

## Diane Hymans, Trinity Lutheran Seminary



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In a recent New Testament II class at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, the subject for the day was Paul's emphasis on giving oneself for others, looking particularly at the Christ hymn in Phillipians 2:6–11, as well as related passages, including Paul's reference to himself as an example (Phil. 2:20–21). One insightful student commented, "Paul isn't a very good example of self-care, is he?" The student was bringing content from her first-year "Person in Ministry" course into this second-year New Testament class. Professor Clayton Croy, who teaches the course, reports that the student's comment led to a fruitful conversation about the differences between a modern parish pastor and the form that Paul's itinerant, sometimes dangerous, ministry took during the Roman empire. Croy reports, "We considered that self-care and giving oneself for the gospel are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that proper self-care enables one's ministry to be stronger and longer-lasting." The discussion also led to the observation that some persons, even now, may be called to more perilous ministry than others.

This incident is an example of one form that integration across the curriculum takes at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. It is not uncommon for content from one course to find its way into the discussion in a course in another discipline. The faculty hopes that this will happen, and, in fact, encourages it. Since the 1980s, when the faculty realized that pre-seminary theological training could no longer be assumed, integration has been one of the core values underlying the curriculum at Trinity.

The MDiv curriculum at Trinity Seminary is more structured than in many theological schools, with a significant number of required courses taken in prescribed sequence. It is built around the classical theological curriculum — biblical studies, historical and systematic theology, and practical theology. In addition to a sequence of required courses in these foundational disciplines, students are expected to take a variety of courses designated as options in specific areas, including the arts, missiology, preaching, and several Bible options. In what room they have left in their schedules, students may choose elective courses. The core courses serve as prerequisites for almost everything that follows. The essentials of this curriculum have been in place since the early 1990s, though many aspects have evolved since then.

The curriculum is front-loaded with the basics. Entering juniors take courses in Bible, systematic theology, church history, and worship. All are intended to provide a base from which to move into the middler year, when more courses in practical theology come into play. In this second year, MDiv students add to the sequence their first course in homiletics, along with courses in pastoral care and counseling and Christian education. ELCA students also take a course called “Lutheran Identity,” organized around the Lutheran confessions, while students from other traditions take a course related to their own background. The intent is that the content from the first-year foundational disciplines will find its way into these second-year courses on the practice of ministry. The courses related to denominational identity are designed to move beyond simply learning the content of the confessions to exploring how they shape the witness and ministry of the church in distinctive ways.

### **Integrative Sites in the Curriculum**

There are some required courses in the curriculum that are intentionally designed to nurture the practice of integration from the beginning of students’ work in seminary. First-year students are involved in two of these integrative courses. The first is “Person in Ministry,” which brings the resources of pastoral psychology into conversation with those of the Bible and theology to help students understand themselves and the ways in which they relate to others in light of their emerging pastoral identity. The second is “Faith Seeking Understanding,” which is designed as an introduction to the entire theological education enterprise. Nearly everyone on the faculty puts in a guest appearance at some point. The course is not “theology lite,” because it introduces students to substantive issues in theology and ministry from three points of view — content, context, and method — and it introduces the concept of integration. As faculty members model practices of integration, first-year students can ask questions about the relationship between faith and intellect.

Concurrently, contextual experiences are an important component of Trinity’s curriculum. Students in the MDiv program are required to participate in a Ministry in Context assignment, CPE, and a one-year internship. Ministry in Context (MIC) begins in the junior year. After the

Christmas break, students are assigned to an MIC site, usually a congregation. For this first year, students are primarily involved in observing the life of the congregation and assisting in worship. During their middler year, students are exposed to a wider range of activities and take a more active leadership role. In many instances, the sequence of involvement in specific aspects of ministry is related to the sequence of courses that they are taking. For example, one assignment in the required course in educational ministry asks middlers to teach in an educational setting at their MIC site. They are to design a series of three lesson plans, teach the sessions, and write a reflection paper afterwards. The teaching experiences that students are having in their MIC setting become part of the classroom conversation that explores the teaching-learning process. In turn, the content of many students' teaching designs comes from what they are studying in other courses at the seminary.

The first two years of the curriculum are intentionally moving toward the primary contextual experience for students at Trinity — the third-year, full-time internship in a parish. This is required by the ELCA for all candidates for ordination. Internship helps shape the pastoral identity of Trinity students in powerful ways. They are exposed to the full range of ministerial responsibilities, which test the knowledge and skills learned in their first two years of classroom work. Supervising pastors receive training from the seminary to help students reflect on their experience and integrate course work with the reality of life in the congregation.

When students return for their final year of seminary study, they are different. The senior-year curriculum builds on previous coursework and the internship experience to bring it all together for students as they prepare to move into their first call in a parish. Two major integrative courses carry much of that load. "Pastoral Leadership in Ministry and Mission" spans two terms and focuses on the role of pastor as leader. Drawing heavily on case study methodology, students reflect on their experience as interns and work to integrate theological understanding with the experience of ministry and mission in the church. In their final term, students also participate in a course in "Constructive Theology." Here a primary question is "How does theology matter in the decisions we make in ministry?" The course seeks to help the student build a theology to carry into the parish. The internship experience is a continuing conversational partner in exploring the issues involved.

One more aspect of life at Trinity seeks to foster integration for students. Every student is assigned to an I-group. More formally called Integrative Groups, because they are encouraged but not required, their weekly gatherings are an aspect of the informal curriculum at Trinity. Each group consists of students from every degree program and from each year of study, along with a faculty advisor. While there is some structure to the group experience, each I-group takes on its own character. For instance, each group is responsible for planning one week of chapel worship each year. And second-year students are required to bring a critical incident from their MIC experience to I-group for processing. But the mix of students fosters a great deal of sharing

from the whole of the seminary experience, including what happens in class, contextual experiences, and the personal lives of students.

For Trinity's faculty, integration does not just happen. It is built into the structure of the curriculum in the way courses are sequenced, and in the relationship between courses and contextual experiences. It emerges in the way individual faculty members design their courses, in class discussions, and in specific assignments. When the current curriculum was put into place, faculty met in interdivisional groups to talk about integration. Those teaching the junior-year courses, for example, met to compare notes on such matters as content and assigned readings. Though this practice no longer happens in a formal way, it is still a part of the informal conversation among faculty members.

The challenge will come in the next academic year. In fall 2007, Trinity will move from a quarter to a semester calendar. We have just completed an extensive revision of our curriculum to fit this new reality. We are retaining many of the elements of the current curriculum, such as the junior and senior-year integrative courses, and all of our contextual requirements. Sequencing becomes more difficult when students can take fewer courses in a year, but we are committed to working at it. The faculty members who will teach the senior-year integrative sequence, which will now consist of a course titled "Pastor as Leader," followed by a course called "Pastor as Theologian," are already making plans for how the two can flow into each other. And our academic dean has indicated his intention to gather small groups of faculty as we move into the year to talk about integration in each particular year of study and throughout the sequence of the curriculum.

Does it work? For the most part — yes. Faculty members often hear students relating learnings from one course to another. It's not uncommon to hear students say, "It's all starting to fit together." And that applies to students in every year of study. Not every student gets it — they never do. But, after many years of working with it, integration is becoming second nature to Trinity's faculty.