The Teaching Parish

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Parish expands and deepens the student's learning perspective on the many ways God works through local congregations. As the first year of field education; it is required for the M.Div. and M.A.M.S. degree programs and serves to provide a concrete setting for discernment of vocation to ministry through conversation and work with a particular Christian community.

Teaching Parish students dedicate a defined amount of time (7-10 hrs on weeks they are in the parish), to explore limited roles of leadership in the congregation, and contribute to the congregation in three important ways:

1. **By observing and listening to the congregation,** the student notices how the congregation relates to its context, how the members live out their faith in daily life, and how their worship, fellowship and decision making is a unique response to the Gospel

2. **By teaching and preaching,** the student begins to express how the Word of God is relevant to contemporary needs and also faithful to the canonical scriptures, creeds and confessional traditions. (M.Div. students will teach two times and preach twice; M.A.M.S. students may substitute teaching for preaching);

3. **By worshipping and praying with the congregation,** the student establishes a habit of listening to God, the source of all life and faith.

The congregation and the Mentor share their congregational life with the student, and review and discuss the student's skills and gifts for public leadership. Reflection on vocation – both the sense of purpose for the student in ministry, but also the corporate vocation, or 'call' that the congregation or ministry setting has received and faithfully engages - frames the Teaching Parish experience and themes throughout the year. In this way, Teaching Parish helps to prepare candidates for public offices of ministry, and particularly the endorsement stage of the second year of candidacy.

Initial explanations of the main emphases of the Teaching Parish experience follow: observation, listening, prayer, vocational reflection, and mission. Next the shape of the arrangement between a congregation and a student is described and a description of the relationship of mentor and student. Guidelines for weekly conferences between mentor and student may be used to initiate conversation. Evaluation forms are also available at the Seminary's website:

www.ltsg.edu click on Offices; Field Education; scroll to Teaching Parish section.

Observation-Listening

The seminary course that accompanies Teaching Parish, Integrative Seminar I, presents a variety of ways to listen and observe in congregations. Each congregation has a particular story of listening and responding to God's Word. Through interpretive methods and theories, the course aims to assist students in understanding congregations as places of ongoing discernment and service.

To be able to minister to real people in real places one must have open ears and eyes.
Faith begins in hearing and believing the good news that in Jesus Christ God has defeated sin, death and evil. A Christian finds comfort in the assurance that God hears prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Listening and being heard are basic to the Christian faith, and those who seek to minister in the name of Christ Jesus take a listening posture toward God and others. They must also be able to see their neighbor, and to be able to hear the needs of the world around them. Teaching Parish provides that very real setting where faith can meet the world of need.
Faith that grasps the gospel of Jesus Christ develops through interpretation of the scriptures and applying that message in daily life. Students in Teaching Parish listen both to what scripture is saying to the congregation and to how a congregation hears and understands scripture.

In response to the Word of God, people of faith will respond with their own word. Fellowship and prayer comprise the key elements under girding the faith and mission of a congregation. Teaching Parish provides a context for listening well and asking questions, for talking and speaking about their faith with the people of a congregation.

Prayer

At the heart of every Christian congregation is prayer. Gathered around the Word of God and the sacraments, the people pray: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things; Come, Lord Jesus; Come, Holy Spirit." Stemming from these prayers are the many collective and individual prayers that express the variety and intensity of human expectations, needs, fears and hopes.

Through scheduled activities in the Teaching Parish, students have the opportunity to learn from a living, prayerful, congregation and to join its life of service. In order to pray well for a congregation, one must

listen well to congregational members, understand their life together, and respectfully value the rich diversity within every particular assemble.

Vocational Reflection

For ELCA students:

Most students take Teaching Parish during their first year of theological studies and will take the next step toward rostered ministry by participating in the endorsement panel of their approved candidacy process. At this point a candidate should be able to affirm her or his own sense of call to a rostered ministry. At the time of endorsement, the members of a candidacy committee should have reasonable confidence that the candidate's sense of call will be affirmed publicly by the church in ensuing educational and field experiences.

For all students:

In order to assist students in discernment of call, and to prepare students for articulation of a sense of call, an important component of Teaching Parish is vocational reflection. Theological readings and discussions between the Mentor and student can guide this process of vocational reflection.

Mission

All of the study and reflection we do in class and at the Teaching Parish is not just an exercise in devotion; it is intended to equip us to discern how God is calling us to service in the world. Students are making important contributions to God’s mission in a particular time and place by putting together their reading and reflection and anticipating how they as leaders would address the needs and opportunities presented to them in a congregation or special ministry.

PRACTICAL ISSUES IN THE TEACHING PARISH

Congregation and Student

Teaching Parish assignments are normally within approximately one hour's drive from Gettysburg. On the assigned weeks, students spend seven to ten hours in activity related to Teaching Parish, including travel time. Such activity includes:

- Observation and interaction;
- Teaching and preaching at times specified in the Teaching Parish schedule (below);

- Participation and occasional assisting in worship; education; & service ministries
- Visitation and interviews with congregational members;
- Study of the community and various models of ministry;
- Sunday lunches with members of the congregation;
- Conferences with mentor;
- Travel time-**Teaching Parish Mileage Compensation** We ask the congregation to reimburse the student to and from the church for the regularly scheduled Sunday morning responsibilities at the current IRS standard rate (currently 55.5 cents). Mileage will be calculated as either the distance between the Seminary and the congregation OR the students residence to the congregation-whichever is less.
- Student's family: Families are welcome to visit but not expected
- to participate in the Teaching Parish program

Note: While students do not need to be at the teaching parish every week of the term, they must be in the teaching parish at least as many weeks as necessary to complete the number of mentor conferences that are listed below. The 'free' weeks are very limited, but they provide some flexibility. The mentor and student need to decide on a schedule for conferences and visitation that best suits them.

Teaching Parish students are not expected to perform additional duties beyond those articulated above, and should not staff or start any programs or group activities in the parish. Students **should not** be asked to do so by mentors or congregational leaders.

Congregations should arrange for members to take turns inviting the Teaching Parish student for meals following services, and to allow time for conversation and questions. The students will be depending upon these invitations to learn about the congregation's life beyond public worship. Such conversation times form the basis for the student's written assignments.

Mentor and Student

An important aspect of the 7-10 hours that the student will spend in the parish or institution during the selected weeks of the term is the development of an intentional professional relationship with the teaching parish mentor. Each parish is different, and each mentor is different, but a professional relationship can only be effective if there is clear communication of expectations, a real desire to understand the

gifts and strengths of the student and the mentor, as well as prompt attention to areas where new learning is necessary.

The conferences between mentor and student may begin with scripture reading and prayer, as a way to integrate the various learning tasks assigned in the course with the life of the parish, or agency. We recommend using a form of *lectio divina* - a way of concentrating the mind on a particular expression or experience of God's Word, and linking the fruits of that concentration to daily life –to open the mentoring sessions. A description of this practice is appended to the Teaching Parish Reference Book. Biblical reflection done in this way can deeply enrich a discussion of:

a) the theology, context, and mission of the congregation as it emerges from the modules of Integrative Seminar I, or the student's preparations and experiences in teaching and preaching in the Teaching Parish context.

b) reflections upon vocation, prompting students to enrich their sense and understanding of call to ministry for the professional pastor, Christian educator, or diaconal minister as well as an understanding of the call of the congregation, or agency.

Appraisals

Students are responsible for getting the appraisal forms to the Field Education Office by the deadline. These include: a one-page mid-year review, Teaching and Preaching evaluations, and a final evaluation at the end of the year. Please refer to each form for the various questions for appraisal and evaluation. The final appraisals of the year may be shared with synodical candidacy committees.

During the second semester, the Mentor or a qualified appointee should complete one teaching evaluations and two preaching evaluations for students in the Master of Divinity degree. Students in the Master of Arts in Ministerial Studies--Track A should be evaluated in four teaching experiences. Students in MAMS--Track C have the option of teaching or a combination of teaching and preaching experiences, or for diaconal students, a service ministry component.

Teaching Parish and the Diaconal Ministry Candidate

Field work plays a vital role in the preparation and formation of diaconal ministry candidates. Diaconal ministry takes place in the boundaries where church and society interface. Regardless of the particular ministry setting in which they serve, diaconal ministers will be expected to

understand the dynamic relationships within and between congregational and societal systems and to provide leadership in connecting these systems. Therefore, the process of contextualization, reflection, integration, and evaluation will be given particular attention throughout the field work experience.

The goals of field experience for diaconal ministry candidates are:

- to develop a vision and understanding of his or her particular ministry of Word and service as rooted in the Word of God and witness to the Gospel;

- to develop skills for understanding systemic relationships within and between congregations and societal agencies;

- to develop strategies that provide ministry at particular interfaces of church and society;

- to demonstrate competence in the previously stated goals in the planning and execution of a diaconal project designed to engage the congregation's attention more keenly with respect to its ministry of the baptized in the world. Such as project will evidence the candidate's grasp of Lutheran theology and its derivative understanding of Christian vocation.

The first three bullets in this list are appropriate to the Teaching Parish assignment. Bullet three on this list begins to emerge within the Teaching Parish assignment and is more fully developed during the completion of LTSG course 4.205, the Required Diaconal Ministry Independent Study Project. The final bullet refers to LTSG course 4.205 Required Diaconal Ministry Independent Study Project which takes place after receipt of a positive candidacy endorsement decision.

The practical activities assigned in the teaching parish are appropriate for diaconal ministry candidates. Most diaconal ministers are not called to settings that include regular worship leadership but there are obvious places within the liturgy where church and world connect, and these are the more appropriate places for the diaconal ministry candidate to lead: (receiving the bread and wine, preparing the altar, distributing Holy Communion, caring for the altar and vessels, reading the Gospel) and roles that flow from the heart of diaconal ministry (leadership of intercessory prayer, distribution of Holy Communion to the homebound, preaching, oversight of the 'frontiers' – the gathering and the sending, and planning worship with the world in mind).

The opportunities for visitation and interviews with congregational members, Sunday lunches with members of the congregation, and observation and study of the community might be structured to include individuals who provide entrée to the area of specialization of the

diaconal ministry candidate: chaplaincy, social work, pastoral care, spiritual direction, community organizing, parish nursing, etc.