsement affords the candidate the opportunity to re-apply upon completion of assigned work, which could include therapeutic counseling, remedial coursework, or a second unit of Clinical Pastoral Education. Denial of endorsement effectively removes the candidate from the candidacy process, although they may apply for readmission after one year. Nearly a quarter of ELCA candidates in 2010-2017 were either postponed or denied entrance or endorsement.⁷⁸ These higher rates of postponement and denial may correlate with fewer pastors leaving ministry prematurely, although it is too early to draw a statistically supported argument for this correlation.

Candidates who are endorsed continue their education with supervised internship and coursework. They apply for approval for ordination following the completion of internship, usually during the last year of study. Because the ELCA's candidacy process is designed to advance only those who have demonstrable fitness for ministry, barring a failed internship or other anomaly, approval is rarely denied or postponed.

Although it is stressful for most candidates to accept that they are ceding some control of their vocational future to people who are only getting to know them through applications, essays, and interviews, candidacy committee members do strive to build

⁷⁸ Inskip.

meaningful relationship with candidates. Faith and trust in God's promises and the Holy Spirit's presence infuse the work of the committee while they meet with candidates and deliberate apart from them. There is a common moral compass of respect for each individual as a child of God and each congregation as a community which needs healthy and faithful leaders. These factors for resilience, among others, help candidates and committee members celebrate successes and thoughtfully address challenges together.

Theological Education

Candidates for public ministry are required to earn a Master of Divinity degree or equivalent and are strongly urged to attend one of the eight seminaries of the ELCA, located throughout the country, to earn it. ELCA seminary curricula is shaped in large part by distinctive Lutheran theology as well as its membership in the Association for Theological Schools (ATS). ATS member institutions maintain the following strengths and capacities as being integral to pastoral leadership:

- 1) Comprehension of the Scriptures and the theological tradition of a faith community
- 2) The capacity to see and understand how this faith tradition will be lived within contemporary social, economic, and cultural contexts.
- 3) The ability to perform the critical skills of pastoral ministry, including teaching, preaching, the administration of congregational programs, and the sacraments.
- 4) Those committed to pastoral ministry are persons of faith, integrity, character, and the capacity to grow in wisdom.⁷⁹

The historical development of theological education in the United States reflects an attention to and relationship with congregations as they grew and morphed. Van Gelder describes the desired outcome transitioning from "resident theologian" during the

⁷⁹ Michael I.N. Dash, Jimmy Dukes, and Gordon T Smith, "Learning from the First Years: Noteworthy Conclusions from the Parish Experiences of Recent Graduates of ATS Schools," *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005): 66.

colonial period to "gentleman and churchly pastor" through the 1800s to the mid-1900s, to "pastoral director" in the post World War II period, and to "therapeutic pastor" during the 1970s and 1980s. More recently, the "entrepreneurial leader" has been the focus of some seminaries and schools of theology. In 2009, Van Gelder suggested that the "missional leader" is the emerging face of the pastor today.⁸⁰

In a 2013 e-mail communication, Trinity Lutheran Seminary President Barger wrote of the seminary's goal of forming "adaptive leaders."⁸¹ Adaptive leadership is defined as "the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive."⁸² It focuses on leading through change that enables organizations to thrive. It requires its leaders to engage both their head and their hearts, calling forth the convergence of multiple intelligences.⁸³ If a seminary is successful in training adaptive leaders, it will be forming pastors who can manage both the conflict and their attending emotions that are bound to emerge in a changing church in the midst of a changing culture and world.

Each change in the "type of pastor" needed for a season of the church's life and those who answer the call has stimulated some change in the education seminaries have provided. Five of the eight seminaries offer a residentially-based Master of Divinity

⁸⁰ Craig Van Gelder. "Theological Education and Missional Leadership Formation: Can Seminaries Prepare Missional Leaders for Congregations?" in *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig VanGelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 488-491, Kindle.

⁸¹ Rick Barger "Trinity Midweek Blast - A Weekly E-newsletter of Trinity Lutheran Seminary," November 6, 2013, accessed November 18, 2013 http://www.tlsohio.edu/?utm_source=Trinity+Midweek+Blast+November+6%2C+2013&utm_campaign=Enewsletter&utm_medium=email

⁸² Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Theory Behind the Practice: A Brief Introduction to the Adaptive Leadership Framework* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press), accessed December 28, 2017, <https://cambridge-leadership.com/documents/Ch-2-Theory-Behind-the-Practice.pdf>.

⁸³ Ibid., 28-29.

degree, which requires non-local students to relocate to the proximity of the seminary to begin their studies. After two years of academic work, students serve an assigned year of supervised internship, usually necessitating a move to another location. Following completion of internship, the student returns to the seminary for a final year of academic work before being assigned to a region and synod for their first call. Three ELCA seminaries now offer an additional part-time pathway-distance or distributive Master of Divinity degrees which can be completed over a longer period of time, allowing students to continue in their family's current location and employment. Although there was initial resistance to this alternative by candidacy committees and synodical bishops and staff, support has increased, especially for mature students with successful employment experience and demonstrated self-motivation.

Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio now offers a “2 + 2” Master of Divinity degree, in which students spend two years in academic coursework at the seminary, followed by two years of supervised internship, during which both academic and cohort-based integrative learning take place.⁸⁴ This model is appealing as students can study ministry skills while in a ministry setting; it also requires fewer moves for a student and his/her household. Wartburg College and Seminary have just announced a proposed 3+3 education model which will afford persons with a sense of call early in their educational endeavors to complete both the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Divinity degree in six years.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Brad A. Binau, “The Future Is Now: Update on a New Model for Theological Education at Trinity,” *Trinity Seminary Review* 34, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 41-43.

⁸⁵ “Wartburg Theological Seminary to Partner with Wartburg College to Streamline Pastoral Education,” Wartburg Seminary, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.wartburgseminary.edu/wartburg-theological-seminary-partner-wartburg-college-streamline-pastoral-education/>.

Why have these changes emerged in the delivery mechanisms of seminary education? According to Hoge and Wenger, “the research clearly shows that seminary students today differ from those of yesteryear in three significant ways: more are women, more are older, and fewer have had church experience in their own denomination.”⁸⁶ Although the change in gender breakdown has not significantly affected seminaries’ delivery of education, the presence of fewer students entering seminary immediately upon completion of a four-year college degree and more second-career students has required changes in nearly every aspect of the seminary experience. Older students are often married with children. Their spouses seek meaningful employment they desire quality education for their children. Many students and their families consider the traditional model of training, which can require four or more moves in as many years, unacceptable.

The presence of older students with more life experience can yield benefits as well. Older students tend to be “more practical, less academic, and more ready for the everyday challenges of church leadership.”⁸⁷ Students who lack church experience in the denomination in which they are training, while they may require some remedial work in theological tradition, can bring a fresh look at traditions that have become worn by familiarity. Although an increasing number of seminary students bring unresolved emotional issues to their theological training, these challenges are viewed by some as

⁸⁶ Hoge and Wenger, 178, Kindle.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 191, Kindle.

resilience-in-development that can yield a decided advantage over younger students with less life experience.⁸⁸

Most seminaries place students in contextual education assignments in congregations beginning in their first year of seminary. Contextual education continues with a required unit of Clinical Pastoral Education and a supervised internship of at least one year for all who are training to be pastors and six months for deacons. These practices reflect the understanding that the congregation is the primary sphere of ministry and therefore must be a central point of formation for congregational leadership. Congregations which host seminary students as interns are selected for their general health, the leadership skills of their senior/lead pastor, and the congregation's capacity to assume the costs of an intern. While it is possible that the student will observe conflict or financial stresses in the congregation, generally there is minimal exposure to challenges like these.

No matter how much experience, knowledge, wisdom, and prayer are applied to the formation process in seminary, there are simply experiences for which the seminary cannot adequately prepare first call pastors. Dr. Emlyn Ott, former seminary faculty member and Executive Director of Healthy Congregations, Inc., believes that although conflict in congregations is one of the first call pastor's greatest challenges, the seminary cannot teach conflict resolution or management. "The best we can do is work on our own stuff and surround ourselves with colleagues who will hold us accountable for that work."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Robert Banks, *Re-envisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 191-193.

⁸⁹ Dr. Emlyn A. Ott, interviewed by author, Columbus, Ohio, October 7, 2014.

ELCA seminaries today give greater attention to spiritual and leadership formation than twenty years ago. Coursework trains students in spiritual disciplines that sustain pastors' faith and intimacy with Christ, especially in times of conflict, isolation, and confusion over pastoral roles. There are also educational resources available to pastors, including *Healthy Congregations*, which “develops training, education, and consultation in emotional process as it relates to community and congregational systems,⁹⁰ and the more extensive East-Coast based *Pastoral Formation Program* which aims to increase participants' self-awareness of interaction with authority figures and their own patterns of exercising authority in their ministry with others.⁹¹ Reviewing the current curricula of the majority of seminaries, Peter Steinke notes: “Seminary content keeps changing but there is still very little done to address emotional systems.”⁹²

The seminary experience, especially the nature of community built of the students and their families, faculty, and staff, can offer several factors for resilience, including brain fitness, social support, role models, moral compass, realistic optimism, and of course, shared religious practices and spirituality. These further strengthen and equip students for the vocation of public ministry.

⁹⁰ Healthy Congregations website, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.healthycongregations.com>.

⁹¹ Barbara E. Livingston, Katherine Mills Myers, Merle R. Jordan, Bonnie Scott Jelinek, and Ann Plumley, “Pastoral Formation Process for Seminarians: A New Model for Developing Psychologically Healthy Pastors.” *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* no. 3-4 (2009), accessed April 12, 2014, <http://0web.a.ebscohost.com.catalog.georgefox.edu/ehost/detail?sid=6fc5371d-85a94e63bef067086c2dcf87%40sessionmgr4002&vid=4&hid=4109&bdata=JnNjb3BIPXNpdGU%3d#db=rft&AN=ATLA0001893387>.

⁹² Peter L. Steinke, presentation to the ELCA System Academy, Chicago, IL, October 10, 2017.

Craig Dykstra captures the overarching goal of the training and formation of ordained ministers:

It is a beautiful thing to see a good pastor at work. Somehow, pastors who really get what the Christian ministry is all about and who do it well are able to enter many diverse situations, whether joyous or full of misery and conflict and see what is going on there through the eyes of faith. This way of seeing and interpreting shapes what the pastor thinks and does and how he or she responds to people in gestures, words, and actions. It functions as a kind of internal gyroscope, guiding pastors in and through every crevice of pastoral life and work. This way of seeing and interpreting is what I mean by “pastoral imagination”.⁹³

A woman or man who leads with “pastoral imagination” has discerned a call from God and responded with the whole of her being as both sinner and saint. She has been encouraged by other pastors and lay people along the way and equipped with education that aims to balance theological acumen with spiritual and emotional formation. She has likely encountered significant stress and possibly even adversity in the journey toward public ministry. It is precisely through these experiences of stress and adversity that greater resilience has been developed. As she enters the call process and begin to serve in congregational ministry, pastoral imagination accompanied by a deepening resilience may offer the best hope for a long and satisfying vocation in ministry.

Mentoring During the First Call

The belief that emerging leaders need support to accomplish and thrive in their work is not new. The oldest and most successful means of support and formation may be mentoring. The Oxford Dictionary defines a mentor as “an experienced person in a company or educational institution who trains and counsels new employees or students.”

⁹³ Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 41.

The word's origin points to its function in Greek mythology: *Mentor* was the name of the friend whom Odysseus chose to manage his household and train his son, Telemachus, while he fought in the Trojan War. *The Mentoring Partnership* notes that:

Several references to Mentor are not about Mentor the person but about the goddess Athena *assuming the likeness* of Mentor in order to issue the instruction or guidance she wanted to convey. It is easy, in fact, to see Mentor as more of a role than a person; frequent mention of him is made as his likeness is assumed by Athena. It is not too much of a stretch to believe that ability as mentor connotes not an inborn identity, but an identity that one acquires—a set of qualities and skills that one develops, as Athena “assumes the likeness” of Mentor.⁹⁴

Mentoring is part of the rich spiritual tradition found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The aged prophet Eli, with no honorable sons to succeed him, was granted the opportunity to mentor the young boy Samuel.⁹⁵ Elijah's guiding of Elisha into the role of prophet is another well-known story of mentoring.⁹⁶ In the Christian Scriptures, the first female mentor/mentee relationship emerges in the story of Mary of Nazareth being encouraged by her kinswoman Elizabeth, as both women were miraculously carrying children set apart for holy purposes.⁹⁷ The Apostle Paul mentored Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila throughout his ministry outlined in the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 15-20. When Paul rejected Mark as a ministry team member, Barnabas became Mark's mentor and the two traveled as missionaries, proclaiming the Gospel.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Dorothy L. Williams and Keith Killinger, *The Mentoring Partnership: A Component of First Call Theological Education*, eds. John L. Davis and Connie Leann Seraphine (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Ministry), 1996.

⁹⁵ 1 Samuel 1-3.

⁹⁶ 1 Kings 19.

⁹⁷ Luke 1.

⁹⁸ Williams and Killinger, 4.

Williams touches on key mentoring relationships in church history, including Teresa of Avila serving as mentor to John of the Cross and Ignatius of Loyola's imprint on Francis Xavier.⁹⁹ She then describes the role that Johann von Staupitz played in guiding Martin Luther into the priesthood and later as lecturer in Bible at the University of Wittenberg. Luther became a mentor to Philipp Melanchthon both theologically and vocationally when he became a young professor.¹⁰⁰

When Lutheran Christianity first came to the North American continent in the 18th century, Dutch, German and Swedish congregations depended on their homelands to send them pastors. As fewer pastors were found to emigrate to the United States and before the establishment of Lutheran seminaries, the formation of new pastors was almost exclusively accomplished through one-on-one mentoring relationships where an experienced pastor trained a candidate for ministry. The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787) serve as a rich memoir of this "patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America" and his tireless work of forming and mentoring pastors for ministry in Pennsylvania and adjacent states.¹⁰¹

Upon the establishment of Lutheran seminaries in the United States, mentoring continued to be the primary support offered to new pastors, including me during my first three years of ministry in the Ohio Synod of the Lutheran Church in America in 1985-

⁹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰¹ Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in Three Volumes – Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Historical Society of Eastern Pennsylvania), 1982, accessed December 6, 2017 <http://books.google.com/books?id=KZOenQEACAAJ&dq=journals+of+Henry+Melchior+Muhlenberg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiJxN3H8vXXAhWkY98KHe7XDR8Q6AEILTAB>

1988. An experienced pastor was assigned to a group of pastors who had accepted calls and begun ministry during the same academic year in the same urban community. Although the primary relationship developed through a monthly gathering, my mentor was readily available and a great help in the face of several experiences of conflict, including the discovery of the congregation's treasurer's embezzlement of funds. When I became a mentor to a pastoral colleague group in 1998, the same approach was being employed by the successor synod, the Northwestern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, although the pastors mentored were located throughout the geographical territory of the synod, resulting in fewer meetings per year.

Continuing Academic Study as a Form of Support

A pastor's access to education does not come to an end with graduation from seminary. The vocation of rostered minister in the ELCA carries with it the expectation of continued study of the holy scriptures, as included among the vows taken at ordination: *Will you be diligent in your study of the holy scriptures and faithful in your use of the means of grace?*¹⁰² Pastors and deacons are expected to serve as resident theologians and counselors in their congregations and communities, necessitating continuing study of theology, human behavior, and culture. For that reason, continuing education time and funding is included in a rostered minister's letter of call; the general expectation is that a rostered minister will spend at least fifty contact hours in continuing education annually.

¹⁰² "Ordination," in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 187-193.

Seminaries regularly connect with their alumni and other rostered ministers through continuing education offerings on preaching, scripture, counseling, and leadership¹⁰³. Synods offer annual leadership events that bring seminary professors, scholars, and denominational leaders to teach on subjects of interest to rostered ministers. Synods partner with the ELCA denomination to offer education designed for new rostered ministers called, appropriately, First Call Theological Education.

ELCA First Call Theological Education

In 1995, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America established denomination-wide standards and guidelines for First Call Theological Education, designed for pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers in their first call to public ministry:

The church, through this program, acknowledges that learning is a lifelong process and that the period of entry to public ministry is a period of great openness to learning. In the first call, all of the previous years of study and experience begin to coalesce and ministry begins to acquire its enduring form. It is also a period of great vulnerability, and, often a time of isolation and discouragement that has led some first call persons to entertain serious questions about their vocation. It is important, therefore, that the church take care to walk with and support persons during this time of testing.¹⁰⁴

The 1995 First Call Theological Education program consisted of:

- 1) A core program with common events designed for and by all rostered leaders in a shared geographical area
- 2) Electives directed toward areas of specific interest or need
- 3) Structured reading designed to support the overall goals of the program
- 4) Participation in a colleague group or mentoring partnership¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Offerings of note include Luther Seminary's co-sponsorship of the annual Festival of Homiletics and United Seminary's training for pastors who are new heads of staff.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, et al., 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

This program urged synod leadership to expand existing mentoring experiences by joining them to annual seminary-level academic presentations. Synod staff responsible for administering First Call Education were encouraged to work together with neighboring synods to offer more robust common events. Synods began offering this expanded program within two years. Although there are common threads visible when comparing synods' First Call Theological Education programs, there are also differences in the topics addressed, means of delivery, and expectations of participants from synod to synod. These variations can be attributed to the geography of each synod, the strengths and growth edges of each synod, the funds available for FCTE, and the number of first call pastors participating.

Transition into Ministry

The ELCA was not alone in attending to the challenges facing first call clergy. In 1999 the Lilly Endowment of Indianapolis, Indiana began an initiative called "Transition into Ministry." The initiative funded a process that drew together a number of denominations, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, along with experienced educators and pastors dedicated to improving the ways that seminary graduates transition into pastoral ministry.¹⁰⁶ The following assumptions undergirded the initiative:

- The initial years of ministry contribute to a trajectory for personal development over the course of one's ministry. Habits and practices (both good and bad) established in this period tend to endure.
- The experience of the transition from seminary to parish, from classroom to congregation can be abrupt, untutored, and haphazard. As a result, beginning pastors tend to feel isolated and unprepared, lacking crucial support and guidance when they most need it.

¹⁰⁶ James P. Wind and David J. Wood, *Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 9.

- Often in Protestant church life, recent seminary graduates can find themselves situated as solo pastors in struggling congregations, with limited collegial support or institutional support. This can, and often does result in a professional, relational, intellectual, and cultural isolation that can be detrimental to the formation of one's vocational identity.
- A sustained reflective, undivided engagement with congregational life and ministry is critical to the formation of pastoral identity and skill.
- The mentoring of new pastors by seasoned and excellent pastors is an important dynamic in the formation of pastoral identity.
- Learning with and from peers in ministry is a significant experience in vocational formation.¹⁰⁷

Over thirty grants were made to residency-based programs and peer-based programs. ELCA congregations in Moorhead, Minnesota and Davenport, Iowa used the grant to establish residency-based programs in which two to four seminary graduates served their first two years of ordained ministry alongside the leadership of excellent pastors in congregations as what might be considered a second internship.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was a denominational recipient of a *Transition into Ministry* grant for peer-based support of first call pastors in its sixty-five synods. Grant dollars funded 2002 and 2003 surveys of over 800 rostered ministers in their first four years of a call to congregational ministry with a 75% response rate. In the first survey, respondents were asked to rate how prepared they felt in their first call to handle several congregational responsibilities. They reported being most prepared to: (1) preach, (2) plan worship services, (3) visit members, and least prepared to: (1) plan a church budget, (2) plan stewardship programs, (3) manage a church office.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁸ Rebecca Sims, *Executive Summary of First Call Theological Education Surveys* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Ministry, Department for Research and Evaluation, November 2003), 1.

Respondents also rated the level of need for the congregation to work in several ministry areas and then rated their level of preparedness in addressing those needs. "Reaching out to unchurched persons" was rated the highest need but received the lowest level of preparedness. Second highest rated need was "helping congregations work toward a vision." Third highest rated need was "helping people grow spiritually."¹⁰⁹

Respondents said that finding time for spiritual growth was the most challenging task they encountered in the first year of their first call. In the follow-up survey, they noted that having a spiritual mentor/guide was most helpful to them in addressing this challenge. Other competencies they reported the need to develop included managing disputes and conflict situations and training, equipping others for their ministries, and working with the congregation council. For the majority of the needs identified in the survey, those who responded suggested that a mentor was their most helpful resource.¹¹⁰

The summary of the two surveys indicated that there were ministry areas that could benefit from better training while still in seminary. Communication between candidates for call and synod staff during the call process also needed improvement. The importance of a mentor in the early years of one's first call surfaced several times. Sims noted that "facilitating such mentor relationships might be helpful in providing much-needed support in the first few years of called leadership...providing first-call leaders with the best preparation and support possible is an important investment in the future leaders of the church."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 3.

As a three-time mentor of first-call pastors, I cannot recall being introduced to the materials designed for training mentoring pastors or framing the mentoring partnership. While the mentoring dimension of support appeared to be most important for a majority of first call pastors, there is no way of knowing how many synods actually used the materials to equip their mentors.

In addition to funding the study that led to a more robust First Call Theological Education program for the ELCA, attention was directed toward a resource for training congregations receiving first call pastors.¹¹² Seraphine and Schickel studied fourteen congregations in three of the ELCA's nine regions who were nominated by synod leadership for their exemplary work of welcoming and supporting pastors new to ministry. Case study research revealed the following characteristics held in common by these congregations:

- 1) nurture through hospitality and orientation to congregation and community,
- 2) connecting with the local community,
- 3) an attitude of openness and flexibility toward change
- 4) strong lay leaders working in a partner relationship with the pastor, and
- 5) spirituality practiced in worship, Christian education, forgiveness, and care for those in need.¹¹³

The resource also offered advice to first call pastors and to other congregations.

Synods and regions were encouraged to use this resource as part of their core programming with first call pastors and lay leaders of the congregations they served. This resource is still in use in some synods as of December 7, 2017.

¹¹² "Becoming a Vital First Call Congregation," DVD and Discussion Guide (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Ministry, Department of Vocation and Education), publication date unavailable.

¹¹³ Ibid.

In 2013, I observed this resource's use with first-call pastors at the annual core programming event sponsored by two of the three Ohio synods of the ELCA in Huron, Ohio. While the resource offers engaging instruction and thoughtful questions for discussion, several of the first-call pastors present had no congregational lay leaders present to benefit from it. Furthermore, a few of the pastors had already been in their congregational setting so long that the guidance for nurture and hospitality were received too late for them to use. Synod first-call coordinators may want to consider offering this resource to first-call congregation leaders a month or more prior to their new pastor's arrival. Even if no synod staff person were present to facilitate discussion, a congregation preparing to welcome a first-call pastor would benefit from access to the resource.

First Call Theological Education Models in Use

In an informal survey of colleagues who administer first call programming in their synods, it appears that the 1995 standards and guidelines continue to give direction to their work. One example is Rev. Gretchen Anderson of the Northwest Minnesota Synod.¹¹⁴ In 2013 she had been working for three years with two contiguous synods as a full-time coordinator for their first call education. Lilly Endowment's *Transition into Ministry* initiative funded her work there as well as regular gatherings for networking with other first call administrators across the denomination.

Anderson described a program that meets at least two of the 1995 guidelines:

- A three day-long core event annually that brings seminary professors to teach first-call pastors, synod staff, and other pastors who desire to attend
- Fall welcome day for all first-call pastors in their first three years
- Colleague groups meeting monthly with trained mentors
- A focus on spiritual direction and formation

¹¹⁴ Rev. Gretchen Anderson, November 18, 2013, e-mail message to author.

Additionally, Anderson described intentional and consistent communication between the synod staff and first-call pastors throughout the call process in order to build a healthy and supportive relationship.

First Call Theological Education in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, under the direction of Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Sarah Friesen-Carper, gathers its first-call pastors and their one-to-one mentors annually in the fall for extended time with the synod staff, who both teach and engage informally with participants. Topics for the gatherings have arisen from requests made by the first-call pastors themselves. These gatherings are intended to build and deepen relationship between the pastors and staff. The mentoring component is less prescribed—the mentor and first-call pastor determine the frequency and mode of meeting that is best for them. In the spring, a core event for all first-call pastors and mentors of the six synods of Region Six is held. A seminary or college faculty member is invited to teach at this event.

Reflecting on current culture and the need for community, Dr. Len Sweet suggested: “If the printing press took us away from the commons (meetings held in the public square for discussion and debate) to wide and shallow forms of engagement, then peer-to-peer learning and social media will take us back deep (in a relational dimension) again.”¹¹⁵ Emerging models of formation during the first years of ministry appear to be giving significant attention to support for colleagues through group formats rather than individual mentoring relationships.

¹¹⁵ Leonard I. Sweet. “Deep and Wide” (lecture delivered in Cambridge, UK, June 23, 2014).

An Emerging Model: Pastoral Colleague Group

New first-call programming models are beginning to emerge, perhaps owing to the fact that the ELCA guidelines and standards are now more than 20 years old. Two of these deserve particular note. The first is a mentor/colleague group ministry conceived and initiated by ELCA Pastor Paul E. Hoffman upon his retirement from congregational ministry three years ago. Hoffman's understanding of Christian ministry is shaped by the ancient catechumenate model of preparing persons for life in Christian community through a year of formation.¹¹⁶ Hoffman gathers with groups of up to six pastors in a geographical area six times during a calendar year. Although not specifically limited to first-call pastors, the majority of participants are in the first three to five years of public ministry.

I was welcomed to participate in a November 2017 colleague group gathering in Pennsylvania. Each meeting has a prescribed order of the day that remains the same throughout the year together. Hoffman leads the group in a time of "check-in." The sharing was deep and honest and participants listened intently. Following a brief break, the day continued with *Lectio Divina*, a prayerful and reflective reading of a scripture text for the Advent season approaching. This experience was followed by a time of prayer—each participant being prayed for by another while the rest laid hands upon the person for whom prayer was offered. Led by their facilitator, they also prayed for the one member who was absent due to her spouse's hospitalization and sent a picture of the chair where

¹¹⁶ Hoffman is the author of two books on the catechumenate, *Faith Forming Faith: Bringing New Christians to Baptism and Beyond* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012) and *Faith Shaping Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

she was envisioned to be seated with her cohort around it. She responded later with gratitude for their care for her. This time concluded with an embrace of peace among all.

Hoffman then introduced the teaching theme for the day—Spiritual Practices—one of 16 options he offers to these groups. Teaching continued after lunch. He taught as one who was more of a senior learner alongside junior learners than a self-proclaimed expert, regularly connecting practice to theology. Participants had been encouraged to bring their own favorite resources for prayer and spiritual practices, and most did so, sharing in the mutual teaching and learning.

Finally, the group spent time in analysis of a case study on a congregational issue. Following some closing discussion, the group dispersed, with most of them expressing intent to continue in a second year of this colleague gathering. This peer-to-peer style of learning offers access to theological teaching and reflection desired by the participants as well as a means of counteracting the isolation they may feel as pastors new to ministry. Community has formed, even between Hoffman's colleague groups. He will host a gathering in Seattle in early 2018 to give fifty pastoral colleagues the opportunity to meet one another and spend time learning together.

This mentoring experience offers several modalities for formation consistent with the qualities of millennial pastors and candidates outlined above: (1) personal relationship, (2) serious engagement through the spiritual practices of scripture reading and prayer, (3) teaching practices of interest chosen by the pastors themselves, and (4) exploration of the theological and emotional issues pastors face in everyday ministry. Hoffman's commitment to and giftedness for mentoring pastors newer to ministry is obvious. He currently leads more than ten of these groups across the country and hopes in

time to multiply this ministry in the years ahead, although the means of multiplication is not yet clear.

An Emerging Model: “Collaboration Around Leadership Learning”

In early 2017 a three-year grant was awarded to the ELCA from the Siebert Foundation to provide resources and leadership training to a cohort of first-call rostered ministers in the six synods of Wisconsin and the neighboring Great Lakes Synod in Michigan.¹¹⁷ The focus of this collaboration is: (1) financial literacy and wellness, (2) development of healthy and effective congregational relationships (focused on Family Systems Theory), and (3) learning tools and strategies for moving their congregations toward mission goals.

Beginning in February 2018, the 16-21 participants nominated by their bishops will meet quarterly (three times via teleconferencing and once at the fall first call annual conference) over the three-year period. The pastoral goals and resource needs identified by participants will give direction to the curriculum created by the teaching team. Coaching in ministry practices and financial wellness will be offered throughout the period. Participants will be able to apply to the Resourceful Servants Savings Matching Program to motivate them to reach their financial goals. Denominational leaders will also meet with participants in site visits to their geographical clusters annually to better understand the ministry contexts where they serve.

¹¹⁷ Connie Leann Seraphine, *Talking Points for First Call Rostered Ministers Nominated by their Bishops for a Three-year ELCA and Siebert Foundation Collaboration Project, “Collaboration around Leadership Learning (CALL)”* (Chicago: Office of the Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2017)

CALL will not yet have had its first meeting as of this dissertation's submission. However, its design and focus clearly address three of the most pressing issues first call pastors say they face.

Conclusion

For over twenty years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has demonstrated a commitment to assist first-call pastors and deacons in developing competency and confidence in ministry skills. While new needs have emerged, specifically developing financial wellness, other needs including finding time for spiritual growth, dealing with conflict, and equipping congregation members for ministry continue to top the list for pastors new to ministry.

Teaching and mentoring have been the primary methodologies for delivering first call theological education. Emerging ministries appear to offer new means of addressing pastors' needs for education and formation of pastoral role and identity. Section Three will explore the formation of Christian leaders' identity and make a case for new directions a synod might take in supporting its first-call pastors in developing resilience and a deepening sense of pastoral identity.

SECTION THREE:

THESIS

For the millennial-aged first-call pastor or deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America today, the first three to five years of parish ministry will critically impact their long-term engagement in the vocation. In considering the kind of support that can help rostered ministers thrive and develop resilience in their first calls (and encourage a longer tenure in congregational ministry), a look at the ways that God calls and forms leaders is in order. If it is true that increasing self-awareness and self-differentiation can build resilience among first-call pastors, are there examples from the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth that support such a premise? What insights might Jesus' own school of mission and ministry for the twelve disciples he called offer to these new ministers and those tasked with their support and continuing formation?

Part One of Section Three will offer a summary of Jesus of Nazareth's public ministry in the Gospel of Mark, exploring implications of Jesus' work with his disciples that offer insight into supporting pastors' growth self-awareness and resilience. Part Two of this section will make a case for the inclusion of Bowen Family Systems Theory in a first-call formation strategy.

Part One: A Study of Jesus's Discipleship of the Twelve in Mark's Gospel

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures offer many examples of faithful and effective leadership punctuated by flawed and destructive leadership—men and women exhibiting both of these over the course of their lives. In his book *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*, Reggie McNeal suggests that God

uses the following influences to shape spiritual leaders including Moses, David, Jesus, and Paul:

- the *culture* in which a leader is raised
- the leader's *call* to mission
- the *community*—people around a leader who shape and sustain them
- the leader's unique *communion* with God
- the leader's engagement in *conflict* with destructive forces in life and mission
- the *commonplace* of a leader's existence—the daily choices of living¹¹⁸

McNeal maintains that God employs these same influences to shape the hearts of spiritual leaders of every age, including today's rostered ministers. The life and ministry of Jesus is effectively and faithfully characterized by many different leadership styles and/or skills sets, including Robert K. Greenleaf's servant leadership¹¹⁹ and George Kladis' team-based ministry.¹²⁰ For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus on three of the influences McNeal has identified: the *culture*, the *community*, and the leader's engagement in *conflict* with destructive forces in life and mission to explore Jesus' public ministry and formation of his disciples as presented in the Gospel of Mark.

Why the Gospel of Mark? Although unsigned and undated, Mark is believed by most biblical scholars to be the first of the four gospels, composed sometime in the middle to late 60's CE.¹²¹ The audience is believed to have been Greek-speaking Gentiles

¹¹⁸ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xii-xiii.

¹¹⁹ Robert K. Greenleaf, "The Servant as Leader," accessed April 8, 2015 www.leadershiparlington.org/pdf/TheServantasLeader.pdf.

¹²⁰ George Kladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

¹²¹ David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and David Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 276, Kindle.

who had some basic understanding of the Old Testament, since Mark offers no explanation of the key Old Testament figures he references, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah, and Isaiah.¹²² The Gospel's purpose appears to have been encouragement for Christians who were experiencing ridicule and persecution, possibly from Judean as well as Roman authorities. Mark is also appropriate as the key resource for this research because of its focus on discipleship and mission.¹²³ Joel F. Williams writes, "Mark also wrote his Gospel to move his readers to follow Jesus and live up to Jesus' demands."¹²⁴ Finally, the Gospel of Mark is "a coherent narrative with a powerful impact" that readily draws hearers and readers into its "story world", in much the same way as a great novel or theatrical play does.¹²⁵ All who answer the call to be pastors and deacons in Christ's church are followers of Jesus; the Gospel of Mark is a means by which God through the Holy Spirit guides and encourages all Jesus-followers.

Culture

McNeal describes three distinct phenomena that together forged a *culture* ready for receipt and transmission of the "good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) First, the expansive Greco-Roman Empire brought with it a standardization of language that allowed commerce and cultural interaction to flourish. Second, the Roman

¹²² Waldie N. Neufeld, "Disciple-making Based on the Gospel of Mark: Lessons on Servant – Leadership" (PhD diss., Gonzaga University, 2009), 78, accessed February 27, 2015, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

¹²³ Rhoads et al, loc. 3370.

¹²⁴ Joel F. Williams, "Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, no. 153 (July-September 1996): 332-343, accessed April 1, 2015, http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/.

¹²⁵ Rhoads, et al, loc. 324.

road system linked cities and increased travel. But the third and possibly most important phenomenon was the collapse of traditional religion: “In the century before Christ and during the apostolic era of the first century, energy shifted away from the institutional expression of religion to the search for personal salvation.”¹²⁶ Gnosticism (a Greek philosophy built on the concepts of cosmology, reincarnation and secret knowledge leading to salvation) and Mithraism (a Persian cult also emphasizing secret knowledge and high personal morality) were both on the rise, while Judaism had become fractured into several groups, including the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. McNeal notes:

The missional aspect of Judaism suffered from neglect in the years preceding Jesus’ arrival. The Sadducees had tied their fortunes to political favor with Rome. The Essenes had devised an exit strategy from the current age, based on an end-of-the-world scenario. The Pharisees had reduced the faith to lifeless legalism.¹²⁷

It was in and to this culture that John the Baptist eagerly proclaimed Jesus’ arrival and mission. (Mark 1:7-8) The parallels between the expanding cultural context into which Jesus was called and today’s North American cyber-culture and post-Christian religious milieu in which today’s first-call pastors begin their ministry cannot be ignored.

Community

Mark 1:14 - 8:26 comprises the center of Mark’s Gospel and presents the core plot.¹²⁸ Jesus called his first disciples: Simon, Andrew, James and John. (Mark 1:16-20) These men were the first identified members of Jesus’ *community*—the people who

¹²⁶ McNeal, 52.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹²⁸ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 27.

would be shaped and sustained by Jesus and would shape and sustain him as well. Jesus' call of Levi showed "that Jesus joins to himself not only upright persons like Peter, Andrew, James and John, but also those like Levi who are disreputable."¹²⁹ Later, he appointed seven more: Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot.¹³⁰ The four, and later the twelve, accompanied Jesus as he taught, preached, healed, and cast demons out of people. Some of them had witnessed the astonishment that listeners in Capernaum experienced as he taught with authority (Mark 1:21-22). They became aware of the opposition Jesus began to encounter from religious and political authorities, and even his own family. (Mark 3:20-25). When his family attempted to interrupt his ministry, Jesus established a clear boundary for them and for himself. He was not cutting emotional ties; however, the family relationship must serve the mission.¹³¹

Initially, Mark portrays the disciples in a very favorable light, as loyal and committed. They willingly carried out the mission Jesus gave them: preaching, teaching, healing and casting out demons (Mark 6:6b-13). Yet, the disciples' major challenge with Jesus soon becomes glaringly evident: they failed to comprehend his identity, his mission, and the nature of their discipleship to him. Jesus' parable of the Sower is the first example of the disciples' confusion; in response to their confusion Jesus established a pattern of offering further instruction (Mark 4:1-34). But no sooner had he finished teaching than the disciples revealed their lack of faith, panicking when caught with Jesus

¹²⁹ Mark 2:14; McNeal, 92.

¹³⁰ Mark 3:13-19. In Mark 3:14, Jesus named the twelve "apostles," which would identify them as being sent out by Jesus. However, nearly every other reference to the Twelve is "disciples."

¹³¹ McNeal, 56.

in a storm upon the Sea of Galilee. Jesus seemed incredulous at their fear: “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40) Having witnessed Jesus’ authority and power, they still wrestled with fear and lack of understanding.

Mark, the narrator, also addresses the disciples’ failure to comprehend through the Gospel’s literary structure. In chapters 5 and 7, persons who approach Jesus for help are presented as people who have overcome fear and respond with faith, including the Gerasene demoniac and Jairus, whose daughter is gravely ill (Mark 5:1-20), as well as the woman with the hemorrhage of blood (Mark 5:21-34) and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Mark contrasts these minor yet faith-filled characters with the disciples, who, at this point in the narrative, increasingly lack courage and faith and fail to understand Jesus’ identity and the nature of his mission. There is a noticeable increase in tension between Jesus and his disciples throughout the events recorded in chapters 6 and 8.

Conflict

Although he withstood temptation from Satan in the wilderness, and continually dealt with his disciples’ confusion, it is the authorities with whom Jesus experienced the most sustained *conflict* throughout his ministry. The scribes and Pharisees contended with Jesus early in his ministry (Mark 2:1-11, 18-20, 23-28). At that point, Mark notes that the Pharisees began plotting with the Herodians on how they might destroy Jesus (Mark 3:1-6). The resistance seemed to quiet for a time, only to emerge again later as the Sadducees and the chief priests joined the others who had opposed Jesus and begun plotting against him (Mark 7:1-12; 10:2-9; 11:27-33; 12:13-40).

Yet Satan and the human forces arrayed against Jesus were not the sum total of opposition Jesus faced. His mission on earth was to disarm the power of sin—humanity’s

age-old rebellion against God. He disarmed sin's power by choosing against it. In using his divine authority to heal the sick and broken rather than to attend to his own needs, he chose God's way over humanity's self-serving ways. In enduring the suffering and shame of the cross, he faced humanity's rejection of God's divine intervention into the world. In the resurrection, God spoke the eternal yes to Jesus and humanity's rejection of him (Mark 14:1-16:8). In Jesus, the kingdom of God with its healing and grace, had indeed come near to humankind and all creation.

How does Mark characterize Jesus' approach to life and to people? What are Jesus' identifiable personality traits? Jack Dean Kingsbury makes the following observations:

- toward his mission: Jesus is authoritative (1:10)
- toward God: Jesus loves God with heart, soul, mind and strength (12:29-30)
- toward himself: Jesus functions with integrity, self-awareness (6:4, 31; 9:40)
- toward the disciples: faithful to their formation, even though they frustrate him (4:1-40, 5:1-34, 7:24-30)
- toward the Jewish crowd: compassionate (6:34; 8:2)
- toward the religious authorities: confrontational (7:1-13)
- toward his death: self-giving and serving (10:45)¹³²

Chapter by chapter, story after story, there is a true integrity to Jesus. Jesus understood the emotional systems into which his mission led him and he functioned with clarity of purpose and intention.

A Deeper Look: Mark 6 and 8

There are two clusters of events that shed light on the multi-faceted relationship Jesus had with his disciples in the Gospel of Mark. The first cluster is recorded in chapter 6, as Jesus and his disciples were traveling in the Galilean region of Israel, ostensibly

¹³² Kingsbury, 7-8.

among Jewish people. This section of the Gospel begins with Jesus preaching in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth on the Sabbath. Although many were astounded by his teaching, they despised him—certain that no one born in their little village could speak and act with such authority. Their unbelief rendered them unable to receive Jesus’ deeds of power, except that a few were healed (6:1-6).

Jesus then sent the twelve out two by two to begin their own mission work (6:6b-13). Earlier he had appointed them “to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have the authority to cast out demons.” (3:14-25) In chapter 6, he fully equipped them for their work, giving them clear instructions about what they are to carry with them and how they are to behave among those who will welcome them and others who will not. Mark reports that they proclaimed the call to repentance as Jesus did in 1:15, and “cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them”(6:13). Mark’s narrator inserts the news of John the Baptist’s death here in what seems like an interruption (6:14-29). Yet the story of Herod’s beheading of John functions along with Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth to remind the hearer/reader that there are powers opposing the Gospel and those who declare it even to the death. Those who proclaim the good news risk their very lives to do so.

When the disciples returned from their mission with stories of teaching, exorcisms, and healing, Jesus, aware of the physical and emotional toll such ministry exacted, led them away by boat to a deserted place where they might rest. But Mark reports that their departure did not go undetected and when they arrived at the shore, they found a great crowd there waiting for them (6:30-44). Although he had traveled there for respite, Jesus had compassion on those who came looking for him “because they were

like sheep without a shepherd,” an “echo of a common image of aimlessness from the Hebrew Bible.”¹³³ And so Jesus taught them.

After some time passed the disciples urged Jesus to send the people away so that they could find food in nearby towns. Instead, Jesus told them, “You give them something to eat.” Thinking he meant that they should go and buy food for the crowd, they protested that they did not have the money to do so. But Jesus had something else in mind. After reporting the bread and fish they had to Jesus, they watched as he took the loaves and fish, looked up to heaven, broke the five loaves, divided the two fish and then gave it all to them to distribute. The verbs *took*, *blessed*, *broke*, and *gave* are readily recognizable as the language employed in the Last Supper (Mark 14:22-24). Not only did everyone eat that day, but there was also over twelve times as much left over.

Aware of his own need for communion with God, Jesus immediately sent the disciples off by boat to Bethsaida, dismissed the crowds, and went up the mountain to pray. In the early hours of the morning, Jesus strode across the water to meet the disciples on the sea. But the disciples, seeing him, were terrified that he was a ghost. He climbed into the boat, assuring them that it was he. Mark as narrator draws the incident to a close with stinging commentary: “They were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (6:51-52). The phrase “their hearts were hardened” brings to mind the Pharaoh of Exodus—his heart was also characterized as “hardened” after nearly all of the ten plagues. However, in Exodus, the Lord is identified

¹³³ See 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 29.

as the one who hardens Pharaoh's heart.¹³⁴ Readers of Mark are left to wonder if Jesus' disciples or the Lord are responsible for their "heart condition."

In Mark 8:1-10, another great crowd was gathered, but now Jesus and the disciples were in the Decapolis region among Gentiles. There are several similarities between the feeding of the multitudes in Mark 6 and Mark 8. Jesus' compassion for them is because of their hunger, a more universal human issue than the "aimlessness" he saw in the Jewish crowd.¹³⁵ Again, Jesus employed the disciples' assistance in the miraculous feeding. Jesus and the disciples then departed immediately, this time together in the boat.

In this third scene on the sea, Jesus debriefed the disciples (8:14-21). They were anxious because they had only one loaf of bread with them. Had they forgotten what Jesus can do with bread? Jesus was again struck by their lack of understanding of his identity, the scope of his power and authority, and the trajectory of his mission.

The final section of the eighth chapter is pivotal to the entire Markan narrative (8:37-28). Jesus looked to the disciples to serve as a feedback loop of sorts as he asked, "Who do people say that I am?" They answered John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets. Then when asked who *they* say Jesus was, Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Peter grasped one dimension of Jesus' identity, that he was the promised Savior and Deliverer of the Jewish people. But Peter did not yet comprehend that Jesus was the Son of God. When Jesus spoke of his suffering, death, and resurrection, Peter's failure to comprehend deepened. He attempted to silence Jesus, but Jesus silenced him,

¹³⁴ Exodus 9:12, 10:20, 10:27 and 11:10.

¹³⁵ Malbon, 36.

“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

As Jesus invested himself in his disciples and endowed them with his authority, he intended that they would employ this authority and share more fully in his ministry. However, when commanded to feed the multitude in John 6, they could not draw the connection between the power they had been given over demons and illness and the ability to multiply the few loaves and fishes they had. Even after witnessing Jesus do this with the Jewish crowd, they seemed clueless when faced later with the smaller Gentile crowd. Now, as he contemplated his death and his departure from them, “Jesus’ struggle with them is to lead them to overcome their incomprehension lest it undermine their commitment to him.”¹³⁶

Implications

What, if any, implications can be drawn from the influences that shaped Jesus for his ministry? How does Jesus’ ministry with his disciples offer insight into increasing self-awareness and resilience in first-call pastors?

Jesus’ ministry with his disciples takes seriously the influences of *culture, call, community, communion, conflict and the commonplace* with the end goal that his disciples would continue the mission he began. Jesus and the disciples grew into a learning community in which he taught them how to exegete their culture and proclaim the Good News within it. He was a living example of what it means to live committed to God’s call on one’s life. They formed community secure enough for each to share their hearts and their struggle without fear of being rejected. The disciples observed Jesus

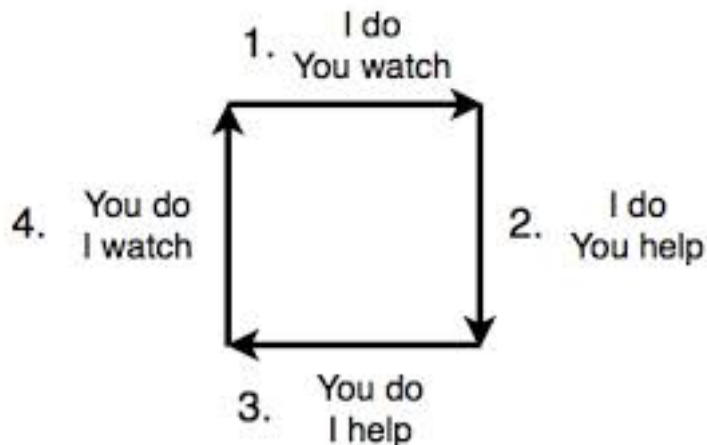
¹³⁶ Kingsbury, 102.

before and after communion with God, and likely learned to long for it and prioritize just as Jesus did. They learned not to abandon one another in the face of conflict; when the Pharisees criticized the disciples to Jesus, he stood by their actions and in the gap between them. And day by day over the span of three years, the commonplace of the disciples' words, deeds, and thinking became more and more aligned with divine things, the things of God.

The Gospel of Mark offers the opportunity to observe several key principles in Jesus' forming of his disciples:

- Jesus keeps the mission of God in front of him at all times, so that there is clarity of purpose even in the face of conflict or confusion
- Jesus forms deep community with his disciples, while remaining clear about his own identity as the Son of God
- Jesus employs peer-to-peer learning in his formation of the twelve disciples; they learn in community with one another
- Jesus recognizes emotional processes in people and groups and manages his own emotions when tired, challenged or threatened.
- Jesus teaches and leads, but does not over-function in those roles. He uses the principle of the leadership square to equip his disciples-a learning community-so that they develop the skills to continue the mission when he is no longer with them in person¹³⁷

Figure 3.1 The Leadership Square



¹³⁷ The Leadership Square originated in the field of education, and was adopted by Christian communities to describe the process of discipling. It is referenced so frequently that its source cannot be accurately determined.

The impact of inspired and experienced teaching joined to vital and effective peer-to-peer learning communities with skilled mentors for those beginning public ministries in an ever-changing culture cannot be overestimated. The faith communities to which they have been called may look and behave differently than those their seminary education prepared them to lead. Their planning of worship and style of preaching, or their commitment to pastoral care, may be confusing or even disruptive, to the point of conflict. They must discover and develop relationships beyond the congregation for companionship and consolation. While it is tempting to draw comparisons between Jesus' discipleship of the twelve and seminary education, in some respects the first three years of public ministry bear a far greater likeness to Jesus' formation of his disciples for ministry than seminary or contextual education ever can.

As our world, our culture, and our church changes, we who serve the ELCA as synod staff are in a unique position to continually discern how best to support those whom God is calling to ministry.

**Part Two:
Bowen Family Systems Theory as a Resource for Pastoral Formation**

Pastors and deacons are best able to order their lives around God's call to ministry when they bring their healthiest selves to that call. The Wholeness Wheel has been recommended across the ELCA as a tool for evaluating spiritual, social/interpersonal, emotional, physical, financial, vocational, and intellectual well-being since 1997.¹³⁸ A new leader's awareness of strengths, limitations, emotions, and appropriate boundaries develops most effectively when he is connected to others who are working at developing

¹³⁸ See Appendix, p. 115 for an illustration of the ELCA Wholeness Wheel.

that same awareness. Recognizing emotional systems and how to function best in them is a skill we acquire by practicing skills of observation and testing our hypotheses with others who are practicing them too.

I suggest that Bowen Family Systems Theory and its related family of origin work should be considered an integral component of a strategy for pastoral formation for first call clergy. Bowen Family Systems Theory, sometimes called “systems theory,” is a comprehensive way to think about human behavior formulated by Dr. Murray Bowen (1913-1990). His theory is based upon his observations as a psychiatrist working with schizophrenic patients and their families. Bowen found the highly subjective diagnostic method for mental health patients lacking because of its inability to be replicated from one examiner to another. Bowen and his colleagues observed many families living and functioning together in order to better understand the behavior of the family unit, which led to him to formulate the theory and its eight concepts for understanding family functioning.¹³⁹

As Bowen was making a case for understanding human behavior from a systems, rather than a linear or causal, approach, other disciplines, including physics and chemistry, were beginning to navigate similar shifts. Newtonian science was being challenged by a more relational, systems-oriented quantum physics. Non-mechanistic models were beginning to be replaced by more holistic, dynamic ones.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 3.

¹⁴⁰ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 10.

Bowen made a conscious decision not to apply his theory to more subjective disciplines like theology. He did believe, however, that the eight concepts were so objective, that their presence and impact could be identified among any group of people who shared a common purpose. Bowen Theory is based on the premise that the family (or any group functioning with a common purpose) is the emotional unit rather than any one individual in the family (or group). Roberta Gilbert reflects on the uniqueness of this lens on human behavior: “Until Bowen Theory came along, most people had little or no idea about how to think about those automatic emotional processes of groups, so powerful in all of our lives.”¹⁴¹ Although the emotional processes to which Gilbert refers are automatic in a sense, the thrust of the theory is the transformative impact of observing and thoughtfully choosing how to act within one’s relationships, rather than reacting without benefit of reflection.

Bowen argued that the very nature of a system is that each of its individual parts has an impact on the functioning of the system. A leader plays a significant role in the function of the system, and others in the system will likewise continually impact the leader. The system develops patterns of behavior in an effort to remain in some sense of balance, or homeostasis. One example of homeostasis that Bowen observed was that when one member of a family began to function with greater thoughtfulness and maturity, other members of the family might act with less maturity in an unconscious effort to re-establish the balance they had known before. Gilbert summarizes the aim of systems thinking: Systems thinking strives to look at the emotional process going on in

¹⁴¹ Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Lake Frederick, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 2.

people, while never losing sight of the facts of a given situation. Rather than trying for control or blaming the other, one tries always to better manage oneself and one's own contribution to the situation."¹⁴²

Bowen Theory is composed of eight interlocking and inter-related concepts:

- 1) The nuclear family is the emotional unit, as noted above;
- 2) Differentiation of self is "the ability to be aware of one's self and the other's self at the same time"¹⁴³ which leads to clarity about boundaries, responsibilities and goals;
- 3) Triangles are the smallest basic unit of an emotional system, "the way people stabilize their relationships by externalizing their anxiety onto someone or something"¹⁴⁴;
- 4) Emotional cut-off is the natural reaction of separating from family members or others with whom relationship is difficult;
- 5) Family Projection Process is "the process through which parents' poor emotional boundaries impair children"¹⁴⁵;
- 6) Multi-generational Transmission Process is the tendency for patterns of behavior to repeat from one generation to another in a family;
- 7) Sibling Position, a concept adopted from Walter Toman's work, maintains that relationships between siblings and parents create expectations and dynamics which then shape one's interactions beyond the family;
- 8) Emotional Process in Society is Bowen's assertion that there was "growing evidence that the emotional problem in society was similar to the emotional problem in the family."¹⁴⁶

Bowen theory identifies "differentiation of self" as the "cornerstone concept," because it is the only concept that considers the characteristics of the individual apart from the rest of the family or group. Bowen conceptualized differentiation of self as

¹⁴² Ibid., 2.

¹⁴³ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1993), 66.

¹⁴⁴ Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 29.

¹⁴⁵ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Aronson, 1989), 379.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 386.

measured on a scale similar to an emotional maturity scale, ranging from the lowest possible level of differentiation (no self–total fusion with another) to complete differentiation. He maintained that people who function in the lower half of the scale live in a “feeling” controlled world with little or no objectivity. Moving toward greater differentiation means moving toward the capacity to differentiate between feelings and objective reality.¹⁴⁷ Even though this concept is focused on the individual, the level of differentiation depends on how fused a person was in their family relationships. Differentiation of self has a direct connection to stress and resilience: “lower scale people are more vulnerable to stress and, for them, recovery from symptoms can be slow or impossible while higher scale people tend to recover rapidly.”¹⁴⁸ No value judgement should be placed on a person’s position on the scale; it is solely intended to help understand functioning.

In addition to differentiation of self, which has variability, i.e. the capacity for increase or decrease, anxiety is a second variable important to Bowen theory. Anxiety is understood as the way an organism reacts to a real or perceived threat. Anxiety can be chronic or acute. Increased anxiety causes an organism to react to protect itself. When a family or group gets more anxious, people will do what they can to become more comfortable again. This can result in greater fusion or enmeshment, in projection of blame, or in extreme cases, emotional cut-off. Incidentally, each of these consequences can be recognized in events and episodes in congregations’ lives as well as those of families.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 472-474.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 472.

Because Bowen theory is directed to the study of human behavior, it has been applied across a broad spectrum of vocations, disciplines, and social phenomena, including psychoanalytic and feminist theories and business and education applications. White and Bregman argue that it is one of the 20th and 21st centuries' most significant social-behavioral theories.¹⁴⁹

Rabbi and psychotherapist Edwin H. Friedman studied Bowen Theory, drawing connections both to his ministry within his synagogue and the care of clergy in his counseling practice. He recognized that religious communities have emotional systems similar to a family. He connected the emotional growth and maturity of the religious leaders whom he counseled to their capacity for differentiation of self.

Friedman applied a systems approach to congregational leadership in his book, *Generation to Generation*, maintaining that clergy “are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock: the families within our congregation, our congregations, and our own.”¹⁵⁰ The presence and function of triangles and differentiation of self in the lives of pastoral leaders became his primary loci of study. Galindo, Gilbert, Marcuson, Richardson, and Steinke are a few of the scholars who have continued to apply systems theory to pastoral leadership and congregational life.¹⁵¹

As a comprehensive theory of human behavior and relationships, systems theory offers a means of “thinking in action” about the full scope of relational interaction in

¹⁴⁹ Charles White, preface to *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, eds. Ona Cohen Bregman and Charles White (New York: Routledge, 2011), xv.

¹⁵⁰ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 1.

¹⁵¹ See the bibliography for these authors and texts.

pastoral ministry. Preaching, teaching, committee work, pastoral care, and staff supervision—how one lives into pastoral identity in all its facets can all be addressed by it. Second, systems theory maintains that all persons, including pastors, bring their own emotional system into their relationship with others. A person who is growing in awareness of her own emotional system is better equipped to bring the best she can be at the moment into every relationship in which she functions. She becomes increasingly aware of her emotional system by exploring her relationships within her family of origin and working toward self-differentiation in her family relationships, striking a balance somewhere between cut-off from them and fusion with them.

While all eight concepts work together in the theory, pastors who have found systems theory important for their work of ministry emphasize four concepts as having brought clarity to their own self-understanding and to their relationships within the congregations they serve. They include: differentiation of self, triangles, multigenerational transmission, and sibling position.¹⁵² Differentiation of self may have the most crucial implications for pastoral leadership, both for the pastor and the faith community. The more self-defined a leader can become, the more she will focus upon:

- self, not others
- strength, not weakness
- process, not content
- challenge, not comfort
- integrity, not unity
- system, not symptom
- direction, not condition¹⁵³

¹⁵² Israel Galindo and Betty Pugh Mills, “Long-tenured Ministry and Systems Theory: Bowen Systems Theory as a Resource for the Long Haul,” *Review and Expositor* 1 no. 3 (2016), 345. Accessed December 9, 2017.

¹⁵³ Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*, 109.

In short, the more self-defined a leader is, the better she will lead others. The more self-differentiated a leader is, the less anxious he will be, even when others around him are anxious. When people are intensely anxious or fearful, they tend to be more reactive in their thinking, resulting in less resilient behavior. Individuals who have higher levels of self-differentiation tend to be more resilient and develop even greater resilience in the face of anxiety or trauma.

In a 2009 report, Livingston and a team of colleagues summarized a pastoral formation process designed for seminarians which “focuses on the ways in which unconscious patterns from the core relationships in one’s childhood get replicated in the interpersonal relationships between a pastor and a congregation.”¹⁵⁴ The Pastoral Formation Program has been deemed a “valuable opportunity for pastoral development and a sound investment by any candidate and denominational body in building an emotionally and psychologically sound minister who can lead in a faithful and healthy manner.”¹⁵⁵

For 22 years, Dr. Roberta Gilbert, one of Dr. Bowen’s students at the Georgetown Family Center (now the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family), taught the “Extraordinary Leadership Seminar”—a three-year course for clergy consisting of monthly lectures and group and individual coaching. Comments on the seminar’s website include: “The work in family systems theory has given me hope of staying in my call”

¹⁵⁴ Livingston, et al, 1.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.

and “My congregation is a different congregation. Chaos and bickering has disappeared and people are positively engaged in different ministries.”¹⁵⁶

The goal of these programs and others like them across the country is to assist clergy in learning to function more and more from an emotionally healthy and thoughtful stance, rather than a reactive, emotional one. Pastors and the churches they serve function more faithfully and effectively when they grow in self-differentiation and face anxiety and conflict, remaining just a little less anxious than those around them.

The practice of “thinking” systems can offer profound benefits to a first call rostered minister and, through his leadership, to the congregation's lay leaders and membership. When a deacon is able to manage anxiety over his personal financial circumstances, his leadership will be more confident and consistent. When a pastor learns how to respond calmly when she is faced with the need to prepare a sermon in five minutes, or deal with resistance from congregation members, both the pastor and the congregation reap the rewards. When a deacon grows in his ability to listen reflectively to a complaint and keep the distress he feels internally from clouding or shutting down his reasoning, both he and the congregation will be healthier and stronger for it. Pastors who grow in their understanding of emotional systems will learn to demonstrate flexibility and creative thinking. Their own emotions in just a little more control, they can effectively direct attention to concerns of greater importance and persevere in challenging tasks both at home and in the congregation, contributing to the development of greater resilience.

A congregation whose pastor learns to think about the emotional systems of the congregation may expect to see the congregation's emotional and spiritual maturity grow

¹⁵⁶ Center for the Study of Human Systems, accessed December 9, 2017, <http://www.hssystem.org/index.html>.

as well. The Rev. Peter Scazzero argues through study of scripture, the witness of Christians throughout the ages, and contemporary church experience that a pastor's emotional and spiritual maturity are inseparable.¹⁵⁷ As a pastor's maturity in these arenas deepens, the congregation's maturity and resilience can deepen as well.

A congregation whose deacon demonstrates healthy conversations and conflict management to its leaders can grow in its capacity to facilitate healthy conversations among people who disagree with one another. Together, they learn, as Crystal Downing writes, to re(sign) truth by positioning themselves "on the edge," as if on the edge of a coin. "A position on the edge looks to both past and future, to tradition and change."¹⁵⁸ This position respects persons who align themselves on either side of an issue and creates the possibility for safe space in which conflicted parties can be heard.

As a first call minister learns to manage her own emotions and recognize when she is over-functioning or under-functioning in her personal and professional life, she is likely to weather the joys and challenges of her first call with greater hope. Hope for the present and future of a pastor's relationship with a congregation may result in a longer tenure in the first call, and a greater probability of continuing in pastoral ministry well past the five to ten-year mark.

Other Voices

While many respected scholars and pastoral leaders make a convincing case for a relationship between systems theory and the development of pastoral leadership and

¹⁵⁷ Peter Scazzero with Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 19.

¹⁵⁸ Crystal L. Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012), Kindle Location 519.

resilience, “thinking systems” and working on one’s self-differentiation is not the “quick fix” that many desire in the heat of conflict or the crushing burden of adversity.¹⁵⁹ I have been a student of Steinke’s work since 1998, and have been engaged in studying systems theory with others for nearly ten years, but only in the last four years has systems theory become the lens through which I observe my behavior and work toward greater differentiation of self. This kind of disciplined engagement without immediate reward or solutions may not be appealing to new rostered leaders.

Galindo and Mills asked this question of the long-tenured pastors in their study and one noted:

They (some clergy) seem to be great at talking about dysfunctional systems and dysfunctional people and all the family issues affecting someone else, but do not take much responsibility for their own behavior. This is the most challenging part of the theory for me. What is my responsibility in all this? How has my own reactivity contributed to a problem? How can I act in a more mature fashion? It may be possible for young clergy to ask those questions of themselves if they have some emotional maturity already. I did not have the maturity or clarity of self as a young clergy.¹⁶⁰

Bowen Theory is challenging precisely because the focus is ultimately on changing self, rather than working to change the system. Another participant suggested:

Some understanding of the theory might be helpful to younger clergy, though a deeper understanding is gained through working the theory and observing it over time...I believe it helped me to avoid early burnout. It makes sense that it could help young clergy to weather the storms of ministry with resilience.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Mark Gregory Reamer, “Breaking New Ground: Pastoral Leadership in the Roman Catholic Church Through the Lens of Bowen Systems Theory,” (DMin diss., Divinity School of Duke University, 2014), 53.

¹⁶⁰ Galindo and Mills, 356.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 356-357.

Bowen Theory has received criticism because of its perceived male-defined terminology and rational objectivity, denying attention to emotions that are generally attributed to the feminine dimension of humanity.¹⁶² While some feminist therapists embrace Bowenian therapy, some accuse him and other male family therapy pioneers of placing too much emphasis on the mother's contribution to symptom development in children.¹⁶³ These and other related diagnostic concerns appear to have far more to do with professional counseling, and stand beyond the scope of family system's possible use with first call pastors.

Another valid concern is the expense of doing systems theory with clergy. Currently the closest available course in systems theory meets monthly in the Columbus, Ohio area and online; annual tuition is \$900, roughly \$100 per six-hour session. Included is in-depth teaching on the concepts and their application to pastoral leadership and small group family of origin work with a highly trained coach. But this expense and the travel involved would be prohibitive for nearly all new pastors and deacons in our synod.

A local pathway that offers at least some access to systems theory with the potential for greater pastoral resilience is a worthy effort for the sake of first call pastors. In fact, candidates for first call may consider a synod who offers such a pathway a more desirable place to begin their public ministry.

¹⁶² Reamer, 53.

¹⁶³ Jenny Brown, "Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice: Illustration and Critique," accessed December 31, 2017, http://www.thefsi.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Bowen-Family-Systems-Theory-and-Practice_Illustration-and-Critique.pdf.

Conclusion

Jesus' sense of self and his formation of the twelve disciples for ministry offer significant guidance for those who would support first call pastors and assist with continued pastoral formation. Family Systems theory dovetails deftly with Jesus' focus on mission and his teaching and mentoring of the twelve. The opportunity to grow in systems theory and continue work on one's family of origin offers a proven means of learning how to manage oneself within the emotional system of the congregation. Because it fosters growing emotional maturity, it also deepens spiritual maturity. As a pastor matures emotionally and spiritually, the opportunity exists for the congregation to do so as well.

In a new rostered minister's journey, "great things are at stake: the vocational future of an individual leader, the communal future of a congregation of believers, and the handing on of the faith from one generation to the next."¹⁶⁴ We owe it to these ministers and the congregations who call them to pursue all that will help to bless them on the journey.

¹⁶⁴ Wind and Wood, 7.

SECTION FOUR: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact, *Forming Resilient Rostered Ministers*, is a strategy designed to guide the efforts of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod–ELCA to support first-call pastors and deacons in developing resilience for ministry. The focus of the strategy will be ministry with and for first call rostered ministers in this synod, the majority of whom are under the age of 35 when they begin. This strategy takes into account the unique identity of the synod, its geographical size, as well as the number and distribution of congregations therein. That being said, other synods may find value in some or all of this strategy’s general principles.

The artifact has six sections:

- 1) An overview of the educational theory upon which the strategy is based
- 2) A model for the annual gathering, intended to foster foundational relationship with synod staff
- 3) A model for a pastoral colleague group, with a sample curriculum for a one day retreat and plan for its implementation
- 4) An outline of a monthly online conversation connecting concepts of systems thinking and lectionary gospel readings designed for pastors to grow in awareness of their function in the congregation as an emotional system
- 5) Information for first call pastors to achieve greater financial acuity and confidence by taking advantage of the ELCA initiative, “Resourceful Servants”
- 6) A plan for evaluation of the strategy

SECTION FIVE:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS

Artifact Description: *Forming Resilient Rostered Ministers* is a strategy designed to guide the staff of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod–ELCA to support its first-call pastors during their first three years of ministry. The focus of the strategy is the development of confidence and resilience in the pastors who begin their public ministry in this synod.

Goals and Strategies: The ultimate goal for *Forming Resilient Rostered Ministers* is that the synod’s first-call pastors and deacons will experience meaningful support as they navigate the first three years of ministry, deepening their sense of call and resulting in greater overall emotional health for the pastors and the congregations they serve. The strategy is to build and deepen relationships and offer meaningful ongoing support through an annual 24-hour retreat with the Bishop and staff, a bi-monthly pastoral colleague group meeting with a skilled facilitator/senior learner, and monthly hour-long discussions on aspects of family systems that can be helpful to the new pastoral leader.

Audience: The audience for whom this artifact is designed is the Bishop and staff of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod–ELCA, who may choose to use some or all of this strategy with persons called to served their first three years as pastors and deacons.

Artifact Scope and Content: The scope and content of the strategy will be ministry for and with the first call pastors and deacons of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod. The content will be ordered in sequence of the events as they will be

scheduled, with a curriculum component for the fall retreat, one representative session of the pastoral colleague group, and one representative session of the online event offered via monthly ZOOM Cloud Meetings.

Artifact Budget: The annual synod budget for the strategy is projected as follows for each of the next three program years:

• Annual Retreat:	\$1,500.00
• Share of Transportation Costs for Colleague Leader:	3,000.00
• Subscription to Zoom Cloud Meetings	1,800.00
• Administrative Costs	<u>500.00</u>
Total	\$6,800.00

Technical Skills Required to Maintain the Artifact: The following skills are necessary for the maintenance of this artifact: 1) Effective oral and written communication skills; 2) recruitment of leadership for the pastoral colleague group to be provided by an experienced and committed pastoral leader, preferably from another synod; 3) regular study of scripture, particularly the Revised Common Lectionary texts assigned for weekly worship and preaching; 3) continued engagement with family systems theory, particularly as it relates to leadership in congregational settings; and 4) administrative support for event planning.

SECTION SIX:

POSTSCRIPT

When I began to study the experiences of first call pastors and examine attrition rates, both Dr. Sweet and my dissertation advisor Dr. Deborah Loyd told me that Doctor of Ministry students usually choose a ministry problem that somehow connects to their own experience. Truer words could not have been spoken.

I began public ministry at the age of 25 in a mid-sized Midwest city where there had been only one other Lutheran clergywoman in a solo pastor position prior to my arrival. The congregation to which I had been called had begun to decline in membership as its attendees and members left the immediate racially and economically transitioning neighborhood for others to the north and west. In fact, when the bishop at that time consulted with me regarding the call, he stated clearly that I would not be held responsible if the congregation continued to decline, but would be recognized as the reason for any improvement in its overall health and strength.

I was called to preach the Word of God and celebrate the Sacraments among people whom I grew to love very quickly. I was welcomed into their homes and lives, especially the lives of those who weathered tragic losses. An excellent internship experience, Clinical Pastoral Education, and part-time employment as a hospital chaplain intern had prepared me well for the care needed in the face of illnesses, catastrophic injuries, deaths, and other experiences of loss that members faced. But nothing had prepared me for the lack of stewardship education I found or the blatant racism that emerged among some in the congregation as a team of members and I began summer programming with neighborhood children. Nothing had prepared me for the discovery

that the beloved congregational treasurer had embezzled several thousand dollars from the congregation or the discovery that the previous pastor had falsified reports of theft to justify moving out of the parsonage. Nothing prepared me for the members who viewed my age, marital status (single at that time), and lack of experience in child-rearing as disqualifying factors for my ministry with them—I lacked maturity in the ways in which they measured it. When these events all came to a head in my third year of ministry, I began to seriously consider leaving ordained ministry. I scoured the newspaper for alternative employment opportunities, but soon realized that a Master of Divinity degree was perceived as a focused professional degree that did not readily translate into other types of work. There were moments when, looking across the parking lot of the church at the local drug store and the fast food establishment, I had to talk myself out of walking there to get an employment application.

It was at these times of crisis when two specific means of support intervened to provide the support I needed to persevere. One was the leader of my pastoral colleague group, assigned to me by the synod, an experienced pastor who listened, encouraged, offered specific advice when warranted, and held me in prayer. The other was a group of experienced pastors who welcomed me to their monthly meetings, where I further developed my pastoral identity through group analysis of case studies we took turns presenting. Had I not had these two distinct forms of support at that point in my career, I am convinced that I would be working in some other vocation today.

Each of these means of support was unique and each contributed to my developing resilience in the face of the challenges I encountered in the congregation. My senior pastoral colleague was intentional in listening, but never tried to “fix” me or my

situation. He directed me toward a woman who could assist the congregation through the audit that was required—helpful because I had no certified public accountants within my congregation or small circle of acquaintances. He helped me hear myself think through possible responses but stopped short of telling me what I should do.

The case study group had formed around an Academy of Parish Clergy model. With them, I became more adept at the practice of listening to a critical incident and untangling the theological, psycho-social, and emotional threads therein. We were not applying Bowen Family Systems thinking, but the practice of identifying these dimensions of an incident laid a foundation for me to use later as I began to study the work of Peter Steinke and later, Dr. Bowen and Rabbi Friedman.

This course of study, research, and proposed strategy are but the latest steps in a humble effort to “pay it forward,” begun in my own work as a mentor to two groups of first call pastors and to an individual pastor at present. I believe that when God calls persons into ministry, a divine promise of support for their vocation is incarnated in the synod leaders and colleagues who walk alongside them. They are pastors and deacons of promise in our synod—our land of promise. May we keep faithfully nurturing them along the way.

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APPENDIX

**Table 1.1 Ten-Year Tracking of Ordained Pastors
with a Focus on Those 30 and Younger at Ordination 1988-2003¹⁶⁵**

Year of Ordination	Total Number Ordained	30 years old or younger at Ordination	Those 30 years or younger at Ordination in Congregational Ministry 10 years later
1988	398	190	130
1993	323	98	73
1998	360	115	82
2003	308	85	57

Table 1.2 Status of ELCA Applicants for Candidacy by Year-2010-2017¹⁶⁶

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	All	Percent
Candidate Pending	65	87	141	169	290	255	309	183	1,499	45.0%
Congregational Call	299	198	116	56	48	13	6	3	739	22.2%
Inactive/Postponed	50	72	63	80	80	93	52	6	496	14.9%
Denied or Withdrew	68	64	47	49	33	30	16	5	312	9.4%
Assigned/No Call	15	25	52	23	8	1	1	0	125	3.8%
Non-Cong. Call	32	24	20	6	6	6	4	2	100	3.0%
Ordained, On Leave	15	9	4	1	2	2	2	3	38	1.1%
Ordained, Retired	6	4	2	0	1	0	0	0	13	0.4%
Ordained, Resigned	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	6	0.2%
Ordained, Removed	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.0%
	556	483	446	384	468	400	390	202	3,329	100.0%

¹⁶⁵ Adam DeHoek, January 8, 2015. Email communication to the author.

¹⁶⁶ Kenneth W. Inskeep, 2017. "A Review of Candidacy Applications Submitted from January 1, 2010 through May 23, 2017," (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Department for Research and Evaluation), Table 15.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

assigned/no call. persons who have been approved for ordination and assigned to a synod, but still await a call in that synod

bishop. An ordained minister elected by voting members of a synod or denomination to lead the body in mission and ministry

candidate pending. persons who have entered the candidacy process and are progressing toward but have not yet been approved for ordination (there is no time-limit on the candidacy process)

congregational call. persons who are serving as pastors or deacons in a congregation

deacon. person consecrated to a ministry of word (preaching and teaching) and service (leadership in areas of denominational or congregational ministry)

denied or withdrew. persons who have been denied advancement in the candidacy process or have withdrawn from the process of their own volition

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). a denomination established in 1987 from a merger of three North American Lutheran church bodies. As of December 2016, there were over 3.5 million baptized members in 9,252 congregations in the United States and the Caribbean. 16,232 ordained ministers and 1,228 deacons are rostered in the ELCA, with approximately 85% actively serving in congregations (statistics from www.elca.org/News-and-Events/ELCA-Facts, accessed December 4, 2017)

full communion partner. a denomination with whom the ELCA shares a common theological foundation on issues of scripture, sacraments and ministry. The ELCA and its full communion partners welcome their rostered leaders to serve in one another's congregations.

inactive/postponed. persons who have not progressed and/or have been directed to address developmental issues or meet specific conditions before continuation in the candidacy process can be granted

non-congregational call. persons who have been called to ministry settings which are not congregational, i.e. campus ministry or chaplaincy

ordained, on leave. persons who have received a call and been ordained, but have resigned the call and do not currently have a call

ordained, removed. persons who have received a call, been ordained, and later removed from the leadership roster

ordained, resigned. persons who have received a call and been ordained, and have resigned from that call without receiving and accepting another call

ordained, retired. persons who have received a call and been ordained, and have retired from regular ministry

public ministry. work in a congregation or other denominational setting

rostered minister. in the ELCA, a person who has been approved for ministry and ordained as a pastor or consecrated as a deacon in the church

synod. generally a geographical area in which mission and ministry are carried out

ARTIFACT

FORMING RESILIENT ROSTERED MINISTERS

Section 1: Summary of the Strategy and its Educational Foundation

The strategy I am proposing for support of our synod's first call pastors and deacons has four components:

- 1) Continued use of an annual 24-hour retreat in mid-autumn designed to build relationship between first-call pastors and deacons, our bishop and synod staff, and one another. Each year's topic will be determined in conversation with the Bishop, staff and second and third year rostered ministers, welcoming their interest in planning and evaluation of continuing education opportunities. Therefore, only the 2018 topic is being specified in this summary of the strategy.
- 2) A pastoral colleague group of first-call pastors, deacons, and a skilled facilitator will meet six times per year for scripture study, prayer, and teaching on areas of pastoral ministry and administration, beginning September 2018. These spiritual formation practices and leadership topics are identified as highly important to rostered ministers, but may not be found consistently in a local ministerial group or conference gathering. The community that is expected to form among the pastors and facilitator will help to ameliorate the isolation that is often a part of the first call experience. Further, the nature of the colleague group's work offers several of the factors Southwick and Charney describe as factors contributing to resilience: Realistic optimism, facing fear, spirituality, social support, resilient role models, and brain fitness.¹⁶⁷
- 3) A monthly hour-long online conversation connecting scripture reflection and concepts of family systems theory and their application in congregational life. This component will offer an opportunity for the development of community, addressing the isolation first call pastors often report. It also offers the possibility of insight into anxiety the first-call pastor may be encountering in the congregation. Developing insight into the nature of human behavior and emotional systems in congregational families, the congregation as a whole, and the rostered minister's household can contribute to the deacon's or pastor's differentiation of self and resilience in his/her role in these relationships.

¹⁶⁷ Steven M. Southwick and Dennis S. Charney, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13.

- 4) Encouragement to use ELCA Resourceful Servants¹⁶⁸ programs and resources, including Savings Matching Pilot program and Financial Wellness resources. This component seeks to address the financial challenges many rostered ministers face as they begin public ministry.

This strategy is designed with the understanding that students learn more when teachers teach less and students are afforded the opportunity and challenge of doing the work. Bloom's Taxonomy of learning as well as the concepts of andragogy, developed by Malcolm Shepherd Knowles, and learning-centered education by Jane Vella will shape each component of the *Forming Resilient Rostered Ministers* curriculum.

In the mid-20th century Benjamin S. Bloom explored the nature of thinking, authoring or co-authoring nearly 20 books on the subject. In 1956 his concept of a learning taxonomy became an invaluable tool for curriculum planners, administrators, researchers and teachers. In 2001, former students of Bloom edited the original model from noun-forms to verb-forms. They also reversed the top two categories, identifying creation or synthesis as the highest achievement of learning.¹⁶⁹

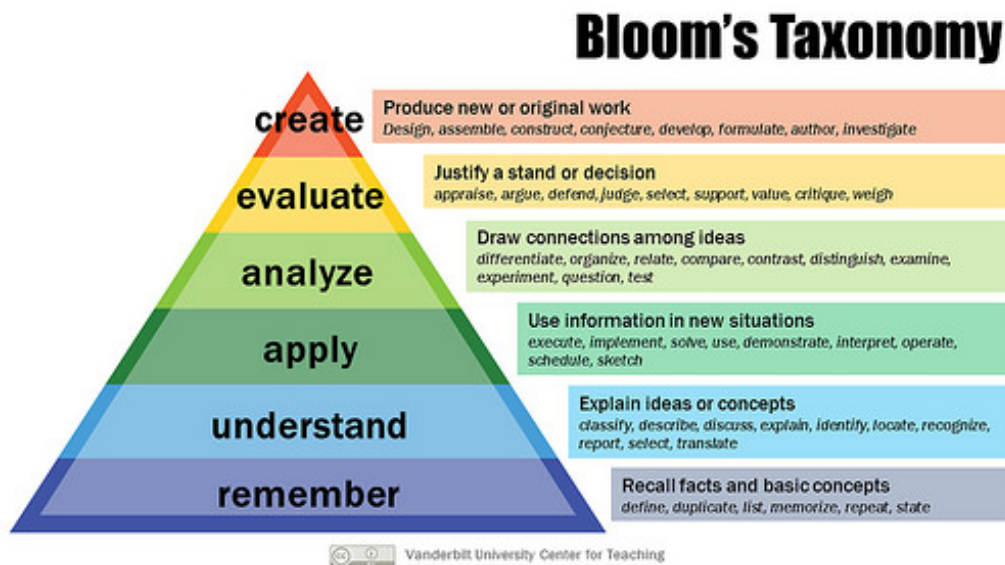
Seen in Table A.1 below¹⁷⁰, the model illustrates how learning begins with basic recollection of information, progresses to the ability to articulate and apply that information and culminates in a learner's capacity to evaluate the information and use it in some new way. Bloom's theory on the progression of learning continues to inform effective teaching today, setting appropriation of information in one's life as its goal.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.resourcefuleservants.org/rostered-ministers/>

¹⁶⁹ Mary Forehand, "Bloom's Taxonomy", *Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Technology*, Accessed December 29, 2017. <https://www.d41.org/cms/lib/IL01904672/Centricity/Domain/422/BloomsTaxonomy.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, Illustration of *Bloom's Taxonomy*. Accessed December 29, 2017. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

Figure A.1 Bloom's Taxonomy (2001 edition)



20 years after Bloom began his work, Malcolm S. Knowles focused his attention on adult learners and offered six assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that differ from those of child learners:

- 1) Need to know: An adult needs to know why she needs to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
- 2) Self-concept: As a person matures, his self-concept moves from that of a dependent learner to that of a self-directed human being.
- 3) Experience: As a person matures, she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
- 4) Readiness: As a person matures, his readiness to learn becomes increasingly oriented to the developmental tasks of his social roles
- 5) Orientation to Learning: As a person matures, her times perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, her orientation toward learning shifts from subject-centeredness to problem-centeredness.
- 6) Motivation to Learn: As a person matures, the motivation to learn becomes more internalized.¹⁷¹

These assumptions led Knowles to identify the following four principles as foundational

¹⁷¹ Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1990) 57-63.

to the design of effective adult learning:

- 1) Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- 2) Experience, including mistakes, provides the basis for the learning activities.
- 3) Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
- 4) Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.¹⁷²

Ultimately, Knowles argued that the most effective adult education happens when a teacher becomes a “facilitator of learning.”

More recently, building upon the work of both Knowles and Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Friere, educator Jane Vella proposed that a teacher is most productive when focused on learning tasks, rather than teaching tasks. A teacher may know her subject material inside and out; her challenge will be to find ways to involve and engage learners in a dialogue with the material cognitively, emotionally, and physically.¹⁷³

- Cognitive: learners have engagement with a new concept or piece of information
- Affective: learners are given an opportunity to emotionally connect with the information, to react to it reflectively, argumentatively or in some other meaningful way
- Psycho-motor: learners are challenged to determine how they will use or what they have discovered-how it will be incorporated in their lives

When learners engage with information to the point of psycho-motor involvement, they are reaching the apex of Bloom’s Taxonomy, evaluating it for its usefulness and if found to be useful, creating something new by integrating it into their lives in some way. Vella

¹⁷² Knowles,

¹⁷³ Jane Vella, *Taking Learning to Task: Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3-4.

employs Bloom's Set of Verbs (1956) to aid in the design of curriculum that invites learners to engage cognitively, affectively and with psycho-motor interaction:

Table A.1: Bloom's Set of Verbs¹⁷⁴

Cognitive	Affective	Psychomotor
Select	Revise	Design
Define	Edit	Operate
Identify	Share	Set Up
List	Respond To	Practice
Name	Approve	Organize
State	Put in Priority Order	Exhibit
Compare	Acclaim	Review
Distinguish	Brag	Recite
Contrast	Applaud	Play
Read	Assist	Diagram
Demonstrate	Protest	Draw
Relate	Agree	Compose
Group	Change	Realign
Estimate	Debate	Affix
Reflect	Support	Put
Solve	Deny	Take
Employ	Comply with	Write
Complete	Control	Prepare
Classify	Listen to	Dramatize
Apply	Accept	Build
Illustrate	Celebrate	Choose
Synthesize	Reframe	Manipulate
Analyze	Choose	Redesign
Design	Value	Rearrange
Edit	Prefer	Employ
Add	Enjoy	
Delete	Rank	

Creating learning tasks using vocabulary specific to the stage of engagement offers teachers a means of creating learning experiences that can progress from acquisition of

¹⁷⁴ G. Piskurich, *Self-directed Learning: A Practical Guide to Design, Development, and Implementation*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993) 66-67. Accessed online December 29, 2017, <http://www.med.monash.edu.au/assets/docs/scs/psychiatry/bloomsverbs.doc>

information to its analysis and ultimately its appropriation in learners' lives. This is the goal of the *Forming Resilient Rostered Ministers* strategy.

Vella's Seven Steps of Planning¹⁷⁵ will be employed in design of the three main learning components of the strategy.

¹⁷⁵ Vella, 61-65.

Section 2:

The Annual Gathering

The Annual Gathering is a pre-existing component of this strategy, intended to develop and deepen relationships first-call pastors and deacons have with each other and with the bishop and staff. This roughly 24-hour long event takes place annually in early to mid-autumn in Lansing, Michigan at the site of the synod office.

THE SEVEN STEPS OF PLANNING THE 2018 ANNUAL GATHERING:

- 1) *Who* (participants): twelve pastors and deacons in years one through three of their first call in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, Bishop Craig A. Satterlee, Assistants to the Bishop Sarah Friesen-Carper, David Sprang, Chrysanne Timm. Individual mentors who have been working with year two and year three participants are also invited, but not required to attend. The first call ministers will include millennial-age pastors and deacons as well as those who were called to ministry after one or more other careers. They will likely not have lived on the territory of this synod previously and may know only a few of the colleagues in their area from seminary or other settings.
- 2) *Why* (the situation): these pastors and deacons can benefit from learning that it will be ok, and in fact, a sign of resilience to ask for and accept help when they are overwhelmed. They will also benefit from relational time with the bishop and staff and one another.
- 3) *When*: one day (12-14 hours over a 24-hour period)
- 4) *Where*: St Stephen Lutheran Church's sanctuary and community room. The Community Room will have five round tables with three to four people seated

half-moon style around them. The room will be equipped with a computer, projector and screen, an easel with flipchart, nametags and markers, and a table for the bishop and staff. On each table: sticky notes, index cards, pens, colored pencils, markers, paper, Jenga® blocks

- 5) *What*: Content covered in the selected learning tasks is marked with an asterisk.

Worship with Holy Communion

*Gospel promises of God's presence, power, and forgiveness

Respect, affirmation

Emphasis on resilience in ministry and life

How to design and use warm-up activities

Building relationships and trust in one another

*Subject: It's OK/GOOD to Ask for Help

Journaling, if desired

Creative expression with art supplies

Walking

*Self-assessment of health and well-being

*ELCA Wholeness Wheel

*ELCA Resourceful Servants website and resources

*Evaluation of the retreat

- 6) *What for* (achievement-based objectives) By the end of this one-day session, all participants will have:

- Talked with Bishop Satterlee and at least one other staff member one-on-one or in a small group

- Enjoyed some time with colleagues during table work, meals and walks outdoors, weather permitting
- Heard the good news of the Gospel and been renewed by receiving Holy Communion
- Assessed their current sense of well-being using the ELCA Wholeness Wheel (included in addendum)
- Heard the message that their Bishop and staff are ready and desirous of supporting them in times of distress
- Been introduced to the Nurturing Pastors of Promise ministry components
- Been introduced to the ELCA Resourceful Servants website and resources

7) *How*: learning tasks and materials (**The Program**)

Day One

11:30 A.M. Welcome and morning Eucharist led by Bishop Satterlee in Sanctuary

12:15 P.M. Lunch Buffet in the Community Room

1:00 P.M. Task 1: Warm-up led by David Sprang. Participants will be asked to bring an object or be prepared to describe an experience that symbolizes joy to them. They will be invited to share their object/experience something about themselves in pairs at their tables. Then we'll hear from everyone who desires to speak.

1:30 P.M. Task 2: Review of the event's schedule by Sarah Friesen-Carper. Participants are invited to write questions or topics of interest on post-it notes and place them on a sheet of newsprint labeled, "I'm wondering..."

1:45 P.M. Break

2:00 P.M. Task 3A: *Stressors-Eustress and Distress*: 20-minute talk by Sarah Friesen-Carper.

Task 3B: Participants review a random three-day period in the past 2 weeks in their calendars and identify moments of good stress with a + sign (eustress) and difficult stress (distress) with a - sign. They can make some notes about the balance of the day's pluses to minuses and their sense of well-being or lack of. In pairs, they will be asked to summarize their findings and share what they discover about the balance between the two types of stressors and how they deal with them.

- 2:50 P.M. Task 3C: Participants have 30 minutes to review the ELCA Wholeness Wheel (see Figure A.1) and write or draw any response they have to it in their ministry setting and/or Tasks 3A and B, take a walk, use the facilities, get a beverage or snack and be seated again.
- 3:20 P.M. Task 4A: In table groups, participants are invited to talk about a time when they faced a significant challenge and felt capable of handling it well. Using Jenga® blocks at the table, they will build a tower together, by placing a block each time one list a resource or other factor that prepared him/her to address the challenge successfully.
- Together when they have come to agreement on the five most important resources identified, they may write each on a sticky note, and place the sticky notes on the newsprint labeled “Resources”.
- 3:45 P.M. Task 4B: *Insights on Resilience for Ministry*—a 20-minute talk by Chrysanne Timm, based on work from her dissertation.
- 4:05 P.M. Brief break
- 4:15 P.M. Task 4C: In table groups, Bishop Satterlee asks participants to talk about the aspects of ministry that deplete energy or cause distress, removing a Jenga® block from the tower for each one named. This will lead directly into Bishop Satterlee’s teaching time with participants.
- Task 5: Bishop Satterlee’s talk with Q and A time to follow: “Asking for Help”
Bishop Satterlee is an effective and engaging leader/teacher who will create his own teaching plan for this segment.
- 5:45 P.M. Free time to check into the hotel
- 6:30 P.M. Meet for dinner
- 8:00 P.M. First-call pastors and deacons are encouraged to spend some time in conversation. Common space at the hotel is available for this.

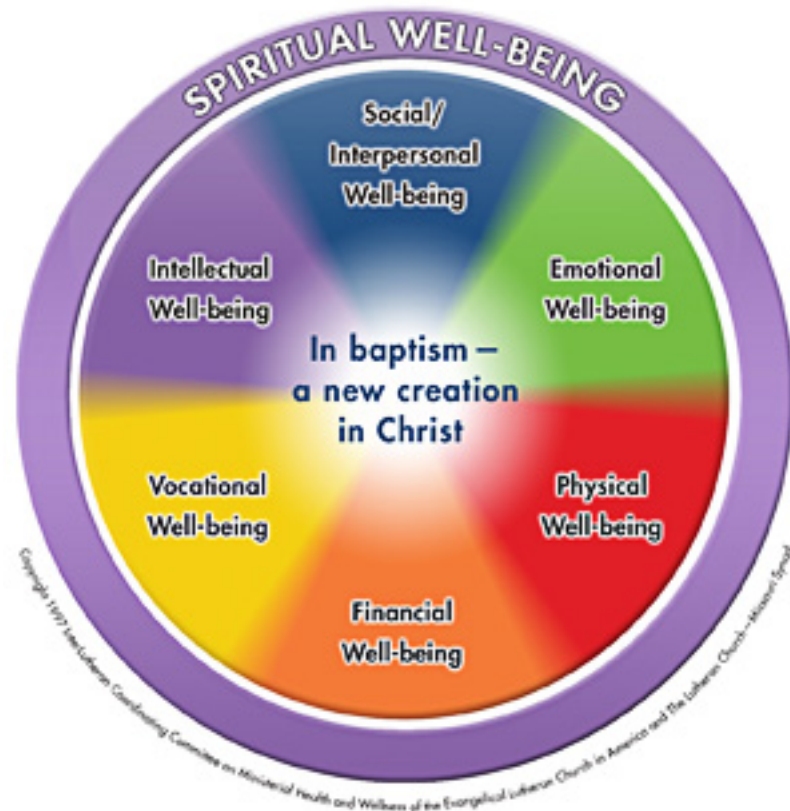
The day’s programming has ended.

Day Two

- 9:00 A.M. Task 6: Reconvene at the Synod Office with Responsive Prayer for Morning liturgy
- 9:20 A.M. Task 7: Sarah Friesen-Carper outlines the components of the synod's ministry with first call pastors – *Nurturing Pastors of Promise*
- 9:45 A.M. Task 8: A local financial advisor speaks about financial planning and tax concerns for clergy in our synod. With computer and screen, he directs attention to the Resourceful Servants website and explains the resources available to first call clergy. Website material is included in Section 5.
- 10:30 A.M. Task 8A: Using the index cards at their tables, participants are encouraged to identify three financial goals: a short-term goal to meet in the next ten days, a mid-range goal to address within 30 days, and a long-range goal to achieve within one year.
- 10:45 A.M. Task 9: Participants are invited to reflect on the day and evaluate it, using sticky notes to write what they will take away from the event and what they will leave behind. They can place the sticky notes on newsprint labeled with the two headings: "What I Will Leave" and "What I Want to Take Away". They may use the index cards to make notes to take with them.
- 11:00 A.M. Task 10: The retreat closes with Benediction by Bishop Satterlee.

Figure A.2

The Wholeness Wheel



Section 3:
Pastoral Colleague Group

THE PROPOSAL

The benefit of mentoring for persons new to public ministry has been a longtime and widely demonstrated one. The Christian tradition and the Hebrew tradition before it is rich with stories of men and women who have walked with others into greater awareness, maturity, and readiness to respond to the call and mission of God. Lutherans also have a legacy of mentoring pastors, beginning with Martin Luther himself and continuing in the United States with Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, among others.

While it has been the practice of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod-ELCA to assign individual mentoring relationships for newly-rostered ministers, I am recommending that mentoring be offered through a pastoral colleague group for several reasons:

- 1) Those new to public ministry have recently completed seminary where peer-to-peer learning was an important part of their education and formation process. A pastoral colleague group offers a peer-to-peer learning opportunity at a time when a new pastor or deacon can experience a keen sense of isolation.
- 2) A pastoral colleague group can offer regular opportunity for conversation, prayer, scripture and other study while meeting the new pastor or deacon's needs for mentoring.
- 3) Millennial first-call leaders express strong interest in continued study and meaningful engagement with scripture and prayer as they enter public ministry. These resources are often not available to them in a local ministerial group or conference gathering, but would be available on a bi-monthly basis in their pastoral colleague group.
- 4) Although assigned mentoring relationships can develop into effective and meaningful ones, first-call pastors and deacons may desire to identify their own local mentor, or continue in a relationship with a long-time mentor already identified.

For these reasons, I recommend that beginning in Fall 2018, the North/West Lower Michigan Synod identify a leader to facilitate a pastoral colleague group six times a year in this synod, possibly in cooperation with the Northwestern Ohio Synod and/or other neighboring synod. Two (or more) synods might share the cost of travel and lodging for the leader/facilitator. The honorarium for the leader/facilitator would be covered by a \$100 annual payment by the first-call participants and \$100 annual contribution from the continuing education budget in their compensation package. The participant's payment represents their investment in their own growth, while the payment from the Continuing Education budget represents 10% or less of the total budget, leaving sufficient funds available for at least one other continuing education event for them to choose.

THE SEVEN STEPS OF PLANNING THE PASTORAL COLLEAGUE GROUP:

- 1) *Who* (participants): six pastors and deacons who are in years one, two and three of their first call in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod in Fall 2018 and a skilled facilitator. In the 2019-20 program year, rostered ministers from years one through three will be expected to participate. (Because of the shortage of first-call rostered ministers in our denomination and high demand in other larger synods, the North/West Lower Michigan Synod will likely not receive more than 2 new pastors into the synod in a year for the next five to ten years.) The participants will include millennial-age pastors and deacons as well as those who were called to ministry after one or more other careers. They will likely not have lived on the territory of this synod previously and may know only a few of the colleagues in their area from seminary or other settings.

- 2) *Why* (the situation): these pastors and deacons can develop deeper relationship with one another and their facilitator as they participate together in spiritual formation practices and explore and develop ministry skills.
- 3) *When*: one day bimonthly (6 hours session). The session described below is assumed to be taking place in September 2018.
- 4) *Where*: a congregation with a meeting room that is in central proximity to the participants
- 5) *What*: Content covered in the selected learning tasks is marked with an asterisk.

Prayer

Lectio Divina

*Scripture: Mark 10:2-16

Respect, affirmation

Facilitating conversation

Building relationships and trust in one another

*Leadership Subject: Starting Off Right with Your Staff

Paper, colored markers and colored pencils for writing and drawing

Journaling, if desired

*Case Study: encounter with a homebound member

- 6) *What for* (achievement-based objectives) By the end of this one-day session, all participants will have:

- Begun building relationship with colleagues and facilitator through a check-in experience and the remainder of the day's work
- Heard the good news of the Gospel
- Experienced prayer for themselves and one another

- Gained insight into how to work effectively with staff members
- Explored the theological and psycho-emotive issues of a case study
- Experienced mentoring support for themselves in their ministry

7) *How*: learning tasks and materials (**The Program**) see below

REPRESENTATIVE DESIGN OF A ONE-DAY SESSION

9:30 A.M. First-call pastors gather with facilitator at a geographically accessible congregational location

Learning Task 1: Checking in.

Facilitator begins by addressing three questions:

1. What's going well with me/my family/my setting right now?
2. What's challenging right now?
3. What am I doing to stay in love with God?

Out of respect for all, there is no "round-robin" order to check-in. Participants speak when and if they desire to do so. Others wait to ask clarifying questions until all three questions have been addressed. If clarifying questions are asked, the facilitator will ask if the participant has finished before inviting another to share.

10:15 A.M. Learning Task 2: Lectio Divina

The Facilitator has chosen Mark 10:2-16, the lectionary reading for October 7, 2018.

The scripture is read, with each participant invited to notice the word, phrase, or image that lingers in their mind once the reading is complete. Participants are invited to share the word, phrase or image.

The same passage is read slowly and devotionally a second time. Participants are invited to consider what they hear the passage saying to them. Those who desire to do so share what they have heard.

The passage is read a third time. This time participants are asked to listen to what the scripture passage is calling them to do, and to share that word if they desire to do so.

11:00 A.M. Learning Task 3: Intercessory Prayer

Following this encounter with scripture, participants rise, forming a circle around a chair. A participant is seated in the chair, and the facilitator prays aloud for him/her as the rest of the group rests a hand on the participant's shoulder, if permitted. Prayer continues until all, even those who are absent, have been prayed for. Everyone then shares a greeting of peace.

A brief break follows.

11:30 A.M. Learning Task 4A: Teaching on a Leadership issue requested by the participants

The facilitator teaches for 20 minutes or so on the topic. The presentation moves toward robust thought if theological, from broad to focused and detailed if more administrative or programmatic in nature.

Learning Task 4B: Participants are encouraged to draw a diagram of the staffing pattern of the congregation they serve, identifying lines of authority and lines of accountability.

12:15 P.M. Break for Lunch in a neighborhood establishment

1:30 P.M. Learning Task 4C: In pairs, participants share their diagram and ask clarifying questions of each other to move toward appropriation in their ministry settings.

Learning Task 4C concludes with participants sharing insights as desired.

2:15 P.M. Learning Task 5: Case Study

The facilitator (or a participant) presents a one-page case study on a first visit with a homebound member of a congregation.

Participants identify the theological issues present in the case and respond to them.

Participants then examine the case for psycho-emotive issues present and evaluate possible responses to the situation, possibly by dramatizing them.

3:15 P.M. Learning Task 6: Wrap-up

The facilitator convenes an informal evaluation of the day's work. The next meeting date is confirmed and a teaching topic is determined.

Participants are invited to give a few words of reflection and evaluation of the day before the group prays together and takes their leave.

Section 4:

Monthly “Scripture Meets Systems” ZOOM Online Sessions

THE PROPOSAL

Parish ministry is both challenging and deeply rewarding. Systems Theory offers a lens through which to view human behavior and specifically the emotional systems in which all people live and work. Many pastors find that “thinking systems” not only helps them engage in relationships more effectively; it also reduces their tendency to be anxious and reactive in stressful situations. Pastors and deacons who can approach challenges with less anxiety are more resilient and deepen their resilience as they move through challenges and diversity.

Some rostered ministers encounter systems theory in seminary or other settings, but now they are applying what they have learned for the first time. There may be a tendency in some new leaders to look for a “quick fix” when they feel challenged, or to diagnose relationship issues as residing in others without thinking about their own behavior. It is hoped that this monthly conversation can stimulate a deeper interest in systems theory and a desire to enter into more comprehensive study of it. This resource may become the genesis of such study among interested rostered ministers in our synod. This teaching opportunity may also extend into a weekly offering, with our Bishop and called staff each taking one session a month to teach and engage rostered ministers in areas of preaching, stewardship, evangelism and mission, youth and family ministry, and the role of the church in social engagement.

THE SEVEN STEPS OF PLANNING THE “SCRIPTURE MEETS SYSTEMS”

SESSIONS:

- 1) *Who* (participants): six pastors and deacons in years one through three of their first call in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, Assistant to the Bishop Chrysanne Timm. The first call pastors will include millennial-age pastors as well as those who were called to ministry after one or more other careers. They will likely not have lived on the territory of this synod previously and may know only a few of the colleagues in their area from seminary or other settings.
- 2) *Why* (the situation): Systems Theory can be a great resource to rostered ministers at any stage in their ministry, offering them a lens through which to observe their congregation as an emotional system. Newly-rostered pastors and deacons may have had some exposure to systems theory in seminary or others work, but now they can benefit from coaching to apply theory to their personal lives and issues, as well as their ministry setting.
- 3) *When*: one one-hour online session per month ten months per year
- 4) *Where*: Zoom Cloud Meeting
- 5) *What*: Content covered in the sessions is marked with an asterisk.

*Scripture

*Bowen Family Systems Theory

*One-page summary of the Eight Concepts

Respect, affirmation

Building relationships and trust in one another

Journaling or drawing of diagrams, if desired

6) *What for* (achievement-based objectives) By the end of this one-hour session, all participants will have:

- Been (re)introduced to the eight concepts and two variables of Bowen Family Systems Theory
- Been reminded that systems theory is not a “quick fix” program or leadership development curriculum, but a way of looking at human behavior and relationships, with the focus on one’s own healthiest functioning
- Listened to scripture together
- Individually and then as a group, explored connections between the Gospel narrative, the systems theory concept, and their own functioning in a particular relationship
- Been encouraged to be observers of behavior
- Been reminded that they serve best by growing in self-differentiation, rather than an effort to change those around them

7) *How*: learning tasks and materials (the hour-long event)

REPRESENTATIVE DESIGN OF A ONE-HOUR “Scripture Meets Systems” SESSION
led by Chrysanne Timm in September 2018

10:00 A.M. All participants log into ZOOM Cloud Meeting using a telephone number and meeting room code supplied by email three days before the meeting. Each introduces him or herself upon admittance to the meeting.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Chrysanne prays for participants by name and invites participants to offer names and situations to be remembered in prayer.

Out of respect for all, there is no “round-robin” order to interaction. Participants speak when and if they desire to do so.

10:10 A.M. Learning Task 1A: Brief Summary of the Eight Concepts and Two Variables in Bowen Theory
Chrysanne gives a brief summary of the concepts and variables using a summary sheet provided to all participants with the email earlier in the week.

She talks about the nature of systems theory in pastoral leadership:

- i. Not a quick fix for conflict
- ii. Not a leadership curriculum, but a way to observe and think about relationships
- iii. Not about changing other people, but managing and growing self

She asks what questions participants have or what insights they may have discovered since their last ZOOM meeting.

- 10:25 A.M. Learning Task 1B: Scripture is read
Participants are asked if anyone would like to read the assigned passage: Mark 8:27-38 “Who Do You Say That I Am?”
Silence for reflection follows
- 10:30 A.M. Learning Task 1C: Discussion
Chrysanne asks if anyone sees a connection between the event described in scripture and one or more of the concepts or variables.
Each answer is affirmed and proposed connections explored as participants are willing.
If no participants draw conclusions, Chrysanne asks some questions about the nature of the event to spur their thinking
Possible connections include: Differentiation of Self, Multigenerational Transmission Process, Anxiety as a Variable
Participants agree upon one to discuss more deeply.
- 10:45 A. M. Learning Task 1D-Application to life and/or ministry
Chrysanne asks, “Where do you see this concept at work in your life or in your ministry? Take five minutes to write any thoughts you have about this question, or draw a diagram of the relationship(s) about which you are thinking.
(As the sessions progress, and less time needs to be spent on opening summary work, the goal will be for participants to talk through the life/ministry application aspect one-on-one by phone)
- 10:50 A.M. Learning Task 1E-Discussion in large group
Chrysanne asks, “Would anyone like to share what they wrote?”
Chrysanne will facilitate closing discussion on the topic, ask questions for informal evaluation of the meeting, and confirm the date, scripture and suggested systems concept for the next meeting.
- 11:00 A.M. Session is completed.

Table A.2: Proposed schedule for 14 sessions September 2018-December 2019

Month	Scripture	Systems Concept/Congregation Issue
September 2018	Mark 8:27-38	Introduction to Systems
October 2018	Mark 10:35-45	Nuclear Family as Emotional System
November 2018	Mark 13:1-8	Anxiety as a variable
December 2018	Luke 1:39-55	Differentiation of Self-Part 1
January 2019	Luke 3:15-17, 21-22	Differentiation of Self-Part 2
February 2019	Luke 6:17-26	Societal Emotional Process
March 2019	Luke 15:1-3,11b-32	Triangles
April 2019	Luke 24:1-12	Change=death and new life
May 2019	John 10:22-33	Emotional Cut-off
Summer 2019	Luke 12:13-21	Sibling Position
September 2019	Luke 16:19-31	Multigenerational Transmission Process
October 2019	Luke 17:11-19	Differentiation of Self
November 2019	Luke 21:5-19	Family Projection Process/Cut-off
December 2019	Matthew 1:18-25	Anxiety

Brief Summary of the Eight Concepts and Two Variables in Bowen Theory

Bowen Family Systems Theory, sometimes called “systems theory”, is a comprehensive way to think about human behavior formulated by Dr. Murray Bowen (1913-1990). His theory is based upon his observations as a psychiatrist working with schizophrenic patients and their families. Bowen found the highly-subjective diagnostic method for mental health patients lacking because of its inability to be replicated from one examiner to another. Bowen and his colleagues observed many families living and functioning together in order to better understand the behavior of the family unit, which led to him to formulate the theory and its eight concepts for understanding family functioning. Later, scholars, including Friedman, Steinke, Gilbert and Richardson began to apply theory and its concepts to religious communities and their leaders.

Bowen argued that the very nature of a system is that each of its individual parts has an impact on the functioning of the system. A leader plays a significant role in the function of the system, and others in the system will likewise continually impact the leader.

The 8 basic concepts of Bowen’s family systems theory:¹⁷⁶

1. **Levels of differentiation of self:** “Differentiation represents the observation that there is a middle way-to be for Self and to be for others.”¹⁷⁷ Families and social groups affect how people think, feel, and act, but individuals vary in their susceptibility to “group think”. Also, groups vary in the amount of pressure they exert for conformity. The less developed a person’s “self,” the more impact others have on his functioning and the more he tries to control the functioning of others. Bowen developed a scale to measure differentiation of self.
2. **The nuclear family:** This concept describes 4 relationship patterns that manage anxiety, marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, emotional distance) that govern where problems develop in a family.

¹⁷⁶ Schara, Andrea M. “Bowen Theory: A One Page Summery(sic),” *Your Mindful Compass*, accessed January 6, 2018, <https://yourmindfulcompass.com/2007/10/11/bowen-theory-a-one-page-summery/>

¹⁷⁷ Schara, Andrea M. *Your Mindful Compass: Breakthrough Strategies for Navigating Life/Work Relationships in Any Social Jungle*, (n.p.: Andrea M. Schara, 2013), 5.

- 3. Family projection process:** This concept describes the way parents transmit their emotional problems to a child. Some parents have great trouble separating from the child. They imagine how the child is, rather than having a realistic appraisal of the child. Relationship problems that most negatively affect a child's life are a heightened need for attention and approval, difficulty dealing with expectations, the tendency to blame oneself or others, feeling responsible for other's happiness, and acting impulsively to relieve the anxiety of the moment, rather than tolerating anxiety and acting thoughtfully.
- 4. Multigenerational transmission process:** This concept describes how small differences in the levels of differentiation between parents and their offspring lead over many generations to marked differences in differentiation among the members of a multigenerational family. The way people relate to one another creates differences, which are transmitted across generations. People are sensitive and react to the absence or presence of relationships, to information about this moment, the future and or the past, and this, along with our basic genetic inheritance, interacts to shape an individual's "self."
- 5. Sibling position:** Bowen theory incorporates psychologist Walter Toman's work relating to sibling position. People who grow up in the same sibling position have important common characteristics. For example, oldest children tend to gravitate to leadership positions and youngest children often prefer to be followers, unless the parents disappointed them. Toman's research showed that spouses' sibling positions when mismatched often affect the chance of divorcing.
- 6. Triangles:** A triangle is a three-person relationship system. It is considered the triangle as the "molecule" of larger emotional systems, as it is the smallest stable relationship system. A triangle can manage more tension than a 2-person relationship as tension shifts among the three. Triangles can exert social control by putting one on the outside or bring in an outsider when tension escalates between two. Increasing the number of triangles can also stabilize spreading tension. Marital therapy uses the triangle to provide a neutral third party capable of relating well to both sides of a conflict.
- 7. Emotional cut off:** People sometimes manage their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them. This resolves nothing and risks making new relationships too important.

8. Societal emotional process: This concept describes how the emotional system governs behavior on a societal level, similar to that within a family, which promotes both progressive and regressive periods in a society.

Variables in Systems Theory:

Differentiation of Self (defined above)

Anxiety: the reaction of an organism or emotional system to a perceived threat

[Note: this information formats neatly into a two-sided PDF document with standard one-inch margins.]

Section 5:

Improving Financial Health and Confidence

Research among first-call clergy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America indicates that many of them begin public ministry with significant educational debt. Relocations during seminary education and first call may result in spousal under-employment, contributing to financial hardship. As noted in my dissertation, when pastors are under stress because of financial challenges, it can hamper their effective function as leaders of their faith communities.

The ELCA has created the “Resourceful Servants” strategy to assist rostered ministers in attaining greater financial health, confidence and security. There are two two-year pilot programs for matching savings and retirement funds. Application for participation in the Year 2 (2019) pilot cohort will open soon. Our synod will make its first call pastors and deacons aware of this pilot program as well as the multiple resources available to them. If funds for future cohorts and pilot programs become available, our synod staff will communicate this to our first call pastors and deacons.

The contents of the Resourceful Servants strategy are included on pages . Their value can be substantial to persons who are willing to seek assistance for the sake of greater financial awareness, responsibility and confidence. For example, the Lutheran Social Service Financial Counseling resource offers six free counseling sessions. Attaining greater financial well-being contributes to overall resilience and may also decrease attrition due to financial hardship.



SAVINGS MATCHING PILOT PROGRAMS

KICK-START YOUR SAVINGS EFFORTS THROUGH PILOT PROGRAMS FOR EMERGENCY SAVINGS AS WELL AS SAVING FOR RETIREMENT.

Only 38 percent of Americans have enough in savings to address an unexpected expense (from an emergency room visit to a car repair). Having even \$1,000 in emergency savings can lessen an unexpected blow.

It is recommended that 15 percent of earnings be contributed to retirement savings. Saving 15 percent of one's income is often a challenging goal; even so, it is important to maximize contributions even if the contributed amounts do not reach this level.

Two Savings Matching Pilot Programs share financial resources with rostered ministers on the road to improved financial wellness. These programs match rostered ministers'

contributions to a dedicated emergency savings account and/or increased contributions to their existing retirement accounts.

EMERGENCY SAVINGS MATCHING PILOT PROGRAM

The Emergency Savings Matching Pilot Program provides qualifying rostered ministers the opportunity to build up their emergency savings reserves through a dollar for dollar match. Contributions to a dedicated emergency savings account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union will be matched up to \$50 per month. Over the course of two years, recipients' contributions will be matched up to \$1,200 (\$600 per year). Through the generous donations of the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA and the Lilly Endowment, matching funds are available to qualifying rostered ministers through the Emergency Savings Program.

READINESS FOR RETIREMENT SAVINGS MATCHING PILOT PROGRAM

The Readiness for Retirement Savings Matching Pilot Program provides qualifying rostered ministers the opportunity to build up their retirement savings through a dollar for dollar match. Increased monthly contributions of \$50 to their existing personal retirement account with Portico Benefit Services will be matched. Over the course of one year, recipients' increased contributions of \$600 will be matched dollar for dollar. Through the

generous donations of the employees and trustees of Portico Benefit Services and the Lilly Endowment, matching funds are available to help build up retirement accounts of qualifying rostered ministers through the Readiness for Retirement Savings Program.

GETTING STARTED: HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SAVINGS MATCHING PILOT PROGRAMS

The Savings Matching Pilot Programs are each comprised of the following phases: Qualification, Application, Selection, Notification, Participation, and Distribution. Review these phases below for an overview of the program and to find out how to participate.

Qualification: How do I qualify to apply for the Savings Matching Pilot Programs?

Emergency Savings Matching Pilot Program:

The Emergency Savings Matching Pilot Program is designed for active rostered ministers who have less than six months' income in emergency savings.

Readiness for Retirement Savings Matching Pilot Program:

The Readiness for Retirement Savings Matching Pilot Program is designed for active rostered ministers who have less than 15 percent of their compensation contributed into their existing personal retirement account with Portico (when combining employer and individual contributions).

To qualify, complete the **Financial Wellness Assessment**. The Financial Wellness Assessment will ask you about several aspects of your financial life, including behaviors and attitudes. To complete the assessment, you will need a rough idea of your household level of emergency savings, your individual retirement

contributions and your credit score. To log in, you will need your rostered leader ID and your email address.

The due date to complete the Financial Wellness Assessment is Sept. 15, 2017.

Application: How do I apply for the Savings Matching Pilot Programs? 

Selection: How will I be selected for the Savings Matching Pilot Programs? 

Notification: How will I find out if I have been selected? 

Participation: What do I need to do if I am selected? 


Distribution: How often will I receive funding? 

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

EMERGENCY SAVINGS MATCHING PILOT PROGRAM

When I communicate with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, do I need to identify myself as part of the Resourceful Servants Initiative?

Yes, when you communicate with representatives from the ELCA Federal Credit Union regarding opening an account, please mention that you are a participant in the Resourceful Servants Emergency Savings Matching Pilot Program.

What do I need when I apply? 

What if I already have an account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union? 

How do I set up automatic withdrawals from my paycheck or primary checking account to be deposited into my account with the ELCA Federal Credit Union? 

Can I make a contribution of less than \$50 per month and still receive matching funding? 

What if I make a contribution of more than \$50 per month? 

For how long will my contribution be matched? 

If I begin making contributions before the January 2018 payroll, will I receive additional matching funding? 

What would disqualify me from the Emergency Savings Matching Pilot Program after it has begun? 

What if I need to contribute less or stop contributing for a few months? 

How do I get in touch with the Resourceful Servants program directly? 

READINESS FOR RETIREMENT SAVINGS MATCHING PILOT PROGRAM

What is the minimum amount I must contribute to my ELCA Retirement Plan to participate in the Readiness for Retirement Savings Matching Pilot Program? 

If you are currently making individual contributions to your ELCA Retirement Plan, you must increase the amount of your contribution by at least \$50 per month.

If you are not currently making individual contributions to your ELCA Retirement Plan, you must contribute at least \$50 per month to participate in this program.

In either case, you can elect a higher amount, but to receive the matching contribution, you must maintain at least a \$50 contribution (or \$50 increased contribution) for each month in 2018.

What if I make an increase of more than \$50 per month? 

For how long will my increased contribution be matched? 

If I begin or increase my ELCA Retirement Plan contributions effective before my first January 2018 payroll, will I receive additional matching funding for 2017 contributions? 

Can I participate in the Readiness for Retirement Savings Matching Pilot Program if my employer is not up-to-date on its payments to Portico? 

What would disqualify me from the Readiness for Retirement Savings Matching Pilot Program after it has begun? 

What if I need to stop contributing at the increased level for a few months? 

How do I get in touch with the Resourceful Servants program directly? 



FINANCIAL WELLNESS RESOURCES

IMPROVE YOUR FINANCIAL WELLNESS THROUGH INCREASED FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE AND LITERACY.

A variety of resources to improve financial wellness are available at no cost to you as a rostered minister in the ELCA. Engaging with these resources provides rostered ministers the information needed to make well-informed financial decisions and the confidence to share perspectives. This competence and confidence not only impacts a minister's personal financial well-being, but also that of the congregations and organizations they serve.

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICE FINANCIAL COUNSELING

Lutheran Social Service (LSS) Financial Counseling offers a full range of financial services that empower you to conquer debt through tangible steps and personal guidance. As a rostered minister in the ELCA, you are eligible to participate in up to six free confidential sessions per calendar year with an expert financial counselor.

[LEARN MORE](#)

ELCA FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

The ELCA Federal Credit Union was created by the ELCA to provide additional financial services to ELCA members, employees of synods, congregations or any other ELCA-related ministry. With the church as its sponsor, the ELCA Federal Credit Union operates in ways that are consistent with the church's values, making it a socially responsible way to do your banking.

[LEARN MORE](#)

PORTICO BENEFIT SERVICES

Being financially well involves making decisions based on our values, as reflected in the way we save, spend, and share. Tending to one's financial well-being in this way requires us to be resilient, generous, and focused on sustainability. Portico Benefit Services provides presentations, tools, and individuals that can help make financial well-being a reality.

[!\[\]\(c507f772dba2b921f86777f01218e570_img.jpg\)LEARN MORE](#)



LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICE FINANCIAL COUNSELING

BE EMPOWERED TO CONQUER YOUR DEBT THROUGH TANGIBLE STEPS AND THE PERSONAL GUIDANCE OF
LSS FINANCIAL COUNSELORS.

If you are a rostered minister in the ELCA or the spouse of a rostered minister, you are strongly encouraged to participate in financial counseling through Lutheran Social Service (LSS) Financial Counseling, where you can engage in open conversations about financial wellness and financial literacy.

LSS Financial Counseling offers a full range of financial services that empower you to conquer debt through tangible steps and personal guidance.

LSS financial counselors help you (as an individual, a couple or as a family) with:

- ✔ Consolidating debt

A Debt Management Plan (DMP) consolidates your monthly bills into one simple payment—often with a lower interest rate.

✔ **Establishing a budget**

Financial counselors help you develop a budget and a plan of action for debt payment based on your individual situation.

✔ **Improving your credit score**

Financial counselors help you understand your credit reports and put you on a path to a debt-free future.

✔ **Protecting your home**

Financial counselors help assess your options—whether you're having trouble making mortgage payments, considering refinancing or a reverse mortgage, or even buying a home.

✔ **Tackling student loan debt**

Financial counselors help you navigate the repayments options for federal, state, and private loans, determine your individual eligibility, contact lenders, and develop a personalized action plan that considers your personal financial situation.

✔ **Achieving financial wellness**

Financial counselors help you create a unique plan to strengthen your financial leadership for yourself and to help others. Financial wellness is for everyone!

DETAILS AND FAQs

When should I seek out financial counseling? ▾

Most simply stated, financial counseling is appropriate whenever you have a question about finances. These questions may cover a variety of topics related to budgeting, borrowing, credit or debt.

Times of transition in your life might be particularly appropriate times to consult with a financial counselor. For example, before entering into a new call, a financial counselor may be able to provide helpful ideas on how to think through the implications of a

change in income and/or location.

Now is the perfect time to take control of your finances. Use the **Financial Wellness Flow Chart** and the **Achieve Financial Wellness Infographic** to see how LSS Financial Counseling can make a difference for you.


What can I expect in a financial counseling session? 

How do I get in touch with a financial counselor? 

How much does financial counseling cost? 

Rostered ministers and their spouses are eligible for six free confidential sessions with an expert financial counselor through Financial Choice, a service of LSS Financial Counseling, provided by Portico Benefit Services.

Will I always work with the same financial counselor? 

If I have had a bad experience with financial advising or coaching relationships in the past, how will this be different? 

Section 6:

A Plan for Evaluation of the Strategy

Three sources of information will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy:

- 1) Informal evaluation of events including the annual retreat and monthly “Scripture Meets Systems” meetings, including:
 - What will you keep from this gathering?
 - What will you take away from this gathering?
 - What questions has this conversation stirred in you?
 - What one thing will you continue to think about after our meeting has concluded?
- 2) A brief Survey Monkey© survey will be sent to each participant within five days of the retreat, the bi-monthly Pastoral Colleague Group meeting, and the monthly “Scripture Meets Systems” online meeting, inviting evaluation of the event, specifically asking how the event has impacted (or failed to impact) the participant’s sense of well-being, as illustrated in the ELCA Wholeness Wheel.
- 3) The “Annual Report to the Bishop” which each rostered minister in the synod is required to submit asks questions about their ministry and general well-being. Although synod staff do not read these reports, the Bishop will inform them if a pastor or deacon needs support or intervention.

As a synod staff, we will review the strategy’s effectiveness based on input from these surveys and reports on a quarterly and annual basis. Ultimately, the strategy’s effectiveness will be measured by the following factors:

- Have our synod’s newly-rostered ministers remained in their first calls for at least three years?
- Have our synod’s newly-rostered ministers participated to the best of their ability in the formation opportunities our synod has offered?
- Has there been measurable fall-off in participation in the bi-monthly pastoral colleague group meetings or the monthly Zoom conversations?
- Do our synod’s first call pastors and deacons find enough support here that they choose to seek a second call in our synod?