

SPECIAL MINISTRIES

The members of the board will understand that any exhaustive study of the so-called “auxiliary ministries” will not only involve substantial educational and institutional issues, but will also plunge us into a veritable morass of theological and ecclesiastical concerns. If not insuperable, they are at least formidable. Included are such items as the relationship of “the ministries” to “the ministry” (and the very legitimacy of the former term), of church to ministry, of the “public ministry” to the “priesthood of all believers,” of “professional ministry” to “lay ministry,” and the perpetually difficult matter of the implications of ordination.

Similarly, concern must be expressed for the meaning of the terms “profession” and “professional” if they are to be used in ecclesiastical contexts. Not only has the ministry long been accorded the status of a “learned profession” but with the extension of the concept beyond law, medicine and teaching to engineering, architecture, business administration, realty and funeral direction, it would be strange not to include the several functions of the ecclesiastical ministry within the “professional” category. But the concept “professional” connotes professional “standards,” and “standards” necessarily connote actual or possible exclusion from practice of those who do not meet those standards.

As we all know, there are many people who object to the use of these elements in the organization and management of ecclesiastical affairs, maintaining that they smack of clericalism and of invidious status and Stand – from which the Reformation presumably delivered us.

What follows, therefore, can be at best a very cursory review—not so much of the distinctly theological and ecclesiastical aspects as the more organizational (if you will, “practical”) considerations involved. They are discussed on an implicit assumption of a sort of pragmatic rubric, that the church is free at any point in its history to define new “forms” of ministry and to provide and prescribe programs of preparation for them. The intricate ramifications of that rubric we will have to let slide for the moment.

One detail which we can point out, however, is that the provision in the Synodical constitution that one of the objectives of the Synod is “the training of ministers and teachers for service in the Evangelical Lutheran Church,” must certainly be seen in its historical context and does not prevent the church from authorizing a somewhat broader program of professional preparation than the strict meaning of the terms used would seem to call for.

It is apparent that for some years we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have been working with greater or lesser accuracy of expression with such “auxiliary ministries” (it should be remembered that for many, many years the teaching ministry was referred to as an “auxiliary ministry”) as the female diaconate, the positions of the parish worker, the professional lay church worker (or whatever a graduate of the Lutheran Lay Training Institute is properly called), the youth worker, the director of Christian education, the social worker (?), the director of Christian music (?), and perhaps others.

There are many explanations for both the viability and endurance of these professional and semi-professional offices as well as for the fact that they have remained small in numerical membership through the years.

It may be gratuitous to point out—but perhaps also helpful—that one of the factors which has undoubtedly contributed to the viability of each of these offices is the simple fact that most employing agencies (congregations and institutions) do not employ with a particularly strict concern for the precise elements of the individual’s preparation. In other words, many agencies need and “hire” what employment agencies call a “girl Friday,” that is, a person versatile enough to be helpful in many aspects of congregational or institutional activity, without particular reference to genuinely professional skills or qualifications.

The Diaconate

The board is presently active through a subcommittee in studying the present advantages and difficulties inherent in the tripartite arrangement for the education of deaconesses in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The three parties are, of course, the Lutheran Deaconess Association, Valparaiso University, and the Synodical colleges, represented by the Board for Higher Education.

While the precipitating factor for the present discussion seems to be the persistent financial crisis facing the Lutheran Deaconess Association, there are larger issues, involving mostly the professional identification of the deaconess. Many would argue that the position has become anachronistic. Certainly far behind us is the concept that a deaconess is a counterpart to the traditional role of the Roman Catholic nun (a role which is obviously also changing) with its overtones of non-marriage, cloistering, and even communal living. (Once in a while this alternative is still discussed – but not too seriously.)

The fact of the matter is that deaconesses are not nuns, they are not nurses, they are not teachers, they are not social workers, and it is understandable that they do

not want to be considered secretaries. One answer, of course, is that they are none of these—because they are deaconesses! Their major is theology, and the central function of their office is that sort of activity which we consider to be very close to the literal communication of law and Gospel—the teaching of religion, ministering to shut-ins, making mission calls, providing religious leadership to parish and other voluntary groups.

The precise, or effective, demand for these services is naturally hard to measure. Fortunately, supply and demand have been in remarkable balance—and both have been small, numerically considered.

What seriously complicates every attempt to solve immediate, pressing issues is the haunting realization that there may not be a really pressing need to maintain the diaconate as a separate office, that more might be gained by transforming the curriculum into one with a basic teacher education or social work education framework, and that the Synodical involvement could be greatly simplified by absorbing the individuals involved into the programs of our existing junior colleges and four-year teachers colleges.

The Parish Worker

Whatever specific legislative acts may be cited, the background of the parish worker program is really the history and tradition of Saint John's College, Winfield. The few words that follow do not begin to reflect the vocational and curricular concerns which have engaged the attention of many people for many hours over the past years.

The crux of the issue is that most people see this program as a parish secretary program and hence one which is scarcely semi-professional in any ecclesiastical sense. By contrast, the Winfield school and other backers are in effect saying that the graduates of this program, presumably because of the training received, are prepared for a considerably broader area of parish service (including teaching in part-time agencies, music, youth work, etc.). Part of the argument is apparently this, that graduates do, as a matter of fact, engage in many of these activities, many with considerable success.

Certainly all would agree that much depends upon the aptitudes, skills, and personality of the individual. Many of the persons involved can and do play the “girl Friday” role admirably, and so the demand has continued, at a level not much smaller than the supply.

Discontinuation of the program, for which a considerable argument could be made in terms of the pre-professional and professional character of synodical schools, would naturally lead to the embarrassment and demoralization of Saint John's College and to the consternation of a fair number of constituents who feel that the Synod renders a very worthwhile service to its congregations by providing this particular program of preparation.

The Lutheran Lay Training Institute

This institution, of fairly recent vintage, has operated successfully but without spectacular notice on the campus of Concordia College in Milwaukee. Some of the very good things that can be said about the institute is that it has been neither presumptuous nor raucous. More important is that fact that the services of its graduates seem to be useful to and appreciated by those who employ them.

The graduates serve in a wide range of positions, a few men in positions remarkably close to that of "acting pastors." (This is really a somewhat separate issue.)

The institute has been remarkable circumspect in its admissions policies and procedures. Moreover, it is gradually raising the level of educational requirements for admission. It will soon be requiring completion of at least junior college education.

Generally, the institute provides its students with an orientation to ecclesiastical activity and experience for the development of skills, depending largely on the previous experience of the students.

The Youth Leadership Training Program is a program of Valparaiso University. Conversations held recently emphasize the fact that the university is holding the program under close scrutiny and is asking pertinent questions about its purpose, direction, and structure. An obvious point of impingement with distinctly synodical interests is the developing youth ministry programs at River Forest and Seward. Shall the two programs be parallel? Shall one yield in favor of the other? Shall Valparaiso prepare for service outside the ecclesiastical establishment (YMCA's, juvenile courts and departments, etc.) and the synodical schools for service inside the establishment? Should the Valparaiso program be built on a social-work base and the synodical program on a teacher-education base?

These are the questions which need to be faced in a cooperative way.

The Ministry of Social Work

So much has been said about this subject in recent meetings of the board that little elaboration is really necessary.

Presently the only synodical “involvement” is the granting of professional fee privileges to students at the junior college level who declare that they are preparing for a social work ministry.

The broadening of concern on the part of our church structures and the increasing complexity of what might be called the “social work case load” of our parish pastors portend a greater demand for truly professional social workers (male and female, and with full professional credentials) in the years ahead. This demand will likely be recognized and met in the years to come.

At the moment, the board has declined to enter into this area of activity because of considerations of cost and because of the extreme fluidity of the situation with respect to the best organization of the program. Another factor is that the beginning of live social work programs at our teachers colleges would be the first clear-cut departure from teacher-education at these schools. Would this step open a Pandora’s box by way of making our schools full liberal arts colleges?

This answer cannot be presumed, and in the meantime, continued earnest attention needs to be given to providing preparation which seems, much more than any of those discussed above, to offer the possibility of creating a ministry which can be truly professional in nature, identifiable by the world, and certifiable by the professional community.

“Special Ministries,” is a report written by the Board for Higher Education staff, and is located in the *BHE Minutes*, January 11, 1968, housed at Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Mo.