

FAQs for Pastors and Leaders

This document will help you answer common questions regarding *Set Apart to Serve* (SAS).

What is “vocation”?

Christ died for all and calls all people to believe in Him. God calls His baptized children to love Him and to serve their neighbor. **This call to believe and serve is called vocation.** God calls pastors and other workers in direct service of the Gospel, even as He calls all people to bless His creation as “masks” of His Fatherly divine goodness and mercy. St. Paul defines it this way: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (GAL. 2:20).

Why is the LCMS launching this initiative?

Our Lord calls us to pray for laborers for the harvest field, that all might hear the Good News of Jesus. We therefore launched the church work recruitment initiative *Set Apart to Serve* to encourage the young people in our Synod to treasure the gifts God has given them for service, and to consider the opportunities available to serve Him full time in His church.

PROGRAMMATIC CONCERNS

Why are we talking about church work again?

It is part of the work of the church in every generation to raise up church workers to proclaim the Gospel to the next. Studies show that, due to the number of LCMS pastors approaching retirement age, the number of ordained pastors in the LCMS may decline from 6,000 to 3,000 over the next 15 years. The same studies anticipate a 50–70% decrease in commissioned workers. These projections take into account the declining enrollment in church work programs at our Concordia universities and our seminaries. Christ provides workers for His church through His people — we need to talk intentionally to our youth about church work to address this decline.

What can current church workers do?

Church workers are primary influencers in leading our youth toward full-time church work. Inform your congregation about the various church work positions and their role in teaching youth about those roles. Create and use curriculum in your school that explains these roles. Encourage the young people in your congregation to consider being a pastor, DCE, Lutheran school teacher, deaconess, etc. This begins by encouraging them to be involved in church regularly.

Our research shows that only half of current pastors and church workers talk to the youth in their congregations about considering a vocation in the church. Now is the time to create an intentional culture of church work recruitment. Through conversations with young people and their parents, we can raise awareness of the opportunities available and encourage our young people to consider the blessing of serving in the church.

How does SAS seek to spark the interest of our youth in serving as pastors or church workers?

Trusting that Christ calls people into church work vocations through His people, SAS encourages people to find occasions to talk to youth about the opportunities to use their gifts to serve God and His church full time — to have conversations about vocation based on God’s Word and to encourage young Christians to serve God in specific vocations and to understand God’s will for every Christian vocation.

CULTURAL CONCERNS

Is the goal of SAS to sustain enrollment at Concordia universities and seminaries / member parishes?

The primary goal of SAS is not to sustain our institutions, but to serve God in the proclamation of the Gospel. SAS seeks to raise up pastors and church workers of the highest character and talent to serve Christ’s church for the sake of the kingdom

of God. SAS is aligned with the Synod's role to work with you in equipping God's people to glorify Him and extend His kingdom by living out their Baptism. This training often happens at our Concordia universities and our seminaries. Increased numbers of church work students at our Concordias, though not the primary aim of SAS, would benefit both our Concordias and the congregations of the Synod.

How will SAS make church work relevant to young people — especially if none of their family members or close friends are church workers?

Many in this upcoming generation are excited to be “the first” to explore and fulfill new ways to serve. SAS messaging and activities will reinforce that it's OK and wonderful to be the first person in your family to be a pastor or church worker. (All first-generation church workers started this way!) SAS tools and resources will help pastors and parents reinforce their child's interest and build a community with other youth who are also interested in church work.

How can we connect with parents and youth whose primary (or sole) interaction with church workers is attending Sunday services?

Now is the time to instill an intentional culture of church work recruitment for generations to come within your congregation. To this end, we have provided resources to help you identify youth with potential and start conversations with children, their parents and your congregation.

SAS programs will create opportunities for both in-person and virtual interactions with parents and youth that meet them at their level without dumbing down the liturgy or the Gospel. Social and digital media are tools that SAS will use for good, by creating experiences and communities that reinforce the joy and satisfaction of church work in authentic and relatable ways at each stage of our youth's development.

Some pastors and church workers are not comfortable starting the conversation about church work with parents or youth — where will we even begin?

SAS will provide tools to help you start these conversations. These program resources will complement your natural teaching gifts. We also encourage workers to tell the story of your own journey to church work. Storytelling is one of the

most natural, relatable and influential ways to speak with authenticity about the joys and challenges of life as a pastor or church worker.

Many pastors and church workers feel they should talk about God and His people, not themselves. How can we bridge this?

In 1 Cor. 4:6 and 11:1, St. Paul encourages the Corinthians to imitate him — but the focus is not on Paul, but on his service to Christ. In the same way, telling the story of your church work is not talking about yourself, but about the office and vocation to which God has called you, and how He has done that.

ACCOUNTABILITY/AUTONOMY CONCERNS

Will our district/parish recruitment results be measured? How?

SAS seeks to stimulate intentional conversations and interactions aimed at encouraging young people to consider and pursue church work vocations. The “measure” of success for SAS lies in the Lord's provision for His church. We hope this initiative results in more students enrolled in church work programs at our Concordias and more students at our seminaries, since those are the Synod's current means for training church workers for the good of the church.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

With so much on our plate providing our faithful with pastoral care, how can we devote greater focus to church worker development?

Rather than ask you to create something new or additional, SAS is built to provide you with tools to engage youth in conversations about church work, resources to encourage their interest and opportunities for them to experience the rewards of church work, all aligned with the work you are already doing. One of the best ways to develop church workers is to be faithful in your call — teaching the faith to our children, giving pastoral care to the young and young adults, engaging children in Sunday school and youth group about church work, including “church work” as an integral part of your catechetical instruction, and considering discussion of vocation in your preaching.

How can I address the burden of debt that students and families bear when pursuing church work education?

We must be honest in these conversations about the difficulties and joys of the vocation. To prepare you to speak with families about these concerns, SAS includes a financial health and wellness component, which equips parishes with information about the average cost of church work education. This resource will also include information about ways to make Concordia university and seminary education affordable. SAS is encouraging the creation of church worker scholarships at the parish and district levels to help fund students' education for the sake of the church.

It's also important to clarify that there is a misperception that earning a Concordia church work degree and attending seminary results in a large amount of student debt. In fact, over the last 15 years, our institutions have significantly increased aid for those pursuing church work. We are actively talking with our CUS schools about how to make church work programs more affordable, and how to help students access the aid that is available.

What can the SAS initiative do to help overcome compensation-related barriers to church work?

Low salary is often a deterrent to pursuing and entering church work. Church workers do not serve the Lord and His church to get rich, but it is incumbent upon congregations to pay their workers a fair salary and benefits.

SAS will provide tools to determine the median entry-level church work salary/benefits so that congregations can develop a sustainable budget to compensate their workers along district salary guidelines or take action to rectify the situation. Please see the excellent "Composition Decision Support Tool" on the Concordia Plan Services website: concordiaplans.org/employers/resources/compensation-decision-support-tool. This tool can provide salary benchmarks to help you determine a church worker's fair compensation by vocation, years of experience, education degree, district, etc.

For more information, visit lcms.org/set-apart-to-serve.