

Report R13.6 (2026)

Report on the Development of a Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan



**Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A
The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod**

Unofficial Resetting and Reformatting of the Report

R13.6

Report on the Development of a Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan (Pastoral Formation Committee, 2023 Res. 6-03A)

ASSIGNMENT

The 2023 LCMS Convention delegates assigned the Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) “to develop and present a comprehensive, uniform, synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan.” (2023 Resolution 6-03A [*Proceedings*, 163]).

PREFACE

For clarity in its fulfillment of the task assigned to it by Resolution 6-03A, the PFC has identified and distinguished three consecutive, distinct time periods during which supervision is provided for specific ministry vicars/pastors. This nomenclature will apply throughout the balance of this report:

- Period A: The initial two-year time of seminary studies undertaken by a specific ministry student-vicar¹, ending with his examination (seminary certification), call, and ordination as a specific ministry pastor;
- Period B: The subsequent two-year time of seminary studies undertaken by a specific ministry student-pastor (newly ordained and serving in context as a specific ministry pastor to his calling LCMS congregation-of-origin), ending with graduation from the seminary’s program of specific ministry instruction; and
- Period C: The subsequent service to an LCMS congregation by a specific ministry pastor following graduation from the seminary’s program of specific ministry instruction.

The provision of adequate supervision over specific ministry vicars and pastors over Periods A, B, and C has been a mandatory feature of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program since its formal establishment by the Synod in 2007 Resolution 5-01B. LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1 directs that every specific ministry pastor shall “... serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor” without limitation as to the time period under which the specific ministry pastor shall remain under supervision—that is, for the entire remaining period of a man’s service as a specific ministry pastor in the LCMS.

¹ Every SMP student is, by definition, a vicar serving an LCMS congregation-of-origin from the very start of seminary studies until certification and ordination into the Office of the Holy Ministry as an LCMS specific ministry pastor. Currently, specific ministry pastor certification and ordination occur at the midway point of seminary studies (i.e., after two years, with two subsequent years of seminary studies remaining until graduation); this midpoint timing of SMP certification and ordination remains unchanged from the Synod’s establishment of the SMP program in 2007.

The 2007 Resolution 5-01B, “To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program,”² includes the following statements:

Theological Foundations Guiding the Proposal (p. 133)

2. Lutherans affirm that there is only one Office of the Holy Ministry, established by God for the public conduct of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. However, the church may recognize certain distinctions within that one Office of the Holy Ministry and establish *degrees of supervision* without undermining the unity of the office [emphasis added].
 - a. All those who serve Christ in the Office of the Holy Ministry exercise *de iure divino* (by divine authority) the power to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, administer the Sacraments, and exercise church discipline. There is no distinction within the one office with respect to *this* power and authority.
 - b. Nevertheless, all ministers serve under supervision [emphasis added]. In ancient times, the practice of making certain distinctions within the one Office of the Holy Ministry *de iure humano* (by human authority) was established so that those ministers with broader and deeper theological understanding should be able to provide doctrinal *supervision* for less experienced, or less well-prepared, ministers [emphasis added]. These distinctions were made to ensure that the Gospel was rightly preached and taught, and to preserve the unity of the church. ...

Overview of the “Specific Ministry Pastor” Program (p. 134)

The specific curriculum will be determined and developed by the seminary faculties, in collaboration with those from the field who represent the specific ministerial contexts at district and congregational levels. It will be based on the following principles: ...

3. The engagement of *supervisors/mentors* by the seminary in consultation with the district presidents as a critical element of the distance education model [emphasis added]. ...

The Specific Ministry Pastor Program will utilize selected *mentors* in the preparation of a man for pastoral ministry with an emphasis on the area of spiritual formation [emphasis added]. ..

Step 2: Preordination Curriculum (p. 135)

Upon entrance into the Specific Ministry Program, the student will be assigned as a vicar in a specific locality but normally will not be authorized to administer the Sacraments. He will preach sermons prepared in collaboration with and approved by *his supervisor* [emphasis added]. ...

² Floor Committee 5, “Seminary and University Education:” C: Jon Diefenthaler (SE), DP: Vice-chair: Carl Krueger, Jr. (SELC); Richard Boche (WY); John Wille (SW), VOM: Allen Behnke (SE); Philip Kaufmann (CI); Chris Kellogg (RM); Michael Redeker (IN), VL: John Bahr (AT); Kathy Meier (MNS); Janice Nafzger (MO), AOM: Arleigh Lutz (NW); Ronald Wiese (MDS), ACM: Ron Bork (NEB); Jonathan Laabs (NI).

Step 3: Certification/Call/Ordination (p. 135)

After certification, call, and ordination according to the usual order, the student is placed on the pastoral roster of the Synod as a “specific ministry pastor.” He now may preach and administer the Sacraments *under supervision* in a specific locality [emphasis added].

Step 5: Completion of the Specific Ministry Pastor Program (p. 135)

Specific ministry pastors are recognized as just that: pastors certified for calls into specific ministry contexts, who serve *under the supervision* not only of the district president but also of a designated general ministry pastor. As such, they are eligible for calls into a similar specific ministry context, where they continue *under the supervision of a general ministry pastor*” [emphasis added].

Because their theological education is formed within the context of their specific ministry and does not represent the breadth and depth of theology and ecclesiology that forms a basis for pastoral oversight beyond the local level, they may not be placed into ecclesiastical roles of exercising pastoral oversight outside the location of their specific call (i.e., in the church-at-large), such as ...

d. *supervising vicars* [emphasis added].

(C) Add a new section at the beginning of Bylaw section 2.3 to define a” specific ministry pastor” and the limitations on membership privileges and responsibilities that pertain, as follows:

Specific Ministry Pastor Status and Limitations

2.13.1 A “specific ministry pastor” is a minister of religion—ordained who has completed the requirements for service as a specific ministry pastor and has been examined by one of the Synod’s seminaries, has received a regular call, and has been placed by the Council of Presidents into a specific Word and Sacrament ministry context. He is eligible to serve only in that specific ministry context for which he has been trained and may not be offered or accept a call for ministry for which he has not been certified as determined by his district president. *He shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor* [emphasis added].

(a) Because he is *under supervision* of another pastor and because a specific ministry pastor’s theological education has been formed in part by and for a specific ministry context, he may not be placed or called into ecclesiastical supervision roles that exercise pastoral oversight outside the location of his call [emphasis added].³

(E) Change Bylaw 3.1.3.1 to read as follows:

... and be it further *Resolved*, That the DELTO Oversight Committee be renamed as the

³ LCMS 2019 Bylaw 2.13.1, p. 63.

Specific Ministry Pastor Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee be placed under the *supervision* of the Board for Pastoral Education [emphasis added]; and be it further

Resolved, That the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee develop comprehensive guidelines that are consistent with the theological foundations, educational expectations, rostering process, training of *mentors and supervising pastors*, and membership limitations intended for this Specific Ministry Pastor Program [emphasis added]; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Specific Ministry Pastor Committee submit a progress report to the Synod at least nine months prior to the 2010 convention.

SUPERVISION OF SMP STUDENT-VICARS AND SMP STUDENT-PASTORS (PERIODS A AND B)

Supervision Documents Developed by the SMP Committee

In May 2012, the SMP Committee issued its first report to the Synod. The SMP Committee sent a second update on March 15, 2013, “The Specific Ministry Program: A White Paper Presented to the LCMS.”

In its 2013 white paper, the SMP Committee reported that the committee had developed and posted a number of SMP policies, procedures and documents as of March 31, 2008.

Following the adoption of the SMP program in principle at the 2007 LCMS Convention, the SMP Committee’s immediate attention was dedicated to developing common policies, procedures, and documents that both seminaries could utilize Synod-wide. These policies and documents were crafted by sub-groups of the SMP Committee and agreed-upon by all parties involved. They include *Admission Criteria*, *Admission Sequence*, *Application for Admission*, *Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* [a.k.a. “Specific Ministry Pastor-Supervisor Position Description”], *Covenant Agreement* [a.k.a. “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the SMP Program”], and *Congregational Instructions for Vicarage Application*. The final document developed, the *Application for Admission*, was posted on March 31, 2008. These documents were posted electronically on the Web sites of both seminaries and of the former LCMS Board for Pastoral Education.⁴

Currently, the Council of Presidents Manual (including its accompanying documents) contains the original SMP Committee’s above-cited policies, procedures, and documents in unamended form from 2008. The current (as of May 2025) CSL SMP Manual contains *similar* policies, procedures, and documents, but with some amendments subsequently made that have resulted in differences when compared with both (1) the original SMP Committee’s above-cited policies, procedures, and documents and (2) the COP Manual (including its accompanying documents). CTSFW is currently

⁴ The Specific Ministry Pastor Committee of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “The Specific Ministry Pastor Program: A White Paper presented to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” March 15, 2013, p. 3.

developing a comprehensive SMP Manual that will gather all SMP policies, procedures, and documents in one place.

The above-cited policies, procedures, and documents developed by the original SMP Committee pertain to the SMP Program during Periods A and B. With some amendments subsequently made, these policies, procedures, and documents (without yet making use of the Period A and B nomenclature), are materially still in use and managed by the seminaries. Two of the original SMP Committee’s documents directly pertain to Period A and B specific ministry *supervision*:

1. *Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* [a.k.a. “Specific Ministry Pastor-Supervisor Position Description”]. This document details the qualifications, selection, responsibilities, accountability, compensation, and terms of service of the pastor-supervisor. < Workbook page 78 >
2. *Covenant Agreement* [a.k.a. “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the SMP Program”]. This document details the commitments of the seminary, district president, sponsoring entity/calling agency, pastor-supervisor, and specific ministry student-vicar and student-pastor, among which is a commitment for the provision of SMP supervision.

Both documents—*Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* and *Covenant Agreement*—are included in the COP Manual and the CSL SMP Manual (with various amendments in the CSL SMP Manual). The *Covenant Agreement* was most recently reviewed by the COP in April 2024. The preface of this document states:

Participation in the SMP program requires a relationship of trust among those involved in this unique opportunity to prepare workers for Christian ministry and mission. A candidate for this program does not initiate the admission process himself, but rather is nominated and supported by those who represent and are responsible for the specific ministry/mission into which the candidate will be placed. This document articulates the covenant of trust and responsibility that exists among the seminary, the candidate, the sponsoring ministry/mission, and the District.

For sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, both of these “old” documents — *Pastor Supervisor Responsibilities* and *Covenant Agreement* — should be replaced as “SMP-Supervising Pastor Position Description Prior to SMP Graduation and Certification (Periods A and B)” and “Partnership Covenant for Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program” in the seminary manuals and the COP Manual with the PFC’s newly developed documents proposed here (Appendix A) in fulfillment of the PFC’s Resolution 6-03A assignment.

SUPERVISION OF SPECIFIC MINISTRY PASTORS RATIONALE AND FEEDBACK/COMMENTS (PERIOD C)

Rationale for Ongoing Supervision in Period C

2023 LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1 states that upon graduation the specific ministry pastor “shall serve under the supervision of his district president and another pastor who is not a specific ministry

pastor.” From the creation of the SMP Program (2007 Resolution 5-01B) to the present, the specific ministry pastor serves under such supervision for the duration of his ministry as a specific ministry pastor.

The primary reason for SMP supervision after graduation and certification is stated in the original 2007 Resolution 5-01B:

All ministers serve under supervision. In ancient times, the practice of making certain distinctions within the one Office of the Holy Ministry *de iure humano* (by human authority) was established so that those ministers *with broader and deeper theological understanding* should be able to provide doctrinal supervision for the less experienced, or less well-prepared, ministers. These distinctions were made to ensure that the Gospel was rightly preached and taught, and to preserve the unity of the church [emphasis added].

2007 Resolution 5-01B further states:

The church should provide the opportunity for a pastor who has been certified and ordained to serve in a specific kind of ministry subsequently to be prepared to serve the church more broadly through a combination of *further academic preparation*, accumulated pastoral experience, and examination [emphasis added].⁵

Credits and Contact Minutes: Master of Divinity and SMP

Pastoral formation through the attainment of a Master of Divinity degree is the route to pastoral ministry in the LCMS that embodies, using the language of 2007 Resolution 7-01B, “broader and deeper theological understanding.” 2023 LCMS Resolution 6-03A reaffirms what previous conventions also stated, namely that:

The residential Master of Divinity (M.Div.) route at our Synod seminaries continues to be positioned and understood as the Synod’s strongly preferred route to ordination, supplying Synod congregations with well-formed, highly educated pastors who as members of the Synod (ministers of religion—ordained, Bylaw 2.6.1) are prepared to preach, teach, and care for souls over a lifetime of faithful ministry *in any and every context* into which the Lord calls them into service” [emphasis added].

The following table presents a brief comparison of the pastoral formation routes available through CSL. (Note that total credits are listed here as semester credit hours.)

⁵ Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, (CSL) and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, (CTSFW) offer the online General Pastoral Certificate (GPC) for specific ministry pastors to become a general pastor in the LCMS. specific ministry pastors may also complete the M.Div. or R.A.R. programs. Credit is given for prior SMP coursework in all three routes.

CSL	Total Semester Credits	Classroom Credits	Combination of Credit Hour Courses*	Minimum Contact Minutes
MDiv	98	90.5	1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0	63,350
RAR	74	66.5	1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0	46,550
GPC	60.5	60.5	1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0	42,350
CHS	36	10 modules per course each term	2.0	28,800
SMP	32	32	2.0	22,400
EIIT	0	24 courses		4,080
CMC				

* CSL is on the semester system.

- 1.0 credit hour course: minimum of 700 contact minutes
- 1.5 credit hour course: minimum of 1050 contact minutes
- 2.0 credit hour course: minimum of 1400 contact minutes
- 2.5 credit hour course: minimum of 1750 contact minutes
- 3.0 credit hour course: minimum of 2100 contact minutes

The following table presents a similar comparison of the routes available through CTSFW. (Note that total credits are listed here as quarter credit hours.)

CTSFW	Total Quarter Credits	Classroom Credits	Combination of Credit Hours Courses*	Minimum Contact Minutes
MDiv	139	136	1, 2, 3, 4	81,600
SMP	51	48	3	28,800

* CTSFW is on the quarter system.

- 1 credit hour course: minimum of 600 minutes of direct faculty instruction.
- 2 credit hour course: minimum of 1,200 minutes of direct faculty instruction.
- 3 credit hour course: minimum of 1,800 minutes of direct faculty instruction.
- 4 credit hour course: minimum of 2,400 minutes of direct faculty instruction.

The following table presents a comparison of the Master of Divinity and SMP Curricula at CSL and CTSFW.

CSL MDiv	CSL SMP	CTSFW MDiv	CTSFW SMP
Exegetical	Bible	Exegetical	Bible
Isagogics	Scripture and Faith	Isagogics	Pastoral/Missional Theology in Luke/Acts
Greek Grammar	Old Testament Theology	Greek Grammar	The Books of Moses (Gen-Deut)
Hebrew Grammar	New Testament Theology	Hebrew Grammar	The Person of Jesus in John's Gospel
Interpreting and Communicating the Word (Hermeneutics)	The Church and Its Life	Pentateuch I (Gen-Deut)	The Epistles of Paul – Planting the Gentile Mission
The Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy)		Pentateuch II (Gen-Deut)	The Prophets – Christ and His Mission Foretold
The Prophets		Major Prophets	
The Psalms		The Psalms	
Synoptic Gospels (Matt, Mark, Luke)		Gospels (Hermeneutics, Textual Criticism, Matthew)	
Pauline Epistles		Gospels II (Luke, Mark)	
Gospel of John		Gospels III (John, 1 John)	
Biblical Languages Lab		Pauline Epistles	
		New Testament Greek Readings	
Historical		Historical	
Introduction to Historical Theology	The Lutheran Reformation	Church History I (First Eight Centuries)	The Church in Missiological Perspective
The Reformation and the Lutheran Church		Church History II (Reformation Era)	
History Elective		Church History III (Lutheran Orthodoxy/ Modern Church History)	
		Church History IV (Lutheran Church in America from 17 th century)	
		History Area Elective	
		Seminar: Historical Text	
		Seminar: Luther Text	
Practical		Pastoral Ministry and Missions	
Introduction to Practical Ministry	Introduction to Pastoral Ministry	Homiletics I	Teaching the Faith
Introduction to Pastoral Ministry	Preaching I	Homiletics II	Ministry and Mission in Today's Pluralistic Context
Homiletics	Preaching II	Pastoral Theology I	
Worship and Word	Introduction to Worship	Pastoral Theology II	
Teaching the Faith	Teaching the Faith	Theological Ethics	
Pastoral Care and the Word	Pastor as Leader and Theologian	Pastoral Counseling	
Reading and Preaching the Word (co-taught with Exegetical)		Liturgics I	
Introduction to Pastoral Leadership		Liturgics II	
Pastoral Leadership and Theology		Bibliography and Technology	
Electives: Congregational Revitalization, Worship and Culture, Conflict Resolution, Growing the Faith, Classics of the Devotional Life, Spiritual Autobiography, Communicating the Gospel to Contemporary Culture, Christianity and Literature, Special Issues in Pastoral Counseling		Field Education	
Field Education		Confessing Christ in Today's World (Intro to Missions)	
		Ministry in a Pluralistic Context	
		Formation Lab	
Systematics		Systematics	
Introduction to Systematic Theology	The Master Narrative	Lutheran Confessions I (AC, Apology)	Introduction to Systematic Theology
Creeds and Confessions	Creedal Themes	Lutheran Confessions II (Sm/Lg Catechisms, Smalcald Articles, Treatise)	Theologia I: Baptism, Life in Christ
Systematics I	Lutheran Distinctions	Lutheran Confessions III (Formula of Concord)	Theologia III: The Lord's Supper: Life in Christ Nourished and Sustained
Systematics II	Means of Grace	Dogmatics I	Lutheran Confessions in Today's World
Church and World	Lutheran Confession of Faith	Dogmatics II	The Holy Trinity: The Mission of God in Today's World
Free Electives (12) including: Lutheran Confessions in Today's World, The Holy		Dogmatics III	
Trinity — The Mission of God in Today's World			
		Theologia I: Baptism, Life in Christ	
		Theologia II: Preaching	
		Theologia III: Lord's Supper: Life in Christ Nourished and Sustained	

The Master of Divinity degree includes on-campus immersion and formation, with in-person classes, real-time interaction with professors and fellow students, in-person daily chapel, socialization and support for seminary families, and more. SMP certification is a mostly online,

hybrid program carried out in the context of an SMP cohort. SMP students are required to attend at least one on-campus, one-week intensive course annually. At CSL, many SMP students attend two, and the majority of those attending only one express that they would like to attend two on-campus intensives but are limited by personal circumstances.

At the 2013 LCMS Convention, delegates adopted Resolution 5-04B “To Continue and *Strengthen* Specific Ministry Pastor Program” [emphasis added]. The Rationale states that there are concerns regarding the SMP program. One of the eight concerns listed is “lack of consistent standard for *mentoring* SMP vicars and pastors” [emphasis added].

District President and Circuit Visitor Feedback/Comments

In 2024 and 2025, the PFC interviewed each of the 35 LCMS district presidents. In addition, the Standing Partnership marketing and communications firm interviewed 60 circuit visitors and collected surveys from more than 1,800 LCMS pastors. These interviews were conducted to fulfill convention assignments given to the PFC in 2023. The district presidents, circuit visitors, and pastors were asked to provide comments on and suggestions for improvements to the current state of Period C SMP supervision within the Synod’s 35 districts.

One conclusion drawn from these interviews is that the level of Period C SMP supervision varies significantly between districts, between individual SMP supervisors within a district, and across the various ministerial contexts served by SMP pastors. Concerning the general quality and consistency of current SMP supervision (Periods A, B, C), district presidents and circuit visitors noted that:

- Consistency of Period C SMP supervision is rated 1 out of 10 (10 being best), while quality of Period C SMP supervision rated 3.5 out of 10.
- Once an SMP student-vicar is ordained, SMP supervision in Periods B and C is largely hands-off, with merely occasional direct visits. This general practice (with notable exceptions) sends a signal (unintended or not) to SMP student-pastors (still being formed through seminary SMP courses) and SMP pastors (once graduated from the SMP Program at either seminary) that Period B and C supervisors feel that their supervision work is mostly complete and no longer so critically needed.
- Senior pastors serving as SMP-supervising pastors, who are often full-time pastors themselves, find it challenging to provide consistent ongoing SMP supervision. The demands of their congregations often limit the time and attention they can dedicate to < Workbook page 79 > supervising specific ministry student-vicars, specific ministry student-pastors, or specific ministry pastors.

Concerning practical realities that influence the success of ongoing Period C SMP supervision in particular, district presidents and circuit visitors stated:

- A key factor in Period C SMP supervision is the availability and willingness of experienced pastors to serve as supervisors.
- Congregations and pastors with a history of doctrinal fidelity and the ability to supervise less experienced pastors must be identified and utilized.

- Geographic challenges, such as those that arise when pastors (either those supervising or those being supervised) serve dual or multiple parishes, make consistent SMP supervision substantially more difficult.

Sharing perspectives on the need for Period C SMP supervision, district presidents and circuit visitors stated:

- There is general agreement that some form of ongoing support and accountability is beneficial for specific ministry pastors.
- Some suggest that over the term of Period C, SMP supervision might evolve from active, regular supervision to more of a coaching or mentorship relationship, especially for SMP pastors who have already served for several years in their ministry.
- Some firmly stated that the need for ongoing supervision, coaching, or mentorship isn't unique to SMP pastors but in fact applies to all pastors in the Synod, regardless of pastoral formation and route to ordination.
- All acknowledge that LCMS Bylaws stipulate that specific ministry pastors are to be supervised for the entirety of their pastoral ministry after graduation and certification. However, some question the practicality and/or utility of such Period C SMP supervision.

Concerning the variability and/or lack of a universal, across-the-Synod systemic process for Period C SMP supervision, district presidents and circuit visitors stated:

- The organizational structure put in place by a district for SMP oversight, supervision, and ongoing training (per LCMS Bylaws) plays a crucial role in Period C SMP supervision. Some noted that the quality of supervision is largely dependent on how well a district's personnel and other resources are arranged and managed.
- Several district presidents indicated that the quality and consistency of SMP supervision varies significantly from district to district, which is symptomatic of a lack of a unified or consistently implemented system across the Synod.
- While SMP supervision (presumably including Period C SMP supervision) is mentioned in the COP Handbook (14.2.7, "Specific Ministry Pastor-Supervisor Position Description," 709), this guidance document does not provide specific details regarding the desired characteristics and implementation of that supervisor-to-supervised relationship. Lack of clear definitions and full consensus at a broader level (i.e., within the Council of Presidents) is likely contributing to the variability in characteristics and implementation of SMP supervision at the district and congregational level. In other words, the current requirement for "SMP supervision" is a very "blanket, one-size-fits-all" requirement without a clear and consistent set of definitions behind it, thus leading to a wide spectrum of inconsistent practices across districts.

**PROPOSED
SPECIFIC MINISTRY PASTOR SUPERVISION PLAN
PERIOD C**

Background Note Concerning the Work of the Pastoral Formation Committee

At the 2016 Synod convention, delegates adopted Resolution 6-01 “To Create a Pastoral Formation Committee,” resolving, in part, that the newly formed Pastoral Formation Committee (PFC) “shall review, assess, coordinate, support, and make suggestions for improvement of all existing noncolloquy routes leading to ordination in the Synod, including seminary and pre-seminary programs” (cf. Bylaw 3.10.4). The work and responsibility of the formerly constituted SMP committee, organizationally located under the former Board for Pastoral Education, is now (that is, is naturally understood to be) located under and overseen by (cf. Bylaw 1.2.1(p)) the PFC.

With the adoption of 2019 Resolution 6-03A (*Proceedings*, 159), delegates directed the COP, in coordination with the PFC, to “draft guidelines and training to enhance the *mentoring and supervision* of specific ministry pastors” [emphasis added].

With the adoption of 2023 Resolution 6-03A (*Proceedings*, 133), delegates directed the PFC “to develop and present a comprehensive, uniform, synodwide Specific Ministry *Supervision Plan*” [emphasis added].

Between the 2019 and 2023 conventions, Pacific Southwest District president Rev. Dr. Michael Gibson submitted (April 2021) a “Specific Ministry Pastor Supervision Plan” to the Council of Presidents (COP). This plan was reviewed but never formally adopted by the COP. Using components of Gibson’s 2021 Supervision Plan with appreciation and thankfulness, the PFC proposes the following comprehensive plan that especially focuses on Period C supervision of SMP pastors.

A COMPREHENSIVE, UNIFORM, SYNODWIDE SPECIFIC MINISTRY SUPERVISION PLAN 2026

Preface

The SMP program was adopted “as a sincere and thoughtful attempt to address real-world needs with an urgency for bringing the Gospel to a dying world and to do so with theological integrity with respect to both the doctrine of the ministry and our commitment to high standards of pastoral education and formation.”⁶ While specific ministry pastors often bring maturity and relational skills immediately into the ministry due to their years of life experience, they do not receive a course of pastoral formation that includes the same theological depth, ecclesiastical breadth and formational rigor as that of a residential Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree or a Residential Alternate Route (RAR) certificate. 2007 Resolution 5-01B recognized that an SMP pastor’s theological education “is formed within the context of their specific ministry and does not represent the breadth and depth of theology and ecclesiology.”⁷

⁶ 2007 Convention Proceedings, Resolution 5-01B, p. 133.

⁷ 2007 Convention Proceedings, Resolution 5-01B, p. 135.

Bylaw 1.2.1(u) defines supervision as such: “For the purpose of these Bylaws (other than those pertaining to ecclesiastical supervision) to have authority over, to direct actions, to control activities.” Period C supervision of an SMP pastor has elements of mentorship, such as providing guidance, offering support and encouragement, and developing a brotherly relationship. Regardless of pastors’ routes to ordination, these types of mentorship activities are naturally characteristic of any healthy, long-term pastor-to-pastor relationship in the LCMS.

However, as intended in Bylaw 1.2.1(u), proper Period C SMP supervision, always exercised in Christian brotherly love, includes the responsibility to instruct, set assignments and expectations, and provide informed, constructive feedback, especially with respect to doctrine and practice. To emphasize this solemn responsibility, Period C SMP supervision plan documents should by design omit the words “mentor” (mentoring, mentorship, etc.) and make consistent use of the word “supervise” (supervisor, supervising, supervision, etc.).

The Responsibility of the District President

In his role as ecclesiastical supervisor, the district president supervises “the doctrine, the life, and the official administration on the part of the ordained and commissioned ministers who are members through his district” (LCMS Bylaw 4.4.5).

However, as set forth in LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1, the specific ministry pastor serves not only under the direct supervision of the district president (LCMS Bylaw 4.4.5), but also under the supervision of another pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor.

The district president is accountable to the Synod in our life together (Bylaw 4.4) for the oversight and implementation of the SMP program in his district. Therefore, upon a specific ministry pastor’s completion of formal SMP studies and entry into Period C, the district president shall:

1. Identify and authorize a local SMP-supervising pastor to serve the specific ministry pastor. The supervising pastor must be an LCMS-ordained, rostered general ministry pastor who is in good standing in the LCMS. He may be an active pastor, retired pastor, or emeritus. The supervising pastor shall not be a specific ministry pastor (LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1).
2. Meet in person with the specific ministry pastor and his SMP-supervising pastor within 30 days of the specific ministry pastor’s completion of formal SMP studies and entry into Period C. The meeting shall include a review of the supervisory responsibilities of the district president and the SMP-supervising pastor, the reception of such supervision by the specific ministry pastor, and the SMP Annual Supervision Plan (Appendix B).
3. On an individual, one-on-one basis, meet annually with all district SMP-supervising pastors to review annual SMP Annual Supervision Plans.
4. Immediately address any issues that arise concerning the specific ministry pastor, the SMP-supervising pastor and/or the congregation/context of the specific ministry pastor.
5. Award the specific ministry pastor one continuing education credit (1 CEU) for every 10 hours he meets in person with his SMP-supervising pastor. A yearly maximum of 4 CEUs may be awarded against the SMP Annual Supervision Plan per year.

6. Provide a written district SMP supervision report in the triennial district and Synod convention workbooks.

The Responsibility of the SMP-Supervising Pastor

The SMP-supervising pastor plays a significant role in the continuing education, growth, and refinement of pastoral skills of a specific ministry pastor over the course of his ministerial service in Period C. Desired attributes of an SMP-supervising pastor include biblical and confessional fidelity in doctrine and practice, personal and pastoral maturity, humility, integrity, virtue, ability in one-on-one instruction, and peaceful harmony in life together in the Synod, as described in the Constitution and Bylaws of the LCMS (Bylaw 1.3).

The SMP-supervising pastor may be the pastor who served as the SMP student-vicar's or SMP student-pastor's supervisor in Periods A or B; however, the SMP-supervising pastor in Period C must be a member of the same or neighboring circuit as the specific ministry pastor he supervises. The specific ministry pastor may propose a particular SMP-supervising pastor for himself, but the final decision and assignment of the SMP-supervising pastor in Period C shall always be authorized by the district president.

The SMP-supervising pastor shall meet face to face with the specific ministry pastor for a minimum of 40 hours annually. These 40 hours shall be devoted to the continuing education of the specific ministry pastor, especially focusing on areas where the SMP-supervising pastor and SMP pastor see opportunities for beneficial additional learning and improvement. The SMP-supervising pastor and the specific ministry pastor will identify study topics and readings in advance of their face-to-face meetings. Time spent together shall include a balance of the following:

1. Studying biblical texts (to include a Christocentric hermeneutic, Law and Gospel distinctions and word studies that are applied to the specific ministry pastor's preaching, teaching, pastoral care, etc.);
2. Reading and discussing a section of the Lutheran Confessions (*Book of Concord*) and applying it to preaching, Bible classes, pastoral care, etc.;
3. Discussing theological books (reading no fewer than three LCMS doctrinally reviewed theological books annually, for review during meeting times);
4. Reviewing four sermons written and preached by the specific ministry pastor over the course of the year (discussing preparation, Christocentricity, Law/Gospel distinctions, continuity, pastoral approach, strengths, areas to improve, delivery, etc.); <Workbook page 80>
5. Discussing pastoral care and leadership (visitation, applying God's Word to parishioners' life situations, weddings, funerals, parish catechesis, crisis situations, church council/voters assembly meetings, elders and other boards, etc.); and
6. Discussing operational and cultural matters within the congregation (finance/budget, volunteerism, constitution and bylaws, traditions, etc.).

All Synod pastors, regardless of route to ordination, are encouraged and expected to participate in continuing education on a regular, annual basis. Nevertheless, continuing education experiences

outside the 40-plus hours of learning that occur between the SMP-supervising pastor and the specific ministry pastor shall be in addition to the fulfillment of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan.

The SMP-supervising pastor shall also

1. Participate in the annual SMP-supervising pastors' meeting with the district president to report on fulfillment of the SMP Annual Supervision Plans.
2. Contact the district president if any issues arise concerning the specific ministry pastor and/or the congregation/context of the specific ministry pastor.
3. Contact the district president in the event he can no longer fulfill his SMP-supervising pastor responsibilities.

The Responsibility of the Specific Ministry Pastor

Regarding supervision, the responsibilities of the specific ministry pastor are to:

1. Meet with the district president upon completion of his formal SMP education and entry into Period C and any time thereafter as requested by the district president;
2. Meet in person for a minimum of 40 hours per year with the SMP-supervising pastor in fulfillment of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan;
3. Complete the readings and work assigned by the SMP-supervising pastor in preparation for all in-person meetings;
4. Participate faithfully in circuit pastors' meetings (Winkels) and district pastors' conferences;
5. Submit a completed SMP Annual Supervision Plan to the district president at the conclusion of each year detailing interactions between the SMP-supervising pastor and the specific ministry pastor; and
6. Self-report the completion of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan on the continuing education page of the Self-Information Tool (SET). Additionally, self-report 1 CEU for every 10 hours that the specific ministry pastor meets in person with his SMP-supervising pastor. A yearly maximum of 4 CEUs may be awarded against the SMP Annual Supervision Plan per year.

NEXT STEPS

1. Adopt edits on the "Partnership Covenant for Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program" (Appendix B)
2. Discontinue the use of "mentor" in SMP supervision materials and instead use the word "supervisor/supervision" throughout Periods A, B, and C.
3. Collect from all entities (identified in items 4–6) suggested edits, additions, etc., concerning the proposed SMP Annual Supervision Plan described above, to be received by the Pastoral Formation Committee by December 1, 2026.

4. Update the COP Manual and all accompanying documents to reflect the use of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan.
5. Update the CSL and CTSFW SMP manuals, webpage, resources, etc., to reflect use of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan and the edited COP Manual.
6. Update all district resources, information, website, etc., to reflect use of the SMP Annual Supervision Plan, edited COP Manual, and edited seminary resources.

APPENDIX A

SMP-Supervising Pastor Position Description **Prior to SMP Graduation and Certification (Periods A and B)**

The SMP-supervising pastor shall be responsible to the seminary for tutoring, advising, encouraging, and overseeing the work of a student in the SMP program.

1. The SMP-supervising pastor shall serve as the supervisor to the student both for his studies in the SMP coursework and for the conduct of his ministry as an SMP vicar/pastor.
2. The SMP-supervising pastor shall provide periodic reports to the seminary.

Qualifications

1. Personal:
 - a. The SMP-supervising pastor shall possess pastoral and academic aptitude to tutor the student and model biblical and confessional pastoral practice.
 - b. The SMP-supervising pastor shall demonstrate an interest and willingness in leading the student to grow in confessional Lutheran pastoral theology and practice.
 - c. The SMP-supervising pastor shall be a rostered “Minister of Religion—Ordained” of the LCMS, with an LCMS Master of Divinity degree.
 - d. The SMP-supervising pastor shall have at least five years of LCMS pastoral experience in good standing.
 - e. The SMP-supervising pastor shall uphold the doctrinal position of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as confessed in the Scriptures and all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Book of Concord-quia* subscription) (LCMS Constitution Art. II).
 - f. The SMP-supervising pastor shall have the permission and support of his congregation to serve in this capacity.
 - g. The SMP-supervising pastor shall agree to be trained for this role.
2. Time Commitments:
 - a. The SMP-supervising pastor shall expect and be willing to spend significant time in personal conversation with the SMP vicar/pastor, tutoring him, discussing lessons learned, providing pastoral guidance and observing SMP vicar/pastor’s vicarage and ministry.
 - b. The SMP-supervising pastor shall expect that a minimum of three to five hours per week will be spent on supervising activities, to include not only in-person meetings (for a minimum of 40 hours per year) but also personal preparation and virtual interaction.

- c. The SMP-supervising pastor shall attend the in-person Seminary Orientation Seminar with his student.
 - d. The SMP-supervising pastor is encouraged to join the student during on-campus intensives at which the opportunity will be provided to spend time with the faculty and with fellow SMP-supervising pastors.
3. Training:
- The SMP-supervising pastor shall be required to complete an on-campus supervisor training course conducted by the seminary, for which appropriate CEUs may be available.
4. Facilities and Equipment:
- a. The SMP-supervising pastor shall furnish or arrange for the provision of all facilities and equipment necessary for meetings between himself and the student.
 - b. The seminary shall be responsible for updating the SMP-supervising pastor concerning SMP-supervising pastor training and information concerning his role as SMP-supervising pastor.

Selection

1. The president of the district from which the student is enrolled shall identify a local LCMS pastor to serve as pastor-supervisor.
2. If the pastor is actively serving a congregation, the congregation shall provide a written and signed statement of its support for this work to the district and the seminary.
3. The seminary shall review the assigned SMP-supervising pastor based upon the district president's selection.
4. Should an SMP-supervising pastor behavior, theological position or lack of engagement jeopardize the formation of the student, the district president in consultation with the seminary shall assign a replacement.
5. When an SMP-supervising pastor accepts a call outside the circuit, the district president shall identify a new SMP-supervising pastor in consultation with the seminary within 60 days.

Responsibilities

It shall be the responsibility of the SMP-supervising pastor to:

1. Guide the student in faith and life through frequent, intentional in-person instruction, encouragement, support, and prayer.
2. Instruct and counsel the SMP vicar/pastor regarding pastoral practice.
3. Be familiar with the course materials and resources.
4. Offer in-person tutoring to the SMP vicar/pastor in situations where he is struggling as he

pursues his formal studies.

5. Accompany the SMP vicar/pastor as he participates in all circuit and district conferences, district conventions, and events and discuss positive lessons from each.
6. Provide thoughtful feedback, as needed or requested, to the seminary and district including, but not limited to:
 - a. Reports on vicarage progress as required and
 - b. Recommendation of the SMP vicar for certification or non-certification.
7. Offer support and encouragement to the SMP vicar/pastor to continue the program, remain diligent about his studies, and subsequently consider pursuing General Pastor Certification or a Master of Divinity degree or Residential Alternate Route certificate.
8. Provide counsel and support concerning the SMP vicar/pastor's general state of physical and emotional wellness, including the wellbeing of his marriage and family, if applicable.
9. Observe the SMP vicar/pastor in a variety of ministry situations, including preaching, leading worship, Bible studies, hospital calls, outreach activities, etc., as described in the vicarage manual, and provide pastoral instructional feedback to the SMP vicar/pastor.
10. If it becomes evident that the SMP vicar/pastor should not continue in the program, provide honest counsel and support in coaching him out of the program.

Accountability

1. The SMP-supervising pastor shall be accountable to the SMP vicar/pastor as instructor, guide, advisor and tutor.
2. The SMP-supervising pastor shall be accountable to the district president and to the seminary regarding his role as the SMP vicar/pastor's supervisor.

Compensation

1. The seminary will pay the SMP-supervising pastor an honorarium of \$_____ for one SMP vicar/pastor, per course. < Workbook page 81 >
2. If the SMP-supervising pastor serves more than one SMP vicar/pastor, he will receive \$_____ for each additional student. The pastor-supervisor will not be reimbursed by the district or the seminary for any expenses.
3. The SMP-supervising pastor's status for tax purposes will be that of a self-employed person rather than that of an employee, since the seminary does not have the authority to control the methods or means by which any pastor-supervisor conducts his services.

Terms of Service

Ordinarily, the SMP-supervising pastor will serve until the SMP vicar/pastor completes the program.

Following completion of the program, the president of the district in which the specific ministry pastor is serving will designate a pastor who is not a specific ministry pastor to provide ongoing supervision for the Specific Ministry vicar/pastor. The district president will be responsible for all matters concerning the membership status and limitations of the SMP (2023 LCMS Bylaw 2.13.1).

SMP-Supervising Pastor	Date
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District President	Date
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Seminary SMP Director	Date
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SMP Vicar/Pastor	Date
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Partnership Covenant for Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor Program

Participation in the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program requires a relationship of trust among those involved in this unique opportunity to prepare LCMS pastors for the holy ministry. A candidate for the SMP program does not initiate the admission process himself, but rather is nominated and supported by those who represent and are responsible for the specific ministry context into which the candidate will be placed. This document articulates the covenant of trust and responsibility that exists among the seminary, the district, the sponsoring entity, the SMP-supervising pastor, and the SMP vicar/pastor.

The seminary promises its support to the SMP vicar/pastor by

- Providing theological education through its program of studies;
- Providing orientation, support, and encouragement for the SMP-supervising pastor;
- Intentionally including SMP vicars/pastors in the corporate life of the seminary student body through prayer, encouragement, and student services; and Working, with local and district supervision, to provide evaluation leading to certification as a Specific Ministry Pastor.

The district of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, through its district president, promises

- To provide overall supervision of the progress of the candidate, including doctrinal supervision, and to endeavor to support the candidate in every way possible;
- To ensure that once the SMP candidate is ordained as a Specific Ministry Pastor, the district will monitor his continued progress in the program, and should a student refuse to complete the study program for SMP certification, will remove that student from the roster of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod;
- To ensure that once the Specific Ministry Pastor has completed his study program, he will work in a situation which will provide supervision by an LCMS M.Div. pastor (non-SMP) (Period C); and
- To be responsible to ensure that tuitions and fees are remitted to the seminary in a timely manner.

The sponsoring entity (a calling agency of synod) promises

- To pray for the candidate and support him, his family, and his ministry spiritually and emotionally as coworkers in God's Kingdom;
- To develop and support a financial plan in which the costs of education and the support of the student are met in a realistic way;
- To utilize the SMP vicar/pastor only as prescribed by the LCMS Constitution and Bylaws; Policy Requirements for the SMP Program; A Comprehensive, Uniform, Synodwide Specific Ministry Supervision Plan; and Seminary SMP Handbook; and

APPENDIX B

**SMP Annual Supervision Plan for
the SMP-Supervising Pastor and Specific Ministry Pastor**

Supervision Plan for _____, _____ to _____, _____
Month Year Month Year

Name of Specific Ministry Pastor _____

Name of SMP Supervisor _____

Date and Length of meeting time

SMP supervising pastor and specific ministry pastor shall meet in person at least 40 hours per year. Note: 1 continuing education unit is the equivalent of 10 hours actual class time.

Date _____	Length of Meeting _____	Date _____	Length of Meeting _____
Date _____	Length of Meeting _____	Date _____	Length of Meeting _____
Date _____	Length of Meeting _____	Date _____	Length of Meeting _____
Date _____	Length of Meeting _____	Date _____	Length of Meeting _____
Date _____	Length of Meeting _____	Date _____	Length of Meeting _____
Date _____	Length of Meeting _____	Date _____	Length of Meeting _____

Topics of Continuing Education discussed during this time together:

See "Responsibility of the SMP-Supervising Pastor"

- Biblical text

- Lutheran Confessions (Book of Concord)

- Theological book discussion

- Review of a sermon written/delivered by the SMP

-
- Pastoral care focus < Workbook page 82 >

- Congregational matters

- Other

Comments:

District President Reporting

1. Years of completed SMP supervision: _____
2. The specific ministry pastor has submitted this annual supervision plan to the district president at the end of each year of completion. Yes No
3. The specific ministry pastor has submitted the completion of his annual 40-hour supervision plan to be recorded on his Self-Evaluation Tool (SET). Yes No
4. The specific ministry pastor has reported his annual SMP supervision CEUs, granted by his district president, on his SET. Yes No