Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Please share with me the goal/mission of the DMin program – what does the program hope to accomplish?

   The Doctor of Ministry degree is the highest professional degree in the practice of pastoral ministry that Concordia Seminary grants. It is for pastors who want to grow in their knowledge and skills and become better pastors within their context of ministry. Our program provides pastors and chaplains the opportunity to enter into a challenging and supportive academic environment and be formed by a distinguished theological faculty and exemplary practitioners of Christian ministry so that they will exhibit the capacity for both critical and analytical theological thinking and biblical and confessional values, ethics, and best practices in ministry.

2. Why do pastors enroll in the DMin program? Is it just for LCMS pastors?

   There are many reasons to enroll in a Doctor of Ministry program. Some are seeking a graduate level professional degree. But I believe that most of our students desire to be better pastors and are looking for a good continuing education program with some substance and some structure. And if they are going to put in the work and energy to learn and to grow, why not get a degree for those efforts? Some are looking for growth in specific areas of ministry. They want to be better military chaplains, better preachers, or better leaders, and we have specific concentrations in each of these areas. Others are seeking to grow in another specific area of ministry, and our General Pastor Concentration provides the opportunity to develop a program of study that will help pastors to grow in the specific areas that they have selected for themselves.

   Although the majority of our students are LCMS pastors and chaplains, the program is also open to pastors and chaplains from other denominations.

3. How do pastors benefit from the program?

   The courses are intended to be very practical with application to the student’s context of ministry. For example, exegetical courses help the pastor grow in his preaching and teaching of God’s Word. The number and variety of credit-earning opportunities allows the pastor to choose the experiences that will help him the most. These might be in the areas of preaching, teaching, catechesis, leadership, counseling, worship, family life, cross-cultural ministry, chaplaincy, and any of a number of other areas.

4. How do their congregations benefit?

   As the pastor grows in these areas of ministry, his congregation will benefit as well, and will also grow along with his pastor. DMin assignments are characteristically focused on how the pastor will use the content of the course in a meaningful way within his congregation or context of ministry.

5. What significant changes have been made to the program in the last three years?

   The program has had a solid foundation for many years with concentrations in Military Chaplaincy, Homiletics, Missional Leadership, and General Pastoral Ministry. We have kept those four concentrations, but we have also worked in the recent past to make the
program more accessible, affordable, and flexible, especially with changes that will take effect this summer in preparation for our fall/winter session. Within each concentration certain specific courses are required, but then the student also chooses from concentration electives and general electives to complete his program. We have reduced the total number of credits in the program to 45. Of these credits, as many as 18, or six courses, can be done as “wrap-around” courses. A student may attend a continuing education workshop, or seminar, or symposium. With prior approval, and working with someone from our seminary faculty, additional readings are assigned and written work follows, in order for the overall experience to count for credit toward the DMin. We have been working with the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI) for a number of years now to allow for as much as 18 hours of wrap-around credit for pastors participating in the workshops of PLI. A similar option now exists with Doxology, with the family life ministry workshops of the Family Friendly Partners Network (FFPN), and with the courses that first-call pastors are able to take through the Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) initiative (although a pastor cannot begin the DMin program until he has three years of pastoral experience, he can at a later time use PALS courses as the basis for as much as 18 hours of wrap-around credit).

We are also beginning to provide some courses online. Beginning in the fall, author of vol. 1 of the Concordia Commentary Series commentary on Mark, Dr. James Voelz, will teach online two courses (one in fall/winter and the other in spring/summer) on “Mark for Preaching and Teaching.” A weekly study of the readings from Mark that are appointed for Year B in the lectionary will feature the texts that Dr. Voelz has treated in vol. 1 of his commentary, providing a foundation for preaching and teaching from Mark during the Church Year beginning with Advent 2014. Additional online courses of a similar nature are planned for the future.

Another change planned for the 2014–2015 school year will shorten the time that students spend in residence on the seminary’s campus from two weeks to one week. Students will complete as much as six credits in each week-long “term,” may come to the seminary’s campus as often as twice a year (in January and/or June), and may limit the time that is spent in residence to three stays (if preferred). The degree may be completed in as few as three years, or as many as six (again, the student is free to choose what works best for him).

6. In what ways is the updated DMin program more accessible and doable for parish pastors?
As stated above, there are now many ways for students to earn credits for themselves, not just through the completion of traditional courses on campus. One week in residence rather than two reduces significantly the cost of room and board and time away from one’s ministry and family. Students may complete their work at a faster or slower pace. It is up to them. Wrap-around courses, online courses, transfer credit for courses taken elsewhere, and courses by independent study are all an option.

7. What are the “wrap-around” possibilities that the program offers? (What does that mean?)
Additional readings and written assignments are wrapped around the experience of an already existing workshop, seminar, or symposium, bringing it to the level of an exercise for Doctor of Ministry credit. Work done with PLI, Doxology, FFPN, and PALS by wrap-around arrangement may be done for DMin credit, as can work with Military Chaplaincy workshops or with CSL’s Book Club. All Continuing Education Workshops conducted by CSL’s faculty in locations throughout the country and even workshops and programs offered by others can also qualify. Prior approval is required.

8. Why should men consider the DMin program?
The Doctor of Ministry provides a structured way to grow and stay current in the very best possible practice of pastoral ministry, and rewards the investment of those who successfully pursue it with a degree. Ministry does not suffer from the time that one devotes to such study and research. Rather, it is aided. It is empowered.

9. How is the program structured, and what is included in the curriculum? (Or is it personalized for each student based on their topic of study?)
It is very much personalized for each student based on his own assessment of his strengths and areas for growth in ministry. There are four concentrations to choose from. For Military Chaplains, there is the Military Chaplaincy concentration, which focuses on the needs of chaplains working at home and abroad with those in the armed forces. Chaplains need not choose the concentration, but most do. For pastors, there is the Homiletics concentration, whose focus is the development of excellence in preaching. The Missional Leadership concentration provides for growth in the area of leadership. The General Pastoral Ministry concentration provides students with the greatest number of free electives and the opportunity to focus on the areas the pastor identifies as having the greatest need.
Each concentration has required courses. There are also concentration electives that help students to reach their self-selected goals within the concentration. And there are free electives. Each student must take a Project Research and Writing course that prepares him for the writing of the Major Applied Project, a research project of significance to the pastor or chaplain in his context of ministry.
After applying and once accepted into the Doctor of Ministry program, a student takes first the Orientation course (soon to be available on-line), then the courses that best fit into his program and/or his schedule. Courses customarily feature one of the traditional four disciplines of theology (exegetical, systematic, historical, or practical theology), but all courses are also always of a practical nature to maximize their usefulness to the context of one’s ministry. Courses are taken in residence in fall/winter or spring/summer terms with students completing reading assignments before their time on campus (either in January or in June) and written assignments after. Online courses, wrap-around courses, and independent study courses bear similar requirements, but lack the expectation of time spent on campus.
When a student is close to finishing his course work, he applies for candidacy, a process that approves him to begin the research and writing of his Major Applied Project (MAP). The Project Research and Writing course helps the student to determine his project and
begin work on the MAP proposal. Once the proposal is approved and an advisor is chosen, the student has one year to do his research and complete his report (MAP). Extensions are possible. Most projects have practical application for others in ministry, and some have been published.

10. What is required of the parish pastor to get into the program, and how does he fit it into his schedule?
A parish pastor, or chaplain, needs to have at least three years of experience in pastoral ministry. He needs to have a Master of Divinity degree with at least a 3.0 GPA. He fills out the application to the DMin program and submits it with a five page account of his ministry career and his goals for his DMin program. He needs to have the approval of his congregation, and he requests four letters of recommendation: from his District President, his Circuit Counselor, another pastor, and the president of his congregation (the four letters of recommendation for military chaplains come from their context of ministry in the armed forces).
Because a typical course takes place over two quarters (fall/winter and spring/summer), he has ample time to complete all of the reading assignments. January and/or June are good times to be on campus for one week of class time. The completion of all written work takes place in the weeks following each term’s time in residence.

11. What is the cost of the D. Min program, and how do pastors typically finance it? Are there scholarships or grants available for the program?
The cost of tuition for the 2014-15 school year will be $675 per credit hour. All Doctor of Ministry students receive a 50% tuition grant, which reduces the cost of tuition to $337.50 per credit hour. The cost of transportation varies for each student, as does the cost of books. The cost of guest housing is $30 per night for a double occupancy room and $45 per night for a private room. Lunch and dinner are available in the cafeteria each day (the present cost is $7.50 per meal). Students who prefer to provide meals for themselves are welcome to do so. Many congregations provide continuing education funds for their pastors, or are willing to budget for this when made aware of the investment value of their pastor’s continuing education. Scholarships may also be available through outside agencies. Military Chaplains, for example, may apply for support through the GI Bill.