

## **Final Report Vicarage Task Force**

### **Introduction**

The 2008 convention of Lutheran Church–Canada adopted resolution **08.1.06 To Establish a Task Force to Review the Vicarage Program**. This resolution called for a review of the “practical training of seminary students with respect to length, location, and financing of vicarages as well as the mentoring and placement of vicarages.”

In September of 2009 President Bugbee gathered the members of the task force together at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharine’s, ON for their first meeting. Serving on the task force were Rev. Mark Dressler (Chair), Mrs. Cindy Israel (Secretary), Rev. Prof. Jonathan Kraemer (Vicarage Placement Supervisor, Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton, AB), Rev. Dr. William Mundt (Vicarage Placement Supervisor, Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharine’s, ON), Deacon Sigrid Robak, Rev. Andre Schroth, and Rev. Daryl Solie (Council of Presidents’ Representative).

At the September meeting the task force reviewed Resolution 08.1.06 of the 2008 Synodical Convention. It examined the benefits and drawbacks of the current vicarage system, and performed a similar examination of a proposed residency program. It then began to assess what further information would be beneficial, and what sources would be helpful in retrieving that information. Before adjourning, each member of the task force was given an area to research, and that information has since been shared through email and discussed at the subsequent teleconference calls. This report is the culmination of their research.

### **Strengths of the Current Program**

Through its interviews the task force quickly recognized that, while the vicarage program could certainly be improved, the current system is not broken. There are clearly many strengths of the current vicarage program.

1. It gives vicars opportunity to apply their theological training to a sustained practical experience in everyday parish ministry.

2. Where there is direct instruction of a supervising Pastor, the vicar is exposed to a variety of lessons; both as overtly taught by the supervising Pastor, and those which he experiences while observing his supervising Pastor.
3. Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accreditation requires “supervised ministry”<sup>1</sup> to be a part of the Master’s of Divinity degree as this is a “practical” degree. The current program fulfills that requirement.
4. The vicar is normally exposed to multiple aspects of parish ministry which will help reveal his strengths and weaknesses which can be addressed in his fourth year, as well as be helpful for candidate placement.
5. 3<sup>rd</sup> Year vicarages allow for:
  - A. The student to seek out answers to theological questions that have arisen during their vicarage
  - B. The vicar to reflect, ask questions and learn from fellow students and professors.
  - C. The student to take additional courses to meet their challenges and identify and address areas of personal growth identified during the vicarage.
6. Through greater interaction with laity, vicars:
  - A. Learn the importance of how to deal gracefully with people.
  - B. Have their preaching shaped by the experience of vicarage.
7. The vicarage helps a student acquire confidence in preparing him for his divine call.
8. It allows students the opportunity to grow by being away from family and friends and adapting to a new environment.
9. The vicar has a chance to earn some money in a time when he may incur much debt.
10. It allows opportunities for interaction between student, supervising Pastor and Seminary such as:
  - A. Seminary vicarage supervisor who visits the vicars in their vicarage congregation.
  - B. Orientation time where the Seminary can make its expectations clear to both vicars and supervisors.
11. While the primary purpose of vicarage is that the vicar grow in learning, it also provides that opportunity for the supervising Pastor.

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<sup>1</sup> “Supervised Ministry” is defined as practical learning experiences under the supervision and mentorship of experienced pastors. “Supervised Ministry” may be part time (“Field Work” or “Field Education”) complementing the full time classroom studies, or full time (“Vicarage”) immersions in parish life.

## Concerns Arising from the Current Program

### 1) Lack of Quality Vicarage Congregations

All three Overtures identify a problem also recognized by the Task Force members. One of the problems recognized by those the task force interviewed, as well as by seminary representatives on the task force, was the lack of quality placements for vicars. There is no question that the program would benefit by having more congregations apply for vicars, thus giving church officials more options in placing the vicars each year.

It was noted that the congregations that usually apply for vicars are either smaller vacant congregations that have no pastor on site, or large congregations that are able to afford a vicar. The first situation, a parish without a pastor on site, will be addressed later in this report under the topic of mentorship. The second situation offers vicars with a variety of experiences in his vicarage parish, but is often very different from the parish he will be placed into as a Pastor since many candidate placements are not larger congregations. During the task force interviews the thought was raised a number of times that it would be beneficial for some vicars to spend their year of practicum in a smaller parish with a pastor on site. The problem, of course, is the affordability of a pastor and a vicar to a smaller congregation. This and other issues were the reason for creating the task force. This concern from the synod can be seen in some of the original overtures sent to the 2008 synodical convention.

### Concerns Arising From the Overtures:

Resolution 08.1.06 was the end result of a number of overtures concerning the vicarage program that were submitted to the convention. These overtures revealed some of the concerns the church has with the vicarage program:

#### 2) Congregational financial constraints

**OVERTURE 1.06 to Provide Synodical Funding for Vicarages** addressed the concern that good potential mentors and congregations are eliminated from the vicarage program due to cost constraints.

#### 3) Vicars being used as cheap labour

**OVERTURE 1.08 To Explore a New Model for Pastoral Training** suggested an alternative Residency Program to replace the current vicarage. It stated that current practices involved in vicarage are counter-productive:

Too often the Church has made use of less than adequate vicarage experiences. Supervision is often lax due to distance and time commitments. Vicars are sometimes

viewed as “cheap labour” rather than involved in a teaching environment. One year does not provide the pastor in training with enough experience to meet the increasing demands of pastoral ministry in the 21st century.

Vicarages in multi-point parishes do not provide responsible mentoring to the vicar, because of distance involved and the lack of time for teaching and learning opportunities for the pastor to meet with the vicar. This also happens with congregations not having time to provide the necessary input to the vicar, again because of distances involved.

Both **OVERTURE 1.06 To Provide Synodical Funding For Vicarages** and **OVERTURE 1.07 To Provide Excellent Mentoring For Vicars** claim that the current program “often necessitates vicars being put in less than ideal situations, often impairing their pastoral formation, putting them at a deficit from the outset of their ministry”

#### **4) Excellence in mentorship of vicarage**

- All three overtures recognize the importance of
  - a) Recruiting mentor pastors.
  - b) Matching mentor pastors with students.

#### **5) The length of vicarage**

Proposal for Residency Program for Lutheran Church Canada – supplement for **OVERTURE 1.08 To Explore a New Model for Pastoral Training** states:

“One year does not provide the pastor in training with enough experience to meet the increasing demands of pastoral ministry in the 21st century.”

#### **6) Mentoring of New Pastors.**

The residency program outlined in **OVERTURE 1.08 To Explore a New Model for Pastoral Training** focuses the mentoring of new pastors once their seminary courses have been completed.

## **Components of Vicarage**

### **Duration**

The length of “supervised ministry” which is required of students at our LCC seminaries as being insufficient preparation for ministry was examined. It should be noted that while vicarage is only one year of full time mentorship and immersion in parish life, students are required to undergo two years of part time “supervised ministry” (“Field Education or Field Work”) under the mentorship of pastors in congregations near the location of the seminaries. This has been part of the curriculum from the beginning of our two seminaries in recognition that theology is a *habitus practicus*; theology is practical. There is a reciprocal relationship between classroom and parish. As students are formed theologically in the classroom, they experience the practice of that theology in the parish; the practice of theology in the parish drives the student’s

studies in the classroom. Summer vicarages are also available at both seminaries, on a voluntary basis for the students.

A study of ATS accredited schools was conducted in order to gauge the depth and length of our seminaries' "supervised ministry." The study revealed a range of practices. Some schools had as little as one year of part time supervised ministry in a three year degree program. Our seminaries' program, with two years of part time and one year of full time "supervised ministry," was longer and more in depth than most schools in ATS. This means that in terms of duration and depth, field education and vicarage at our seminaries affords our students with more opportunities for practical experience and mentorship than most students receive at the average seminary in North America.

Vicarage in the third year of seminary, while it does sometimes mean inconvenience to the student and their family, is an important component of the curriculum. Feedback from students and faculty has suggested that a third year vicarage is important in order to give the students upon their return time to reflect upon their vicarage experience and to address any deficiencies that were identified during the vicarage year. The vicarage year enables the family also to work through the process of moving and getting re-established in a new community. These are invaluable skills to develop in order to make the transition at the end of seminary a smoother one.

The vicarage task force was intrigued by the recommendation that accompanied Overture 1.08, recommending an extension of the vicarage to three year residency program. After completing its research it unanimously concluded that such a radical change to the system was not required. The task force did, however, recognize the value of an extension of mentorship to the first few years of ministry.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) To continue with 2 years of field education and 1 year of vicarage, preferably in the third year of the four year M.Div. degree.
- 2) The Council of Presidents study the possibilities of implementing a process for mentoring pastors in the first few years of their ministry. One such option for this is a model developed by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod entitled PALS (Post seminary Applied Learning and Support). This program has been operating for twelve years and, while it is voluntary, it includes approximately 60-65% of the candidates placed into the field for their first call. PALS pairs young pastors (not more than three years in the ministry) with more senior pastors (ideally 15-20 years of parish experience). It was first established to try to counteract pastors leaving their first parish after a relatively short stay by providing encouragement and support.

### **Mentorship**

Underlying the overtures and resolution was the desire to see the best possible mentorship provided to our seminary students while on vicarage. Surveys of graduates and

interviews with clergy and District Presidents affirmed the importance of mentorship and the priority it should play in the placement of students for vicarage. While there is a consensus that good mentorship is essential for meeting the expected outcomes of vicarage, it was discovered that there are various views on what qualities good mentors should have as well as which strategies make for good mentorship.

Broader research suggests there is good reason for the various views on mentorship. One study suggested that there are four basic styles of mentorship: supporting, coaching, delegating, and directing.<sup>2</sup> A follow-up study summarizes the styles in this way:

The supporting style uses praise to promote cooperation, consideration and minimization of conflict. It is more relationship oriented than task-oriented. The coaching style involves modeling and demonstrating appropriate behaviors. It includes integration, persuasiveness, and active assumption of the mentor role. The delegating style places greater responsibility on the protégé and tolerates greater ambiguity and freedom of choice. The directing style involves telling protégés what, how and when to do things. It places the emphasis on task completion and performance outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

While vicarage supervisors may gravitate toward a certain style of mentorship as their strength, good mentorship actually requires flexibility in style. Flexibility is necessary in order to address the particular needs of the vicar and to adapt as the student shows growth. For example, vicars may often in the initial stages of the vicarage require a more directive style, yet as growth, maturity, and responsibility are evidenced, the mentorship may transition into more of a coaching or delegating style.

Though there are varieties of approaches to mentoring, research has shown that excellence in mentorship entails certain attributes whatever style is used. They are: interpersonal skills, personal attributes, and professional competencies.

The interpersonal skills of a good mentor involve caring and encouraging, promoting and sponsoring, supporting and protecting, as well as challenging and demanding. The personal attributes of a good mentor include being mature and wise, friendly and optimistic, admired and respected, as well as trustworthy and dependable. Finally, good mentors should be professionally competent, which includes being qualified, experienced and seasoned, knowledgeable and informative, as well as professionally involved and active.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stahlhut, R., & Hawkes, R. "Mentoring student teachers: A conceptual model." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Las Vegas, NV. February 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Wadkins, Theresa, and Miller, Richard L. "Bending Twigs: The Act of Mentoring Undergraduate Student Research." In *Developing, Promoting, & Sustaining the Undergraduate Research Experience in Psychology*. Edited by Richard L. Miller, et al. Syracuse, NY: Society for the Teaching of Psychology, 2008: 209.

<sup>4</sup> Wadkins, Theresa, and Miller, Richard L. "Bending Twigs: The Act of Mentoring Undergraduate Student Research," 209.

These attributes together constitute the kinds of qualities that should guide the process in seeking suitable pastoral mentors for vicars. Years of pastoral experience do not necessarily a good mentor make, nor does the identification of exceptional interpersonal skills in the pastor if he had had but a few years of experience.

Excellence in mentorship entails not only the use of different styles and the choice of mentors with certain attributes; a key ingredient is time spent in the process of mentoring. An effective mentorship through vicarage entails observation by the student of his supervisor in various capacities of ministry, debriefing and discussion of approaches used by the mentor, and then observation of the student by the supervisor with debriefing and feedback to follow. Often the student will learn not only by hearing what is said, but how it is said, and observing the body language of the mentor.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) Whenever it is possible, students should be placed with their mentor supervisor on-site. Vicars should not be placed primarily to fill vacancies, nor to serve as mission developers.
- 2) Active identification and recruitment of excellent mentors be a priority of the Council of Presidents.
- 3) The revision of vicarage application process to include letters of recommendation from Circuit Counsellors and District presidents which include a discussion of the potential mentor's attributes and style. This helps to match a student's needs with a supervisor's strengths.
- 4) Directors of vicarage continue to orient and support mentors through the whole vicarage year.

**Congregation**

Although not the primary focus of the concerns raised in the overtures, the Vicarage Taskforce identified the congregation as another key partner in the vicarage process. Congregations not only support the vicar and his family financially, but by prayer and in many other ways. In some vicarage congregations, support committees have been formed in order to ensure the needs of the vicar (and his family) are being met, or if need be, to be a mediator between pastor and vicar in the case of conflict.

Congregations also give of their pastor's time which is spent in the mentoring of the vicar. In entering the vicarage program it is vital that the congregation do so informed of all the consequences as well as the joys in serving the broader church by assisting in the formation of a pastor.

Congregations of a larger size have typically been the type of congregations that have applied for vicars. Often this is because they are able to financially support a vicar. The larger congregation also has served the student well in many respects in that there often is a broad range of experiences which the student may be exposed to or can expect to be exposed to in the short period of one year. On the other hand it has also been suggested that in some respects a vicarage in a larger congregation does not prepare the student for the type of ministry they will typically encounter when they themselves receive their first call.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) That consideration be given to a variety of different congregations for the placement of vicars.
- 2) That congregations inquiring into the possibility of applying for a vicar would receive appropriate information regarding not only the financial commitment but the amount of time that mentoring a vicar will require so they can enter into the process with appropriate expectations.

### **Student**

One last aspect of vicarage, which is also a key component of the process, is the student himself, in particular his attitude toward the vicarage year and his engagement in the learning process. While deficiencies in the early years of ministry may be due to the process of formation in the seminary, it may also be due to the student's investment in the process itself. The student who views it as just another requirement to meet will receive something very different from the experience than the student who actively seeks out opportunities to learn and grow. The student who has a servant attitude and opens himself up to receiving feedback will have a very different experience than the one who already "knows it all."

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) That seminaries continue to improve their evaluation of students' readiness for vicarage.
- 2) That seminaries, and in particular the vicarage directors continue to prepare students to enter the vicarage year with the appropriate servant attitude.

### **Undergirding this: Financial Support**

#### **Benefits of an Affordable Vicarage**

One solution, that will see more congregations involved in the vicarage program, would be to make the vicarage more affordable. As mentioned above, only larger congregations or vacant congregations tend to apply for vicars. If the cost of a vicarage were lowered more congregations would be able to apply for a vicar. This would offer much more flexibility to the Council of Presidents and the Vicarage Directors when they arrange placements each year. A more affordable vicarage would make it possible for smaller congregations with a Pastor to also afford a vicar. If there were more placement opportunities, then those who decide the placements would have the luxury to weigh the mentorship that each placement offers, thus improving the vicarage experience. In past years, the placement options have been very limited, and in some years (2010 for example) there were not enough placements for all the vicars which required the deferral of some vicarages to the student's fourth year.

#### **A Shared Concern**

It is important to note that every congregation in the synod benefits from an effective vicarage program. Whether a congregation has had a vicar in their parish or not, they are still reaping the benefits through their pastor who was once a vicar. It can therefore be argued that a solid vicarage program is the responsibility of the entire synod. The task force thus believes that the synod should examine sharing the cost of training vicars instead of leaving the entire burden of

the cost with the vicarage congregation. To see how this might be accomplished some essential statistics are listed below:

**2008 LCC Synodical Statistics**

- 52,654 confirmed members in LCC
- 316 congregations in LCC
- 229 (72%) were small with 1-199 confirmed members
- 72 (23%) were medium with 200-499 confirmed members
- 15 (5%) were large with 500-1000+ confirmed members

**Annual Vicarage Costs**

- 6-8 vicars are placed per year from the 2 seminaries
- Average cost for a vicar = \$40,000
- Total cost per year for 8 vicars = \$320,000
- Synod’s proposed portion of the total cost (50%) = \$160,000

**Proposed Formulas for Cost Sharing Among LCC Congregations**

If synod chooses to subsidize vicarage congregations, then the funds would have to come from assessing the congregations of the synod. There are two possible ways to accomplish this; to assess each congregation per confirmed member, or to assess them according to their congregational size. The suggested amount for both options are outlined below.

***If cost is shared per confirmed member***

$$\$160,000 \div 52,654 \text{ confirmed members} = \$3.04 \text{ per confirmed member}$$

***If cost is shared per size of congregation***

Example # 1

Annual support from

Small congregations (100 confirmed members)	\$275 x 229 congregations = \$62,975
Medium (350 confirmed members)	\$1000 x 72 congregations = \$72,000
Large (750 confirmed members)	\$2250 x 15 congregations = <u>\$33,750</u>
TOTAL	\$168,725

\*{\$8,725 overage }

\*Overage assumes that some congregations will not submit annual contributions.

Example # 2

Annual support from

Small congregations (100 confirmed members)	\$500 x 229 congregations = \$114,500
Medium (350 confirmed members)	\$750 x 72 congregations = \$ 54,000
Large (750 confirmed members)	\$1000 x 15 congregations = <u>\$ 15,000</u>
TOTAL	\$183,500

\*{\$23,500 overage }

### **Vicarage Placement Assistance Fund**

Should an assessment be made of synodical congregations, then a system for collecting and distributing the funds would have to be established. Mr. Dwayne Cleave, Treasurer of LCC, suggested the following parameters for a potential Vicarage Placement Assistance Fund:

- 1) All congregations would be billed an annual assessment based on communicant membership to support the vicarage program. The Districts would collect the funds from congregations and forward them to LCC.
- 2) The LCC Vicarage Placement Fund would have maximum capital limit established by the Council of Presidents (Suggestion \$240,000). This amount would cover approximately 50% of the cost of having 12 vicars placed.
- 3) The Congregation that has a vicar placement would responsible for covering 50% of the annual costs with the remainder being covered by the vicarage fund.
- 4) Lutheran Foundation Canada financial gift coordinators would communicate and support the Vicarage Placement Fund through their ongoing presentations to our communicant membership with the hope that fellow brothers and sisters in Christ will see and heed to the need and support of this fund through planned gifts
- 5) The Vicarage Placement Fund be invested equally in each District's CEF, managed by the Synod Treasurer and any interest earned through this investment be rolled back into the Vicarage Placement Fund
- 6) The fund, its balances and disbursements would be reported in the Synod's annual financial statements

### **Concluding Recommendations**

The Vicarage Task Force has concluded that the current vicarage program has served Lutheran Church Canada well through the years. Changing to a three year resident program at this time would not be in the best interest of the church. Maintaining a one year vicarage in the third year of the seminary program remains the preferred option. The system is clearly not broken, but it would certainly benefit with some "fine tuning." These adjustments require participation from various participants in the church. Therefore the task force suggests the following recommendations:

### **The Seminaries**

- 1) Ensure that that congregations inquiring into the possibility of applying for a vicar would receive appropriate information regarding not only the financial commitment, but the

amount of time that mentoring a vicar will require so they can enter into the process with appropriate expectations.

- 2) Orient and support mentors through the whole vicarage year.
- 3) Continue to improve their evaluation of students' readiness for vicarage.
- 4) Continue to prepare students to enter the vicarage year with the appropriate servant attitude.

### **The Council of Presidents**

- 1) Encourage congregations to consider the possibility of applying for a vicar, and provide the appropriate information regarding not only the financial commitment, but the amount of time that mentoring a vicar will require.
- 2) Actively identify and recruit excellent mentors as a priority of The Council of Presidents.
- 3) Whenever possible, place vicars where the mentor is on-site. Vicars should not be placed primarily to fill vacancies, nor to serve as mission developers.
- 4) Create an application process to include letters of recommendation from Circuit Counsellors and District Presidents which include a discussion of the potential mentor's attributes and style of mentorship.
- 5) Study the possibilities of implementing a process for mentoring pastors in the first few years of their ministry. (Similar to the PALS model used in the LCMS)

### **The Synod**

- 1) Adopt a system of subsidizing vicarages whereby congregations are yearly assessed and contribute to a Vicarage Placement Fund.

### **Individual Congregations**

- 1) Examine themselves to see if they would be a good training ground for a vicar.
- 2) Consider participating in the vicarage program (especially if it is made more affordable through subsidy) thereby offering more options for placement.
- 3) Commit themselves to support the Vicarage Placement Fund.

It is the prayer of the task force that the recommendations brought forth in this report would be considered and implemented, so that the Synod can raise up Pastors that are both faithful to God's Word, and pastoral with His people. May the vicarage program be improved as He sees fit, and may God continue to bless the process of training shepherds for His church.

Respectfully submitted,

The Vicarage Task Force

June 14, 2010