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My dear Brother:

Would you like to forget some of your own problems for a few moments this spring morning and share some of mine? At this point in the history of the University we are confronted with a situation which has already caused hours of debate. We have accepted almost 900 students for the fall semester of 1956. Many others had to be turned away. You can readily understand that this number crowds our facilities beyond the point of maximum comfort — and they are still coming in.

The immediate answer seems to be obvious and simple — limit enrollment. That solution, however, is not as easy as it sounds. To whom shall our enrollment be limited? Only to students who are in the upper 10% of their high school classes or are able to pass entrance examinations? Or only to those who are urgently and warmly recommended for a Valpo education by their pastors? Both solutions are not entirely satisfactory. The good brother from Xanadu who recommends John Buckabeer highly and declines to do the same for Susy Schmidlaff may face some congregational complications which can give him some real headaches at the base of the skull. A policy which admits only "A" students is, I submit, not good stewardship. Our job is to do the best and the most with the money our people give us year after year. To invest all of it in "brains" would be a failure to face the fact that often the "B" or even the "C" student has better qualities of character, moral integrity and spiritual attitudes than the brilliant but sophisticated (and occasionally unstable) "A" student. Often they also make better leaders for our parishes. They are steady, reliable and wholesome.

What to do? As I have said, we have devoted hours and days of discussion to the problem. At the present moment we are trying to find, or devise, some tests which would determine the basic religious and moral attitudes of the individual applicant — the non-intellectual qualities which will be increasingly important in our complex and troubled world. Not much is available in this field which would fit into our Lutheran pattern. We need help and good counsel from our brethren to whom these young men and women will return after their years at Valpo. Anything that you may have to say about our policies in the area of student enrollment will be thoughtfully and thankfully read and digested. Even a postcard would help. But please don't write as a brother did several weeks ago: "Get yourself some basketball players."

Basically, as I have noted, the problem involves our entire stewardship. It probably also has some very direct bearing on the future of our Church. As Valpo grows, it will pour hundreds of students back into the life stream of our congregations. If they are good, loyal members of a local parish, doctrinally aware and alert, and intelligently helpful to our brethren in the ministry, we will have done a good job. If they are not all of that, our greatest experience in Christian higher education will face failure. That must not happen.

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Now to other matters: Have you ever noticed how quickly morale and efficiency can be detected in an institution? Several weeks ago I landed at the front door of a hotel somewhere in the West. The doorman was aloofly examining the sky (perhaps because I was wearing my other suit and needed a shave) — the bellhop dropped my bags with an angry thud — the room clerk could not find my reservation ("Ya sure it was for this month?") — and so forth. It was clear that here was an institution which was not operating at top efficiency. The morale of an institution or an organization can be seen as clearly as the Empire State Building on a clear day.

Seriously and sometimes tragically this is also true of our congregations. After thirty years and many excursions into Missouri Synod parishes as a visiting preacher I have discovered that the critical test — the ultimate touchstone — of good congregational organization is the half hour preceding the Sunday morning service. This is the final checkpoint. My good brother, the pastor loci, is getting ready for his most important task in the Church Militant. In a few minutes he must lead his flock in worship. He must tell them about God. He must bring God to them in judgment and in mercy as effectively and intelligently as he possibly can. This is his greatest moment and highest duty. Now the shepherd really becomes a shepherd and the preacher a preacher. "This," as the Southern preacher said, "is where the water hits the wheel."

And what happens? I must sadly report that too often he has no time or quiet for that last meditation, that final prayer, before he opens the door from the sacristy and stands before his people in all the majesty, power and humility of his great calling. He has been overcome by the unconquered detail. How often have I sat quietly in the corner of a sacristy while a strange assortment of people wandered in to say something about this or that or nothing. Deacon Holzhammer puts his head through the door to report that the furnace is acting up again. Organist Bach (no relation to Johann Sebastian) pops in to say that the choir will not sing (three of the tenors went fishing). Mrs. Schmeckebeer sweeps in to say
that the meeting of the Ladies' Aid must be postponed because the local Woman's Club is conducting a symposium on "The Care and Feeding of Husbands" on the same afternoon. Sexton Bierrook sadly announces that the electric candles will not light on account of "the fuse is blown out." (At this point my own pastor looked over my shoulder and said, "Put in something about no babysitters showing up for the nursery. This is also a major problem."). Through all this my harassed brother tries to remain calm. He has other and greater things to think about — but what chance has he? With a critical thirty minutes God must be forgotten while he attends to the earthly details of the Kingdom which is still, obviously and deplorably, in time and space.

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Some time ago, you may remember, I started a small and local movement which might be called, "Books for Preachers." I suggested that every congregation put several hundred dollars in the annual budget for buying books for their preacher. A good beginning would be the currently appearing "Works of Luther" in English. Now I would like to start another campaign called "Sunday mornings belong to God and the Preacher." This may require some drastic action by the deacons and other authorities, but it will pay rich and eternal dividends. Let a deacon stand (as I saw in one parish) at the door of the sacristy and quietly but firmly murmur, "The pastor can be seen only after the services." The result, I predict, will be a happier preacher (who will also live longer), better sermons, and a new appreciation among the faithful that they really called him to preach and teach, to condemn and to comfort, to talk about sin and grace — and that nothing must ever interfere with his real calling.

In the end everybody will be happier and God will be glorified.

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Booknotes: I believe that I have occasionally referred to the remarkable Luther Renaissance which we have witnessed throughout the world during the past twenty years. Beginning in Germany and Scandinavia it has now also come to this country. Bainton, Rippp, Watson and Schwiebert have all made a significant contribution to the rising and exciting interest in the man who under God is basically responsible for the Reformation and the existence of the Protestant church. Now comes another fascinating volume — a translation from the German — "Luther" by Rudolph Thiel. As you know, most translations leave a great deal to be desired. In fact, many of them do not convey the flavor and drama and warmth of the original. This particular translation by Gustav Wiedenke is a remarkable exception. While the story of Luther is somewhat dramatized and novelized, he is a good historian and stays very close to the historical facts. Just one little sample of his style and approach.

"On March 3, 1522, Luther mounted the pulpit. Everyone was there, curious, excited. What would he say?

"Many still remembered his last sermon a year before. 'Who wants to fast, let him do so. I do not fast, I want to eat freely what I like. I do not ask what the pope will say to that. He has put me under the ban already, so I have the advantage that I need not keep his commands. Unfortunately they're so many that I can't break them all.'

"What would this wild monk say to his little Christian flock? They had not forgotten him, but had turned his words into deeds. They no longer fasted, or went to confession. They offered bread and wine at the Lord's Supper and took the Sacrament in their own hands, and wouldn't allow their Saviour's blood to be sacrificed at the altar. They chose the lazy monks out of the cloisters and urged their persons to marry. Side altars were gone from the church; the idolatrous pictures were burned — the hypocrisy of papistry was ended.

"Luther still wore the cowl, but stood stiffly erect as if to unlearn his monastic habits. Was he still a monk or not? His voice rang through the bare church, rough and full of feeling.

"'All of us are commanded to die. No one can die for another, but each one must battle with death for himself. I will not be with you then, nor you with me.'"

A book well worth having in your library as an introduction to the monumental translation of Luther's works into English. Perhaps you can get somebody to buy it for you to take along on your vacation.

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One of the minor but very significant duties of a good University faculty is to keep an administrator at least partially intellectually alive and breathing. Instinctively they seem to know that an administrator concerned only with finances, enrollments and buildings can become dangerous and eventually completely useless. My own faculty is astonishingly aware of this danger. As a consequence there is a steady stream of little notes on the desk each morning, "Read this," "Look up Professor Himmelhoch's article in the Educational Record," "Check on the latest developments in the teaching of sanskrit," and so on. I must confess that I am not only very happy over these telegraphic signals, but that I also faithfully follow-up as soon as a quiet hour comes. An administrator should at least be able to understand what his learned colleagues are thinking and talking about.

Many of these comments in my letters to the brethren, therefore, reflect the thoughtfulness of some good colleague who thinks I am devoting too much time to the location of the sewers on the new campus. Example: A few days ago one of them dropped on the desk a mimeographed copy of the Reformation sermon preached at Rockefeller Memorial Chapel on October 30, 1955, by Professor Heller of Marburg. There are some passages in it which I consider medically dubious and historically inaccurate. The following paragraph, however, is as luminous and concise a summary of Luther as I have ever seen.

"Faith and works are indissolubly connected one with the other as the burning and shining of fire; they are after all a uniform and total act which Luther compares with a tube, receiving the water above and pouring it forth below. This unity of faith and love is the real mystery of the Gospel, seen and announced by Luther. This Gospel gives to man a wonderful liberty: By faith he is delivered from all legalism — he is a free souvereign over all things and to no one subject; (ein freier Herr uber alle Ding und niemand untarn.) In spite of this, Christian liberty is not at all arbitrariness or
even satisfaction of a spiritual egoism: this faith makes man a loving servant of all his fellow-men and fellow creatures—a Christian is ‘a zealous servant of all things and subject to every one.’ (‘ein dienstbarer Knecht aller Dinge und jeder mann untern.') ‘By faith the Christian ascends above himself into God, from God he descends again below himself by love, and yet remains forever in God and godly love’ (‘durch den Glauben fahret er uber sich in Gott, und aus Gott fahret er wider unter sich durch die Liebe un bleibt doch immer in Gott und gotlicher Liebe’). Luther’s pamphlet ‘Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen’ (De liberate Christianorum) from which these marvellous words have been taken is perhaps the most moving of all his writings, the programmatical book of reformation. Besides this booklet Luther’s sermons, collected in this *Kirchen und Hauppostille* are the most splendid witness of Luther’s evangelical faith—he himself considered this the best book which he had written and which even the followers of the pope could not help to appreciate. Like dear chimes through all these sermons, especially the Christmas and paschal sermons, the message of ‘Glauben und Liebe’ (faith and love) is sounding. It was one of the greatest moments of my life, when I, grown up in a Roman Catholic atmosphere and often warned of this arch-heretic, discovered the principle of Luther’s evangelical piety.

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More University notes: This morning I returned from a meeting of the Executive Committee of our Board of Trustees, and I am happy to report that things are humming again. We hope to get three buildings—the chapel-auditorium, the library and the deaconess chapter house under way this summer. I was able to report a generous gift of $40,000 for a new law building from Mr. Harry J. W. Niehaus of St. Louis, Missouri. This gift is especially appreciated since it will enable us to appeal to the alumni and others for additional gifts so that we can erect a new building for our School of Law at the earliest possible moment. As I have said before, I give thanks to the Lord of the Church once a day for a particularly intelligent and helpful Board of Trustees. When the history of the University is finally written, the group of men who carried us through the first thirty years of its existence under Lutheran administration should certainly receive special recognition. If a job was ever done which required courage, wisdom and self-sacrifice, these men did it under very adverse circumstances. What I like especially is that they are fully aware of the distinctive purposes of the University and our obligation to make it a thoroughly Lutheran part of the Lutheran Church. This, after all, is central and goes far beyond buildings and roads.

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Correspondence section: This is the most rewarding part of these random notes—the letters from the brethren who feel constrained to talk a little while. All the epistles from architects, builders and fundraisers are pushed aside when a letterhead pops up: “St. Chrysostom’s Church.” I know before I start that the brother has something to say—true, funny, sad—but always something. A few excerpts this month. Comes a note from a brother who must remain anonymous except that his name is Schmidt. He refers to the fact that I have several times somewhat slightly used the name in referring to a Deacon. Brother Schmidt writes:

"Is there a sinister movement afoot and has it been afoot thus the years, to discredit the ancient name of Schmidt? If the movies want to depict a clever and cruel Nazi, his name is Wolf or Braun; if it is to be a stupid underling his name automatically is Schmidt. That same idea is carried out in books, television productions, etc. And lo and behold, I suspect that the same mind dwell in the one who produced a campus letter from Valpo some time ago. I dare say you would look far and wide for a ‘Holzapfel’ and a ‘Schmeeckbeir’ hence such names could scarcely exist even in Lutheran circles as Teutonic as the Missouri Synod, but Schmidts we do have. Yet, they are second to the Meyers and the Mueller.

"Now the next time you write about imaginary characters attending a Lutheran service why not speak of a corpulent Kratzmann, a beautiful Bertha Buesing, a foolish Frieda Fuehrbrueger, etc. No names can be sacred to us Missourians. I am sure.

"Sommolent Schmidts, indeed!"

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I am happy to note that my good friend and colleague, the Dean of the Faculty, also reads the “Campus Commentary”: occasionally. A note from him lands on the desk which reads as follows:

"A sentence in your ‘Campus Commentary’ (indicated in red) reminds me of a bit of dialogue between the mother of a student who had been dropped from the University, and me:

WEB: How about your boy’s religious life?

Mother: I believe my boy is quite religious.

WEB: Do you belong to a church, and does the boy attend services?

Mother: Yes. We are members of a church in Oak Park—a very fine church—and we have a good preacher.

WEB: Would you mind telling me a little more about your church.

Mother: I don’t really know what kind of church it is. I think it is non-dimensional.

Not a bad description of a lot of churches."

** * **

A particularly thoughtful and stimulating epistle. Please read it twice.

"In your January ‘Commentary’ you asked whether or not your readers had ever examined their identification rate. "Yes, I have—perhaps every day for the past twenty years. I am perhaps more keenly aware of the problems posed by identification rates than most brethren.

"Some years ago I submitted to a thorough-going, scientific psychoanalysis over a period of many weeks and, among other things, was told that my excessively high identification rate was both my curse and blessing. It has, indeed, proved to be both.

"It would seem that we are dealing here with one of those inevitable tensions which will not be solved this side of eternity. The Lord evidently needs both the empathic and the less-empathic for the accomplishment of His Purposes.

"It sometimes wonder if much that is wrong in the church today isn’t due to a lack of empathy on the part of many of
its members. Sometimes it would seem that we have assiduously cultivated the gift of not being able to put ourselves into the position of the other fellow, lest we be able to look back and get a good look at ourselves.

"I am sure that, in the measure in which more of us cultivate the sometimes painful blessing of empathy, we shall not only be able to solve more of our internal problems, but we shall also be able to fashion a much more winning approach to those who are still outside our fellowship.

"The problem, of course, is not a simple one. If all of our pastors had my identification rate, all of our pulpits would be empty! On the other hand, if all of the brethren had the identification rate of some I know, our pulpits might all be filled, but I'm sure our pews, for the most part, would be empty. Which leaves us right where we were when I started this letter."

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The correspondence section of the Chicago Tribune strikes my eye over the morning coffee. I like the following letter very much:

"This reader was glad to see a recent letter praising the deportment of Mount Carmel High students on the Stony Island buses. The letter was from a Protestant.

"The undersigned is a Roman Catholic and a daily rider on the 87th bus line. A word of praise is in order for the gentlemanly students of Luther South High school who use these buses.

"With the father of one of these lads I attended 'Ballad for Americans' Luther South put on last year, and most creditably. Luther South has won its 11th straight game in basketball this season. Here is a brand new school worth the prideful attention of the south and southwest sides."

A salute and a tipping of the hat to the faculties and student bodies of all our Lutheran high schools who are producing students of that kind.

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By the way, a few weeks ago I had my first look at the Milwaukee Lutheran High School. I must say that I have never seen anything like it in the entire Missouri Synod. The building is a remarkable reflection of the rising tide of interest in Christian education also on the secondary level. I have never seen a building in our circles which is more intelligently planned and more imaginatively engineered. If you are traveling through Milwaukee on the way to the Synodical Convention in St. Paul this summer, I hope that you will stop at the high school. It is well worth the time.

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And that's all for this time. It is probable that these random notes will reach you sometime around Ascension Day and Pentecost. Perhaps I should confess that they are being written at a time when I am preparing a series of discussions of the holy ministry to be presented to some of the brethren in the coming months. Perhaps the two great forgotten festivals of the Holy Christian Church (the Ascension of our Lord and the coming of the Paraclete) are a good time for us to examine our calling again. It must be perfectly clear to all of us that there is some criticism of our ministry in our day. Now and then one even runs into touches of a subtle form of anti-clericalism. Few things are more dangerous to the continuing life of the Church. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that we are not always aware of the primary danger of our high calling — its reduction to routine, to meetings and conferences, organizations, fund-raising and all the curious doings which our European brethren call our "mad activism".

Perhaps my concluding note today should be a reminder that in the pages of the New Testament, as I have learned again, the holy ministry is at one and the same time the humblest and the proudest of all callings. It is of the very essence of our ministry that we must begin where the lowliest child begins: "Except ye become as little children." This is peculiarly and terribly relevant to our ministry. In fact I hope that I can find time to make a few notes about the historic fact that there has been something childlike about all great preachers. All of them have had a sense of wonder, sublime faith, and unquestioning obedience to the Word.

On the other hand, our ministry, in a divine and heavenly sense, is also the proudest of all callings. Because we have sometimes forgotten that, our ministry may have lost some of its power and its God-given dynamic — that deep sense of anxiety and urgency which is always the mark of a ministry close to God. No matter what men may say, it is well for us to remember at Ascension and Pentecost that only because of our message does God permit the world to roll on its way. When our work is done, the clocks of the universe will stop. Meanwhile, we can go on about our work with confidence and power, knowing that we live forever in the glory and light of the two great and final festivals of the Church Militant.

Very sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann
President