

### **Item for Voters' Assembly – The SMP Program**

The SMP (Specific Ministry Pastor) program is a distance-learning four-year program of the LCMS seminaries that leads to ordination as a pastor. For the first two years of the program, the candidate is designated as a vicar. After two years, the candidate is ordained as a pastor in that congregation. During these 4 years, he will be taking online classes from Concordia Theological Seminary. Also included in the program are several trips to seminary for classes in person with the professors.

Regarding service and ministry in the church, for the first two years, the person is a vicar. This is a training period where the candidate is taking foundational classes to prepare him for ministry. As the vicar is equipped, he will take on different tasks of a pastor such as teaching, preaching, visitation, counseling, and pastoral leadership roles within the church. At the end of 2 years, he is ordained and becomes a pastor. At this point, he can perform any function of the pastor including serving as the officiant of communion at worship services. SMP pastors are normal pastors and can do any task a pastor would ordinarily do.

A major aspect of the SMP program is the mentoring of the candidate by a mentoring pastor, usually the head pastor of the sponsoring congregation. The mentoring pastor is assigned by the district and must meet certain criteria. That pastor agrees to help provide guidance in ministry, counsel for preparing sermons, and general on the job training. This is generally anticipated to take around five hours a week of the pastor's time over a four-year period of time. The mentor will also join the SMP candidate for a summer class on site at the seminary.

The unique aspect of the SMP program is that this is sponsored by a specific congregation. Thus, the candidate is assigned to that congregation. This includes the first 4 years of training during the candidate's seminary education. Upon completion of the program,

the SMP pastor remains under that particular congregation. This can be on a part-time basis or a full time basis. The SMP pastor remains with that congregation as long as the congregation wishes to continue that call in ministry. In the event that the SMP pastor is no longer needed at that church, the district president reassigns the SMP pastor to a different congregation.

The cost of tuition and books for the program is \$10,000 per year. As is the case with any candidate entering in the ministry, either the candidate, the supporting congregation, or both can cover the cost of seminary education. The congregation would be obligated to render salary for services performed. Since Pastor Rosser was kind enough to forego any salary for Grace Place, the original salary offered for this position was \$10,400/year. This amount would be added to the budget. The first portion would be to pay for ministry services rendered. Any remaining amount of the budgeted money would be used to help defray education costs. Also, a designated fund would be set up for individuals who would like to contribute above their regular offerings to support the candidate further with tuition costs. If more support is pledged and funds are available, the congregation has the option of increasing the budgeted amount of monies to support the SMP program each year.

In 6 to 7 years, between 2000 to 3000 pastors in the LCMS will reach retirement age. This presents the church body with a huge shortage of pastors in the near future since the seminaries are only graduating around 90 candidates per year. As a congregation, we have the opportunity to support a man who wishes to serve the Lord in the pastoral ministry. Even in the event that we cannot in the future support the SMP pastor, the district president would reassign him to one of the vacant congregations of our church body at a time when there will be a huge shortage. Let us pray for God's will to be done.