The transition is **REAL**

**The pastor’s journey from seminary to first call**

“The struggle is real” is one of the top 15 phrases used by millennials (ages 22–37). This phrase is used to express annoyance with a problem, yet it’s a bit humorous because both parties know the situation is not the worst problem in the world.

The focus of this Reporter insert is the pastor’s (and his wife’s!) transition from seminary to first call. The transition is real! And putting all kidding aside, the struggle is real!

As a former district president, I witnessed this transition firsthand with new seminary candidates beginning their first call. While everyone goes through transitions in life, I pray the Church seriously considers the transition of our new pastors from the seminary.

If you’re reading this insert, I know you love the Church and her pastors. I hope you will take time to read through these stories and words concerning the transition of our Synod’s pastors into their first call. Please pray for our districts, congregations, seminaries, pastors and their families as we work together in supporting our pastors for the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of the world.

“Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom. 14:18–19).

While our church body created and utilizes PALS (Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support) to address this issue, every one of us plays an important role in helping our pastors transition from seminary to first call … because **THE TRANSITION IS REAL**!

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I forgot to set my alarm, and then I realized I had no coffee in the house. Then I didn’t get to church on time because I hit all the red lights.

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“Wow, really?”

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The struggle is real.
In May 2018, a PALS group in Oklahoma attended a three-day retreat hosted in the home of parishioners from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmond, Okla. The pastors enjoyed time together discussing ministry to inactive members, best practices for teaching and issues of casuistry. They were even treated to a casual evening on the couple’s back porch with the Rev. Barrie Henke, president of the LCMS Oklahoma District. The pastors’ wives and children also attended the event, as the hosts’ home had a pool and plenty of space for children to play. The wives enjoyed a morning together at a local café, and the families visited a local berry farm on the final day of the retreat. There were multiple opportunities for the whole group to worship, including Divine Service, Matins, Morning Prayer and Vespers. The transition is ... easier.

“The first year of being a pastor is stressful. Besides the logistics and time involved in getting settled into a new home, there is much to be done, even in a congregation that has its operations in order. Conflict and problems are a part of daily life in working with sinners, even the sinners in God’s Church. How to handle these situations is not always clear and certain, even though God’s Word is there. Much more so, there is always more to be done than there is pastor to go around. What can result is a loneliness, even for married and socially active pastors. Add to that, sin, for which a pastor needs daily forgiveness and Gospel, and a tipping point can be reached.

(An important aspect of PALS is) time spent with other first-year pastors and the experienced pastor serving as guide. The advice itself is helpful, but the fellowship and camaraderie are more important in healing loneliness and stress. By far the most important thing in PALS — and the most important thing for a pastor in general — is to hear the Gospel from other pastors, to hear that your sins are forgiven because of Christ’s death on the cross ... and to hear that this value of tears and loneliness is passing away, that we have the hope of the resurrection because Christ himself rose from the dead.”

“Transitioning into a congregation for a first-call pastor can have many challenges, especially for the community to which he has been called, far different from his own experiential background. Assumptions by the congregation can offer a great and even frustrating challenge. PALS helps in this transition because it gives an opportunity for the first-call pastors to discuss their concerns with other pastors, and also to receive mentoring by those who have had previous experience in dealing with any congregational assumptions. This mentoring is done in a relaxed, conversational and non-threatening setting.”

“Perhaps the greatest challenge I’ve seen among the pastors and their families in the Oklahoma District is a sense of isolation. While Oklahoma is what I call ‘The Buckle of the Bible Belt,’ with many, many Christians, the number of Lutherans (especially those of the LCMS variety) is quite slim. What often happens, then, is our new pastors come straight out of seminary — leaving a place of built-in community, with people of similar situations — transplanted into rural areas where the nearest brother LCMS pastor is several miles away, parishioners of a younger demographic are sparse and, depending upon the location, other opportunities may be limited as well.

“The PALS families were encouraged by the hosts to relax and consider the place their own. In this type of surrounding, any barriers seemed to disappear as the participants became very open in their discussions. The Porch Talk ... was for the men to discuss with their district president their struggles, troubles and concerns that might impact their ministry.”

We’re all in this TOGETHER
The transition may be real, but there are many players involved in PALS throughout the Synod who work together to assist new pastors to be successful, vibrant, faithful, engaging, confessional, confident, competent, evangelistic shepherds in Christ’s Church.

SET up for success

Now’s the time to update your Self Evaluation Tool (SET)! Here’s why: An additional field has been added where pastors can enter their continuing-education experiences, including PALS. A calling congregation would love to read about all the ways in which its future pastor has continued to engage in pastoral formation.

Questions? Contact the Pastoral Education office at 314-996-1254 or robyn.armbrust@lcms.org.

PUZZLING OUT the Transition

Word Bank

TRANSITION DISTRICTPRESIDENT SYNOD MENTORING SUPPORT PASTOR WIFE FAMILY CONTEXTUAL CONTINUING PALS CONGREGATION COHORT APPLIED LEARNING

Districts Facilitators Universities Churches Delegates DOXOLOGY