

Continuing Education

Special Insert

Use this special insert to talk about continuing education for called workers in your congregation.



Grow sowers of the Word

Does it really matter if our congregations give our called workers the encouragement, time, and resources to continue learning?

Mr. Arvid Schwartz, a former lay representative on our synod's Synodical Council, voices a resounding "Yes!"

"I make my living being in production agriculture (farming) these days. As farmers we are regularly attending classes on crop production," he says. "I need to do that to enlarge my skills and stay current with advances in my field. If I didn't and was trying to grow corn the way farmers did 50 years ago, I'd still be getting fifty bushels of corn to the acre."

Fifty bushels? The United States Department of Agriculture notes that 1958 was the first year corn production passed 50 bushels per acre. Today the yield per acre tops 162 bushels—an improvement of three hundred percent in just 51 years!

Advances in agricultural science and technology have led to this astounding growth in productivity. How important that those who make their living by growing corn stay current in the latest methods for planting and harvesting a bumper crop.

Is that less important for those who don't sow corn but plant God's Word? Arvid doesn't think so.

"I know of no other profession in the United States, or in the world for that matter, where you graduate with your advanced degree, and you get sent off. Where you don't ever have to refresh or enhance that knowledge if you don't want to. You're done...."

"Over the 40 years that you are a pastor the skills of the pastoral ministry are changing all the time. In fact, they are changing more today than 30 years ago. The only way that you can keep up with that is to have someone who is in each of those areas keep telling you that and working with you on that...."



"I use the analogy that the brightest surgeon from the class at the University of Minnesota or University of Wisconsin is sent out to be a surgeon. Does he never return for refreshing work? Of course not!"

God's Word is changeless, and the power of the Spirit is always working through that Word to create and strengthen faith. It is the power of the gospel in Word and sacraments that brings a harvest per acre of "a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:23). Only God knows and directs what growth—whether seen or unseen—his Word will accomplish.

Yes indeed, God blesses the work of called workers as he decides. But because he works through the gospel, it is critical that our called leaders are growing in that Word for themselves. It is also critical that they are growing in how to communicate that Word clearly across generations and cultures. It is critical that they explore and become familiar with ministry challenges that they did not imagine when in school. Pre-ministerial education, no matter how faithful and thorough, can't anticipate all the challenges and changes in a lifetime of ministry.

And while Arvid's statements reference pastors specifically, everything he mentioned is equally important for those serving our congregations as teachers or staff ministers.

How important to encourage the called workers of our congregations to continue to grow in their service to Christ and us. It is important that we look for ways to provide release from the sometimes overwhelming tasks of ministry so that they can focus on growing in the Word and growing in ways to share that Word. And, it is important that our congregations help called workers with the costs of such growth.

Sharpen ministry effort

What exactly *is* continuing education?

It was the most unusual study session I ever participated in—four parish pastors working on a preaching text they had agreed to study.

What's so unusual about that? Well, not one of us was in the same room. In fact, only two of us were in the same state! We were participating in a live voice chat over the Internet.

Four brothers in Christ and in ministry sought to enrich each other's proclamation of the Word for that next Sunday. Each pastor shared insights he had gained from his personal study of the biblical text. The words of King Solomon explain best what happened that day: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

If you say the words "continuing education" to WELS pastors, the first thing that will pop into the minds of many is Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's program of Summer Quarter classes. But continuing education for pastors is much broader than that!

If you say the words "continuing education" to WELS teachers or staff ministers, the first thing that may pop into their minds may be Martin Luther College's summer school program or Masters Program that offer courses in many areas of ministry. But continuing education for teachers and staff ministers is much broader than that!

Yes, there can be tremendous benefit and encouragement gained by following a more formal course of study—including pursuing a degree. What is more, when called workers gather in the same place for study something special happens—learning and encouragement occur outside the classroom as well as within it. Iron sharpens iron.

But as vital as these formal educational resources are, continuing education is more than credits and classrooms, diplomas and degrees. For pastors it means making the most of conferences and circuit meetings or forming small study groups to work together on preaching or other ministry challenges. For teachers it means making the most of the workshops and seminars at conferences or scheduling time to work together as a faculty on a particular ministry challenge.

Most important, for called workers continuing education includes spiritual growth through regular study of the Word. That is the keystone. That same Word they preach and teach to others provides the Water of Life to them too. It is a dangerous activity to offer that Water of Life to others if one is not drinking the Water of Life deeply and personally!



Sounds like a good idea for our called workers. But why is continuing education important to me?

Imagine needing emergency surgery and learning that the surgeon on call graduated from medical school in 1975 and has never opened a book since graduation; never discussed challenges with other surgeons; never attended any class, seminar, or conference for further training. He is unfamiliar with many of the latest surgical procedures that could hasten your recovery. How much better you'd feel if that surgeon not only had the benefit of years of experience but also had stayed current with advances in surgery and follow-up care.

So it is with those we call to care for our souls! Continuing education sharpens their faith, deepens their understanding of God's powerful Word, and encourages them to meet the needs of eternal souls in our congregations and schools. It provides them with the spiritual power of the gospel and broadens them through the experiences, reading, and insight of others.

Did you know that both Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary offer online courses for continuing education? While they don't replace the benefits of studying together face-to-face, they do provide opportunities for called workers when travel to New Ulm or Mequon isn't an option.



Find out more

Learn more about continuing education for called workers:

- Synodically: Rev. James Huebner, first vice president, welsvp1@wels.net
- At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Prof. Richard Gurgel, director of continuing education, gurgelr@wls.wels.net
- At Martin Luther College: Prof. Dave Bauer, director of continuing education, bauerdt@mlc-wels.edu or Prof. John Meyer, director of graduate studies, meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu

Provide ministry support

How can we help our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers?

It was 1990. Oklahoma's oil fields had shifted from economic asset to liability. And the other bread and butter of the Oklahoma economy—agriculture—was faring little better. The budget of Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, was stretched, and then stretched again. But congregational leaders seemed to notice that I, as their young pastor, was looking a bit stretched as well.

I was finishing my fourth year, and some of the new graduate zeal was beginning to be overwhelmed by the ebb and flow of the tide of daily ministry tasks. That's when the congregation presented me with a wonderful gift.

As the budget for 1990 was prepared, the leaders encouraged a plan to go to Summer Quarter that year. They approved three weeks away for Summer Quarter with a fourth week for some vacation. They even budgeted for a seminary student to serve as a summer vicar so that ministry duties didn't just pile up while I was gone.

That congregation gave me three vital gifts: encouragement, time, and financial support.

Members gave their **encouragement** to a worker who was beginning to recognize that he needed to grow to continue to meet the challenges of ministry with a joyful heart. They recognized that a growing pastor was critical for a growing ministry in their midst.

They gave the gift of **time**. They recognized that continuing education is not spelled v - a - c - a - t - i - o - n. They understood that the time away from the regular press of duties could be invigorating, but they also knew that putting the time into the reading, writing, and other course work was not the same as time off. They recognized it would be self-defeating if time away would mean little but catching up when I returned. While some ministry backlog was inevitable, they did all they could to make sure that a nagging concern was not a growing list of ministry undone.

Finally, they gave the gift of **financial support**. I covered the cost of my trip because I would have taken a trip for vacation. But the congregation paid the cost of the summer vicar and all tuition and room



and board fees not covered by a grant from the seminary.

And what did they receive in return for their investment? On the first Sunday back after my month-long sabbatical, here is how the chairman of the board of elders greeted me at the door after worship: "Pastor, you must have really enjoyed it up there at seminary!"

The congregation received back a pastor who was rejuvenated by time to focus on study of the Word and encouraged in his ministry. They received back a pastor who had enjoyed the worship life of the campus and being among others who also shouldered the burden of the heat of the day in the Lord's kingdom.

Those same three gifts—encouragement, time, and financial support—remain critical to assisting your called workers to continue to grow and mature in faith and ministry.

Prof. Richard Gurgel

How can I help?

- Discuss with your called workers how the congregation can help them continue their education.
- Ask for time in congregation meetings to thoroughly discuss the issue of continuing education. If it proves helpful, pull out this insert and make copies for other congregational leaders.
- Hand this insert to others and urge them to put continuing education on their discussion agenda.

Use your partners

What is happening synodically to encourage continuing education?

A renewed synodical emphasis has been placed on coordinating continuing education for called workers after the 2009 synod convention highlighted its importance. The Conference of Presidents reestablished the Committee for the Continuing Education of Called Workers—consisting of representatives from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Ministerial Education, Home Missions, the Conference of Presidents, and the Congregation and Ministry Support Group—to coordinate a comprehensive, yet flexible, continuing education program.



Continuing education through Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has two purposes: to train pastors and to provide continuing education for called workers.

Up until now, all faculty members were called full time to assist with the first task, while devoting above-and-beyond time and energy to the second.

With thanks to God for some generous grants, one faculty member has been freed from half of his regular teaching responsibilities so he can devote time and attention to continuing education. The grants also free up time and provide technical support for other faculty members to develop and teach online courses—all without any increase to the seminary budget.

As a way of highlighting this new initiative, the seminary has named this effort "Grow in Grace: the Institute for Continuing Education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." The institute's motto is "Partnering in the lifelong pursuit of spiritual and professional growth."

To help called workers and their congregations fund continuing education, the seminary will be expanding available financial aid for called workers taking continuing education courses offered by the seminary. In this one-year pilot project, the seminary will match dollar for dollar whatever a congregation contributes toward tuition for its called workers. These scholarship dollars will be available not only for courses offered on campus but also for any seminary course taken for credit online or taught "in the field."

Learn more about WLS's continuing education opportunities at www.wlsce.net.



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

Continuing education through Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College (MLC) prepares students for entry into teaching and staff ministries, but continuing education is necessary to maintain and advance professional and spiritual qualifications.

MLC has offered continuing education opportunities for decades. Last year alone, more than 700 teachers, staff ministers, and pastors were motivated by their gracious God to continue their education through MLC. These servants of the church, supported by their home congregations, demonstrate Paul's words, "Do not neglect your gift. . . . Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress" (1 Timothy 4:14,15).

Of note is the new Master of Science in Education (M.S. Ed) program. Thirteen teachers have graduated with their master's degree, and 60-plus are currently enrolled. The M.S. Ed program offers emphases in instruction, special education, and leadership, with educational technology soon to be added. Programs of one-credit continuing education courses are available for teachers. A growing number of teachers also are pursuing state licensure through MLC.

Principals, early childhood directors, and others in leadership positions may take advantage of the leadership emphasis of MLC's M.S. Ed program. A package of one-credit continuing education courses also targets those in leadership roles.

Find out more about MLC's continuing education opportunities at www.mlc-wels.edu.

Articles written by Prof. Richard Gurgel, director of continuing education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and member of the Committee for the Continuing Education of Called Workers.