

# Transition from Seminary to Parish

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**FOR PASTORS**



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**by Dr. William B. Knippa**

Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) is a collaborative effort of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Pastoral Education department and LCMS districts to help pastors and their wives in the transition from seminary to congregation. To learn more, visit [lcms.org/pals](http://lcms.org/pals).

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Pastor Bill Knippa has served at Bethany Lutheran Church in Austin, Texas, since 1977. He graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and received his Ph.D. in counseling psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. He also studied at Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, and did postdoctoral work with the Menninger Clinic in marriage and family counseling.

Pastor Knippa particularly enjoys the preaching and teaching responsibilities of the ministry, and he is committed to assisting people in being faithful to Bethany’s mission to “make disciples of all nations.” He has conducted many seminars and retreats on topics related to Christian living, marriage and family, and personal and professional growth.

Pastor Knippa is married to Melissa, who is from Tomball, Texas, a town north of Houston. They have three children: Cathleen, Noah and Michael.



# Transition

## from Seminary to Parish

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## Purpose

The purpose of this module is to assist pastors in their transition from seminary to parish ministry. It is composed of five sessions.

### Session One: “Getting Started”

This session will give participants an opportunity to:

1. Reflect on their “life line,” in which they look at transitions they have experienced, significant people in their lives and ministry role models.
2. Engage in relationship and community building with fellow PALS participants. This assists in building a foundation of understanding, communication and trust, which will benefit both individuals and the group.

### Session Two: “Letting Go”

This session is designed to:

1. Provide an understanding of the nature of transition.
2. Address issues of loss that can accompany transition.
3. Bring closure to the seminary and preparation stages of their lives.

### Session Three: “Getting Settled”

This session is designed to:

1. Emphasize the importance of relationship building in the new parish.
2. Present ways of establishing relationships with parishioners.
3. Reinforce the importance of family relationships.

### Session Four: “Getting On...”

This session is designed to:

1. Afford pastors and wives an opportunity to express and evaluate their expectations concerning their ministries.
2. Discern the relationship between expectations and the reality of their ministries.
3. Formulate expectations that will enhance their ministries.

### Session Five: “Taking Care”

This session is designed to:

1. Encourage participants to evaluate and pursue their spiritual and relational growth.
2. Focus participants on the importance of tending to and enriching their relationships with spouses and children.
3. Further strengthen participants’ commitment to and investment in their PALS experience.

*Note: Each session will be preceded by a 12- to 15-minute video presentation that will follow the outline provided for each participant.*

# Session One: Getting Started

Work individually to complete the “life line” on the next page.

## Discussion

1. What people, events and circumstances are associated with your “lows” and “highs”?

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2. Who have been the most influential people in your life?

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3. List and talk about the two to four events in your life that were most significant in “shaping” or defining the direction of your life.

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4. Do you have one or more role models for ministry? If so, talk about them. Do you have a role model for a pastor’s wife? If not, how has your picture of what these roles are, or should be, been formed?

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5. In what direction do you see your life going in the next 12 months?

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6. Describe your faith life in relation to your life line.

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Confirmation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Life Line



# Session Two: Letting Go

## Transition from Seminary to Parish

### 1. Transitions: A beginning is also an ending

- › An ending
  - Good-byes
  - Grief
  - Other options closed
- › A period of adjustment
  - Some disorientation
  - Settling into a routine (Home, Church)
  - Meeting people
  - Getting to work
  - Learning the history and experiencing the culture of the congregation

(Note: If you haven't already gone through the "Getting to Know Your Congregation" module, you can request one from your facilitator. The materials are also available through the PALS office at [PALS@lcms.org](mailto:PALS@lcms.org).)

- › Getting on with life and work
  - "Owning" the ministry
  - Connecting with the people
  - Visioning a future
  - Exercising leadership

### 2. Stability in the midst of transition

- › Your first call — Baptism
- › Your God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit

## Discussion

1. What are some of the activities, experiences and relationships you miss from your time at the seminary?

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2. What major transitions have you experienced in your life?

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3. Now that you are in your first parish, what are some things you wish you had learned or been exposed to while in seminary?

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4. How have your parents and in-laws felt about your decision to enter the pastoral ministry? How have they felt about the church and location to which you have been called?

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**5.** What would you say has been the most difficult adjustment in your transition from seminary to your present parish?

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**6.** What has been the easiest adjustment in your transition from seminary to your present parish?

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**7.** The people/systems/factors that have been most helpful in my transition are:

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## Session Three: Getting Settled

### The Importance of Relationships

#### 1. Relationships are key in pastoral ministry

- › Jesus has called us into relationship:
  - With Him
  - With one another
- › We learn how to do relationships from our earliest days

#### 2. Establishing and maintaining caring, loving and serving relationships has several components

##### › Valuing

1 Cor. 12:14–18

“For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”

Matt. 10:31

“Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

1 Cor. 6:20

“For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

1 Cor. 7:23

“You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.”

##### › Joining

Is. 53:4

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.”

Rom. 5:8

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Phil. 2:5–8

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Heb. 4:15–16

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

##### › Listening

Ps. 5:1

“Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning.”

Ps. 34:15

“The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.”

1 Peter 3:12

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

James 1:19–20

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

##### › Accepting

Luke 6:37

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

John 8:11

“She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.’”

Rom. 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Rom. 15:7

“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

› Affirming

Luke 3:20–21

“[Herod] added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened.”

Eph. 2:22

“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

› Responding

- Sharing and Assisting

1 John 1:7

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

John 13:34–35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- Confronting

Rom. 15:14

“I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.”

Eph. 4:15

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

› Celebration

Eph. 5:19

“...Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”

**Discussion**

**1.** As you were growing up, how did your family handle conflict? How did your family express warmth and intimacy?

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To whom were you closest in your family? Most distant?

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**2.** How have these experiences influenced the way in which you do relationships?

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**3.** When I look at the groups and individuals in my parish, I find it easy to value...

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I find it difficult to value...

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**4.** Ways in which I have (or could) “joined” other members are:

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**5.** As a listener, I rate myself as:

\_\_\_Stone deaf

\_\_\_All ears

**6.** The best listener(s) in my life is/are/have been...

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What did their listening mean to you? What implications do you see for your ministry?

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**7.** What were times in your or your family’s life when you needed a pastor?

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When did you most need a pastor?

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What kind of pastor did you need?

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What does this say about your ministry?

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**8.** What are some ways you can affirm or encourage:

- › Your spouse?
- › Your child(ren)?
- › Your congregation’s leadership?
- › Church staff (secretary, janitor, professional workers, volunteers)?
- › Your congregation in general?
- › Your brothers in the ministry?

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**9.** Who are your encouragers? What have they meant to you?

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**10.** How will you use your worship and Scripture study times as opportunities to communicate God’s love and your love for your congregation?

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## Session Four: Getting On...

### Expectations of Self and Others

1. We enter a parish with expectations, a picture of what should or will be

- › Expectations of:
  - How you will be received by the congregation
  - How effective you will be
  - What roles your spouse will play as the pastor's wife
  - How your family will adjust
  - How you will like the community
- › Expectations and reality:
  - Can be in sync
  - Can diverge greatly

2. Unrealistic expectations concerning yourself and your ministry include:

- › I can help everyone in my care.
- › The effectiveness of my ministry can always be measured.
- › If I work long and hard enough, everyone will love me.
- › No one will ever leave my congregation to join another.
- › No one will ever be angry with me.

- › I will stamp out all sin and evil in this congregation.
- › My family doesn't need much of my time and/or attention.

### Discussion

1. Have you encountered any "surprises" in your parish?

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2. Fill in and discuss the chart on the next page.

3. List and talk about what you believe to be realistic expectations of yourself and the people you serve. How did you arrive at these?

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Area of ministry	Expectations at the time of your call	Reality you are experiencing
Your first days in your parish		
Demands on your time		
Leading worship and Bible study		
Dealing with committees and congregational leaders		
Pastoral care		
Impact of move on your family		
Administrative responsibilities		

# Session Five: Taking Care

## Being Equipped for Ministry

Ministry involves both “being connected” and “being separate”

**1.** “Being connected” involves establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with family, congregation members and others.

- › We “tune in.”
- › We “connect” (eye contact, physical contact, focused attention).

**2.** “Being separate” includes the capacity to:

- › Take responsibility for one’s spiritual, mental and physical health.
  - Time in prayer and Scripture
  - Exercise and diet
  - Personal growth plan

**3.** Capacity to take a position and present oneself in the presence of others.

- › “I” messages critical
- › Based on integrity and biblical values
- › Anchored in your identity as God’s child

**4.** The “conversation and consolation of the brethren” is vital.

- › Support in life and ministry
- › Accountability in life
- › Building up of the Body of Christ

## Discussion

**1.** How are each of your family members adjusting to their transition from seminary to the parish?

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**2.** How are things going in your marriage? With your child(ren)?

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**3.** For what are you thankful in your family?

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**4.** What can you do in the way of “home improvements”?

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**5.** In what ways has your time of preparation at the seminary and transition into parish life been an exercise in faith?

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**6.** What kinds of support systems do you have in place?

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**7.** What kind of accountability do you desire to experience in your PALS group?

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**8.** How do you define “success” in ministry?

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