

You Say I Have Gifts for Ministry?

A few years ago, Pastor Ross Stelljes sat across a table from a 16-year-old kid who had no idea what to do with his life. That kid happened to be me, and that moment was the first time I'd ever heard someone say I might have gifts for ministry.



Professor Ross Stelljes

In the hour that followed and in subsequent meetings, I heard the same call that countless men and women have heard before me: to preach Christ crucified to a world that's searching for hope. But who was I to carry this message? I'd just been licensed to handle a vehicle. How could I be entrusted with souls?

For me, the answers to these questions would slowly be revealed over the course of the next few years atop a hill in New Ulm.

I'd like to tell you how my time at Martin Luther College has changed my life.

Now, with a dramatic opener like that, you might be expecting a long, linear redemption story about how I found myself in college, but that's not what this is. My experience with MLC has been much simpler than that.

I'm just blessed to spend a few hours each day among excellent examples of what a called worker should be.

As a college student who's paying a lot of money to learn things from my instructors, I couldn't ask for more than that!



Professor James Pope

I was privileged to have a Bible History and Literature class with Professor James Pope last year, and he taught me so many invaluable things about how messy evangelism can be. He made me realize why all the foundational knowledge is so important—because you can't learn it all from the books. No commentary or theological text is going to tell you what to say to the woman whose son just had a meltdown and left home, or to the young man whose new wife just died from lung cancer.

However, with a deep knowledge of the gospel and a compassionate heart, we can approach these conversations with confidence and give potent advice and guidance from Scripture.

At MLC I've learned that understanding people is paramount.

I'll never forget an experience I had as a passionate first-year trying to start a weekly worship session with some friends.

I was greeting the people who'd come to sing one Thursday evening when, all of a sudden, Dr. Mark Paustian walked into the room. He approached me and spoke one sentence that cut straight to my core: "I'm here to worship, not to critique."

How could this man diagnose my biggest insecurity and address it in just one sentence before we'd even met? Well, it turns out that just two years later he'd be teaching me the same skill in his Interpersonal Communication class.



Dr. Mark Paustian

Dr. Paustian has a tremendous store of knowledge when it comes to Scripture and communication, and he's always willing to discuss anything with me, whether it's a theory about people, the social climate surrounding worship,



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or how an extrovert like me can better understand introverted people like him. He's truly a student of the things he teaches every day, and it shows in the way he's willing to listen before offering wisdom.

When I think about professors with a visible fervor for their studies, a few other names come to mind. Professor Paul Koelpin made me more excited about history than I've been in my entire life. He drew parallels between the rise and fall of ancient kingdoms and common Bible stories. He emphasized that it's important for any society to be well versed in history because it helps us understand the present. Most of all, he pushed us to do our very best every single day.



Professor Paul Koelpin

What's the secret to getting students excited about learning? The formula is really quite simple. Passion begets passion.

I saw evidence of this as I took Symbolics class with Professor Nicolas Schmoller. I grew up WELS, but without strong family ties to the synod (despite what my last name may indicate). I never really understood the use of the Lutheran confessional writings in our church services and installations. It was in Symbolics class



Professor Nicolas Schmoller

that I understood the importance for the first time. These texts restate key doctrines so everyone can plainly see what the Bible says about justification by faith, the sacraments, and the Trinity.

I see a passion for the truth of Scripture in Professor Schmoller that is a blessing to every student who sits in his class—whether it's telling us he's a doctrine nerd on the first day of school or lighting up when we answer tough discussion questions.

I couldn't possibly write about all the ways the wonderful men and women on the MLC faculty affected me. Professor Paul Bases' fire for Spanish culture and ministry. Professor Mark Tacke's science tricks and captivating classroom antics. Professor Paul Grubbs's infectious love for the literary arts and his students. Professor David Scharf's astounding ability to make the grace of Jesus Christ smack me in the face every time he delivers a chapel or sermon.

I could go on and on, tossing out names, but I'd rather list the singular reason this all exists: Because Jesus loves you and me. Jesus loved us enough to buy us back from the clutches of a fallen angel who was jealous for our souls. That message of grace, of a God who promises never to leave us or forsake us, is why we do everything we do at MLC.

Martin Luther College prepares pastors, teachers, and staff ministers to be the hands and feet of God in this broken world. Each one of us is equipped with a foundation of sound theology rooted in the inspired Word of God.



Professor David Scharf

So please pray for the mission of Martin Luther College. Pray for professors who pour themselves out to train up the next generation of called workers. Pray for the students who feel weighed down by the day-to-day—by the lesson plans, the term papers, or the Greek quizzes. Pray for the 16-year-old kids who sit across the table from recruiters and consider ministry for the first time. Finally, pray for the thousands of souls who will receive the Word of God from these future called workers, that by the Holy Spirit they would be led to faith in Christ and the glorious promise of heaven.



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