

Ministry: A Study

By Leroy A. Dobberstein

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I. Ministry: A New Testament Study

If one were to choose a topic for a Pastor's Institute that is relevant, practical, controversial and comprehensive, all in one, one would not have to look any further than the doctrine of the ministry. Ministry takes all of us back to our earliest childhood, the time we established a close, personal relationship with called servants of the word. Some of us can trace the desire to prepare for and serve in the holy ministry to these early childhood days. We hope to make this discussion of ministry very practical especially in the later presentations. Ministry was a rather burning issue twice during the days of the Synodical Conference and was in part responsible for the break-up of the conference. Ministry, for one doctrine, sets us apart from most of the Lutherans in our country. Ministry, especially as it involves women in the ministry, may prove to be a burning issue for years to come. Because it is possible to make both too little or too much of persons in the ministry and also of forms of ministry, we trust you will find this discussion both timely and profitable.

Your essayist was given the option of directing these essays to both church and ministry. This would have been the natural thing to do. It is not possible to discuss one for long without the other. Nor shall I try to do so now, especially in the first three essays. However in order to devote the last two essays to very practical matters of ministry in the church today, I have chosen ministry as my theme. We shall begin today with *Ministry: A New Testament Study*. In the following essays we shall consider *Ministry: according to Luther*; *Ministry: A Synodical conference Issue*; *Ministry: In a Changing World*; and *Ministry: In the Year 2000 and Beyond*.

Universal Priesthood

Instituted by Christ

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20). These words of parting according to Matthew's gospel are a fitting place to begin a New Testament study of ministry. The Savior spoke momentous words. They are the word and command of the crucified and risen Lord. They say much about ministry. They get to the very heart of ministry, the proclamation of the gospel. But they are far from the only words Jesus spoke about ministry. For that matter this passage is only one of many with which to begin a New Testament study. One could begin with another ministry directive, the simplicity with which Jesus speaks his final word according to Mark's gospel: “He said to them ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation’” (Mark 16:15). In John's gospel the divine command is spoken on the eve of the Lord's resurrection. “Again Jesus said: ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’” (John 20:21-23). At the Ascension everything Jesus said earlier was summed up in the command: “You will be my witness” (Acts 1:8). No listing of passages setting forth the overall work of the ministry would be complete without Peter's words: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). These do not exhaust the list. We have not cited a passage yet, which includes the word

ministry. Each passage in its own way adds something to the discussion of ministry. The brief listing here simply reminds us that we don't point to any one passage for the institution of the ministry. Jesus, in fact, did not in any one of these words institute a new ministry. He only encourages a ministry which reaches all the way back to the first gospel spoken in the Garden of Eden.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers: he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). These simple words, if we dare call them simple, set into motion a ministry which has no end. There were times when that ministry was not very apparent, when those who were entrusted with ministry were careless and remiss. But this gospel ministry had been in existence through the centuries, for millennia. It never ceased to exist.

The promise of the seed of the woman breathed new life into the hearts of Adam and Eve, hearts that had been rendered lifeless and hopeless through sin. The good news that rescued them from the power of Satan and darkness begged to be shared. It was only natural that they share it with their children. A direct result of that ministry of the gospel was the offering their son Abel sacrificed to the Lord. The account of Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel, and the child God gave to the first parents in the place of Abel ends with the grand announcement: “At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26).

Touching base over the centuries we are told: “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it” (Genesis 8:20). A few chapters later Abraham responded to the Lord's call, left his father's house and country, traveled to Bethel. “There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 12:8). Abraham continued to build altars to the Lord (Genesis 21:33). So did his grandson Jacob (Genesis 33:20). Moses became the appointed leader of God's people of promise and a prophet “like me” (Deuteronomy 18:15). The list of preachers of the good news is numberless. Persons called directly by the Lord immediately come to mind, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah. Finally every believer of the Old Testament must be included. The very nature of the gospel is that believing parents share it with their children, believing hearts share it with hearts which do not believe.

The ministry that Christ instituted was not new. It was an encouragement to do what believers have always done. It was a ministry after the pattern of his own prophetic office. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

To His Church

We properly say that the institution of the ministry is Christ's, not a new ministry, but an encouragement to do what is inherent in the gospel message, to proclaim the good news. Everything we have said to this point already suggests a second key thought in any New Testament study of ministry. Jesus has given his ministry, not to angels, not to any select group of men, much less to any individual. He has given his ministry to the church. Church and ministry go together. They belong together. They are inseparably bound.

The word “*ecclesia*” occurs for the first time in the gospel accounts of the Lord's ministry in Matthew 16: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (v.18). Jesus had asked his disciples two momentous questions: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” “What about you? Who do you say I am?” Answering as a spokesman Peter made a strong confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus acknowledged Peter's good confession, and in turn gives us insight into the church. “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:17-19). The church is his, Christ's. It is holy, for Christ himself builds it. The church is made up of all those who confess

what Peter had confessed. Accordingly the Apostle's Creed calls his church the communion of saints. The church shall endure forever, for it is invincible.

Jesus used the word "*ecclesia*" a second time, as recorded also in Matthew's gospel (18:15-20). Here Jesus speaks of the functioning of his church in carrying out the ministry that is given to it. In particular Jesus spoke of the responsibility of carrying out church discipline. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

With that we note the particular words which Jesus used at this crucial point in his ministry to refer to those who are his, to those he entrusted with the work of the ministry. "*Ecclesia*," according to its etymology, was a meeting of citizens called together by a herald. They were one's called out of their homes to a place of meeting, to an assembly (Acts 19:32,39,41). In the Septuagint it was used to apply to the children of Israel and is used in this way in the New Testament also (Acts 7:38, Hebrews 2:12). Jesus used it to refer to his own, the ones who were called out from the world of unbelief to faith in him, to those who confessed him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, the ones to whom he entrusted "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The church then is the sum total of all those who have a personal trust in the vicarious atonement of Christ, a faith which is the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

Church becomes a common term throughout the remainder of the New Testament to refer to those who are Christ's. Though Luke does not use the term in his gospel he uses it often in his account of the apostles. Paul uses it consistently both in the letters to the gathering of Christians and his pastoral epistles to refer to the called-out ones, those whom the Holy Spirit had delivered from the power of Satan and darkness to faith in Christ. Church is rightly applied whenever "two or three come together in my name" (Matthew 18:20).

To his church Christ says go, disciple, preach, be my witnesses. The passage that these verbs bring to mind often serve as mission festival texts. At such times we do not hesitate, and rightly so, to apply these words to all Christians. We acknowledge them, not only as immediate injunctions to the called apostles, but the gospel command to the church of all times, until the very end of the age. Upon the strength of these words all Christians are encouraged to be an active part in sending out others to do the work of the ministry. More than that, all Christians are encouraged to confess their Lord and Savior before men, to be witnesses, evangelists, workers together with Christ. All this is in keeping with the words of the inspired apostle Paul: "... if I am delayed you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Yes, it is in keeping with the inspired words of Peter, "you also, like living stones, are built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:5,9). All Christians, by virtue of their faith in Christ, are equal before God." "So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). All Christians, by virtue of their faith in Christ, are ministers: "It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken. With the same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak'" (2 Corinthians 4:13). Andrew believed the words of John the Baptist concerning Christ and told his brother Simon: "We have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ)" (John 1:41). Jesus called Philip and "Philip found Nathaniel and told him" (John 1:45). The Samaritan woman believed Jesus' testimony and we are told: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39). The thief on the cross saw and heard enough on the day of the Lord's death to confess to his fellow malefactor: "We are punished justly, for

we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41). Unpreached gospel has been called a contradiction of the greatest sort.¹ Remember the words of Peter and John before the council in Jerusalem: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

A Ministry of the Gospel

Again almost every passage, which we have cited, leads to the next consideration. The ministry that Christ instituted is a ministry of the gospel. This thought bears repeating. The ministry that Christ instituted is a ministry of the GOSPEL. The focus is not on any form of ministry, but on the content. The word ministry should not be quickly dismissed. It means service. The “*diakonos*” was a servant. The “*diakonia*” is a service rendered unto another. The Christian, by virtue of his faith in Christ, is a servant, freed from the cruel master of sin, set aside for service to the God who saved him. We said, the emphasis is not on any particular form, even though Scripture uses various words to describe those who minister in the Lord’s harvest. More of that later.

Here we focus our attention on the content of the ministry, the gospel. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing ... teaching.” “Go into all the world and preach the good news....” “I am sending you ... if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven ...” “You will be my witnesses.” “You are ... a royal priesthood ... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” At Troas Paul summarized his entire ministry with this very focus; “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task (*diakonia*) of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24). Not that the work of the ministry does not also include the preaching of the law. In fact, because of the sinful nature of man’s heart, ministry without law is not possible. But the ministry of the law is no end in itself. Its purpose is always to serve the gospel, the gospel that alone can bring the sinner to Christ and salvation. Again Paul puts it all in perspective when he writes: “Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadfastly at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious. If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness” (2 Corinthians 3:7-9).

The ministry of the gospel is a preaching of righteousness. It proclaims that objective truth “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Each Christian is a preacher of reconciliation, justification, and righteousness before God. I am, of course, using the word preach beyond the narrow sense of a formal address prepared according to various homiletical rules and delivered in an oratorical fashion in a public place. Preaching in its wider sense is any way in which the truth of the gospel is conveyed before men. It may be a children’s Christmas Eve service, a father’s conducting family devotion, a mother’s hymn in the nursery, a child’s recitation of John 3:16.

Summary

There is one ministry, the ministry of the gospel, instituted by Christ and given to the church, that is to all Christians, the communion of saints. Christ’s institution did not signal anything new, for the ministry of the gospel began with God’s first promise to a fallen world. All who have been called to faith are servants of Christ, ministers of the gospel of reconciliation.

Public Ministry

¹ Schaller, *WLQ*, January 1981.

Divinely Instituted

Alongside the universal priesthood of all believers God has established the public ministry of the word. Again, we look in vain if we seek to find a simple passage from Scripture that instituted the public ministry in the same way, for example, that Christ instituted baptism or the Lord's Supper. That God has indeed ordained a public ministry as a means of exercising the New Testament ministry may be seen from many things that God has revealed. It may be seen from the need for a call. "And how can they preach unless they be sent?" (Romans 10:15). At times such calls were direct (Isaiah 6:8, Jeremiah 1:4ff., Exodus 3:10, Matthew 10:1, Acts 22:21). Ordinarily God calls through the church (Acts 6:1ff, Titus 1:5). God's plan for public ministry may be seen from the qualifications that Scripture has set down for such ministry (1 Timothy 3:1-12), the fact that those who serve in it are special gifts of God to his church (Ephesians 4:11-13) and that public ministers are appointed by the Lord (1 Corinthians 12:28). That the public ministry is divinely instituted may be seen from the fact that God has provided that those who serve full-time in the church receive their livelihood from the church.

One Ministry

We rightly speak of a divinely instituted public ministry. That does not suggest, however, a ministry that is essentially different from the universal priesthood. First of all, public ministry takes nothing away from the ministry that is given to all believers. All believers have the right and responsibility to confess their faith before men. All may go directly to God with their supplications and sacrifices of praise. If anything the public ministry reinforces the ministry of all believers for the church determines the needs, establishes the offices and calls those who are to serve in the public ministry. Secondly, the public ministry proclaims the same gospel. It has the same purpose, the salvation of souls. The public ministry and the universal priesthood are two species of the same genus. Public ministry is a special way or form of practicing the one ministry of the gospel that is done in the name of Christians who have the right to call. There is but one Lord, one office or ministry, one gospel and one purpose.

Equality

It also, follows that all Christians, including those called into public ministry, are equal before God. "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi' 'father' 'teacher' the greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:8-12). All Christians are equal, but not all are equally qualified to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. Not all are qualified to teach, to divide law and gospel, to provide leadership in the church, to judge teaching and practice within the church, etc. God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33,40) and has provided for an orderly way for the church to carry out its ministry. He recognizes the needs of his church at any given time and place. He gives to the church men who are qualified to supply those needs (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:7-16). He has instructed his church to find and use the necessary gifts through the divine call. At the same time God himself promises to work through his church. Those who are properly called are his own appointed public ministers of the word. "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15). "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28, cf. also 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11). It is also God's will that the church gratefully receive and employ the gifts he has given (1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:6-9). At the same time the fact remains that all Christians are equal before the Lord. No Christian has any authority in the church above and beyond that which the church has properly conferred upon him.

The Direct Call

Nor does Scripture make any undue difference between those directly called by God and those whom he calls to ministry through his church. We said, at times God did call directly. Many of the prophets in the Old Testament were called directly by God (Isaiah 6:8, Jeremiah 1:4ff., Exodus 3:10). In the New Testament the twelve apostles received a direct call from the Lord (Matthew 10:1). So did the apostle Paul (Acts 22:21). Direct calls were received from God at a specific time, to perform a specific function. They also had the gift of inspiration (1 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:19-21). However, direct calls did not confer generically different functions. Though the prophets and apostles were authoritative teachers in the church (Ephesians 2:20), they were engaged in the one and same ministry of the gospel. Furthermore, preaching and teaching in both testaments was not limited to those who were called directly by the Lord. It should be no surprise when Paul refers to Timothy as a brother and fellow-worker (1 Thessalonians 3:2) and Peter calls the leaders in the congregations of Asia Minor fellow elders (1 Peter 5:1).

Prof. J. Schaller provides a good summary of the essential thoughts that we have discussed up to this point in an essay on *The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry*.

The New Testament ministry [*Predigtamt*, literally, office of preaching], better termed service [*Predigtdienst*, literally, service of preaching], began with and through the first preaching of the gospel in Paradise and appears wherever the gospel is in any way communicated. For the gospel is a word which is to be preached, and it immediately through the very process of conversion turns those whom it brings to faith into preachers of it. Thus every believer since the beginning of the world is according to his spiritual nature a preacher of the gospel, not only *de iure* but also *de facto*. There is no one who has this *commission de iure* who does not also carry it out *de facto*. God did not institute a ministry in *absracto*, but he continually creates the ministry of preaching [*Predigtdienst*] through his gospel. Because of the needs of the church God in the time before Christ raised up the prophets, and later the apostles, by a direct, immediate call and by a special endowment with the Holy Spirit in order that they might perform the service of preaching in a special form. Their activity did not differ essentially from the preaching activity of all Christians. They wanted and were to proclaim nothing but the Word of Redemption. Their ministry differs from that of other believers only in this that they became such bearers of this Word that God gave an ever clearer revelation through them and made their writing for all time the source of the Truth to which all other believers are bound in carrying out their ministry of preaching. Neither the prophets nor the apostles constitute a special order or the beginning of a special order in the church to which the ministry would be given exclusively. This work always remains the duty of all Christians and of every individual Christian until the end of days. Where there is no believing Christian, there is also no commission to preach. But wherever there is a single true Christian, there there is not only a person who is invested with the ministry, that is, one who has the commission to preach, but also one who actually proclaims the praises of him who has called him if he finds ears to hear.²

Forms of Ministry

In his summary Prof. Schaller suggests the next thought for our study of ministry, the matter of order or forms of ministry. Schaller observes that neither the prophets nor the apostles called directly by God constituted any special order for all time. Turning to Scripture we find that God raised them up to fulfill a special need within the church. At times two or more of these men were contemporaries. In each case the particular function which one or the other was called to fulfill ceased with his death. No where do we find Isaiah or Jeremiah, for example, passing his office to another. True, Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha, not to confer anything on

² *WLQ*, January 1981, page 46.

Elisha, but to carry out the Lord's instructions to anoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:16) and to fulfill the desire Elisha had already expressed (2 Kings 2:9). For that matter neither term, prophet or apostle, is used exclusively for ones called directly by the Lord (1 Kings 18:4; Acts 14:4,14). The latter is reason enough not to speak of any prophetic or apostolate order in the church for all times.

However, is there any divinely instituted order or form for the New Testament? Some have insisted that there are, or is, and follow an episcopal or presbyterial form of church government. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has insisted that the office of the pastor is the divinely ordained order for the church today. It is true that the Old Testament priesthood was a divinely established form that continued up to the fulfillment of that type in the coming of Christ. However, we can find no equivalent in the New Testament. There is no passage in Scripture where the word priest is equated with minister, except maybe Romans 15:16 "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Priest is used only to refer to believers to whom the ministry is given, not as some form or order to be followed.

It is also true that one is able to find forms in the New Testament. "It is he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). In 1 Timothy chapter 3 Paul speaks of overseers (*episkopos*) and deacons (*diakonos*). In chapter 5 he speaks of elders (*presbuteros*). However, any attempt to categorize these forms meets with difficulty. According to their use in the New Testament one is not able to find any clear-cut distinction. The deacons appointed by the church in Jerusalem are also found engaged in the responsibilities associated with apostleship (Acts 6). Though it would seem that there are differences between the office of an elder and a bishop the two terms are used interchangeably and neither word seems to identify itself with the pastoral office as we know it today. We noted earlier that the title apostle was applied to others besides Paul and the Twelve. In addressing the Christians in Asia Minor the apostle Peter refers to himself as a fellow elder (1 Peter 5:1). Obviously the importance of the New Testament ministry is not its form but its content and its purpose, the preaching of the gospel and the salvation of souls.

For that reason the church today exercises its Christian freedom and establishes its own forms of ministry. It does not do this arbitrarily, and certainly not to establish any rank and encourage ideas of honor and prestige. But it has established the office of pastor, teacher, vicar, deacon, visitor, missionary, professor, district and synodical officers, etc., according to the particular needs of the church. Offices of the past may be discontinued; new offices may be established, as long as it serves the best interest of the gospel. "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice" (Philippians 1:18).

Ordination

Unlike the office of the ministry, the rite of ordination has no divine institution. Though it is referred to in Scripture (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6) no where was it done according to any divine command. Ordination does not confer the office. Nor does it confer any inherent powers. It is purely a liturgical form, but serves a distinct service in the church. It confirms the legitimacy of the call, the qualification of the one ordained, and invokes God's blessings.

Preparation for Ministry

Universal Priesthood

Who will minimize the importance of preparing God's people for ministry? We do not make them ministers. They are ministers through their union with Christ. But we can impress upon them the privilege that is theirs as members of the universal priesthood. We can make them aware of the opportunities that God places before them for service. We can encourage them to search out and welcome the opportunities they have for their priestly activity. And we can equip them for their ministry as saints by helping them grow in the knowledge of Scripture. "And we pray that in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

Worker Training

Nor will we minimize the importance of a thorough and careful preparation for those who hope to be called into public ministry. Not the least of the preparation will be a high regard for ministry. An anonymous quotation says it well. "Looking back on my college and seminary years reminds me of a funnel. The wide end of the funnel was my time in college. There was so much to learn, so many subjects. By the time I graduated from Seminary I was at the narrow end of the funnel ... There was only one thing to learn and proclaim.... Jesus Christ and Him crucified.... I thank God for the diverse, liberal-arts education I had in our worker-training schools, but most of all, I thank God that we were constantly reminded there is really only one thing you can do with it all ... – lay it at the feet of the Savior and say, 'Here am I. Send me!'"³ The Lord has blessed us with a worker-training system second to none, which might well be the envy of any other church body. Granted, such training does not come cheap. But we cannot thank our God enough that our forefathers, with far less resources than the church has at its disposal today, had the foresight to train thoroughly beginning with our academies. The notion that less for education means more for missions seems to lack the vision necessary if we are to maintain a thorough training of our candidates for ministry. It appears that not for the first time in our synod we face a severe shortage of candidates for ministry. May the Lord give us the patience and trust of the past not to change the system in any way that will mean more with less. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2).

II. Ministry: According to Luther

Following our initial study of the ministry according to the New Testament we move on to Luther and the Reformation. At no time in the history of the church does a study of the ministry promise to be more interesting, necessary and profitable. No doubt a study of the ministry during post-Apostolic days would be helpful to our study, either to confirm apostolic understanding and practice in the early centuries after the apostles or to establish trends which paved the way for the deadly legalistic ways of Rome with which Luther was to contend. Luther reflects his own personal study of the early church in a much later writing, *On the councils and the Church* (1539).

Church and ministry were not especially on Luther's mind, anymore than the doctrine of justification was, when he nailed the 95 thesis on the castle church door. But what he said there had great implications, not only for the doctrine of justification, but also for church and ministry. The drawing of the lines had begun - the authority of Rome versus the authority of the Word, God's promises, the gospel. True, the lines would not be fully drawn until, shall we say, 1525 and *Luther's Bondage of the Will*. But the 95 thesis was the start. The sale of indulgences was living proof of a legalistic system that flew in the face of the gospel every step of the way. Already in late 1520 Luther summed up the entire issue: "Their madness and senselessness is such that Christ

³ Quoted from an essay by Prof Paul Eickmann at WELS Professors conference, June 6-8, 1990. Essay was entitled: "The Blessings of a Liberal Arts - Based Worker-Training Curriculum in an Age of Specialization."

must be denied and altogether rejected so that sacrifice and offices might survive.”⁴ This statement strikes to the very heart of the ministry.

To examine every thing that Luther wrote or said concerning the ministry is too ambitious an undertaking in any single essay, though we shall want to come back to Luther briefly in the next essay. One could cite more than a dozen major writings that deal directly with the doctrine of the ministry. Time will not allow us to quote every writing on the key thoughts outlined for this essay. Because I prefer to let Luther speak for himself as much as possible, I feel compelled to limit myself for the most part to four of his writings. Three of them are among Luther’s earlier writings, *Freedom of a Christian* (1520), *Sermons on 1 Peter 2* (1522-23) and *Concerning Ministry* (1523). To counteract the arguments of those who have felt that the later Luther was not consistent in his views of church and ministry, or that he even contradicts himself, I have chosen as a fourth a much later writing, *Commentary of Psalm 110* (1535). There are still later writings one could examine to demonstrate that Luther’s views of the ministry were based upon the Scriptures and not upon whim or expediency.

We are Christians

The first of our writings looks in on Luther in the year 1520. Many things have happened since Luther spoke out against the indulgence traffic near Wittenberg: the Heidelberg meeting, Luther’s sermon against the ban, an attack by John Eck, a summons to Rome, a hearing before Cajetan and the Leipzig debate. Following the debate at Leipzig Luther returned to Wittenberg to resume his many duties and devote time to study and writing. Within half a year Luther produced three major writings, *The Address to the German Nobility*, *The Babylonia Captivity of the Church* and *The Freedom of a Christian*. All three writings clarify Luther’s evangelical theology. The third of these, *The Freedom of a Christian*, addressed directly to Pope Leo X, belongs very much to our study of ministry. We might say it paves the way for a study of Luther’s teaching on ministry. For what Scripture teaches of the ministry is tied directly to what Scripture has to say about the blessed state of the Christian.

The state of the Christian according to Scripture Luther sums up beautifully in two theses: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none and a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all.” These theses alone are enough to explain why Prof. August Pieper says, “No other writing of Luther so clearly, deeply, and completely expresses his innermost attitude of heart as does this one. Since Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, no one in the church has presented the very essence of Christianity so faithfully and so powerfully in two propositions.”⁵

Freedom by the Gospel

Luther’s conviction of the freedom of the Christian and therefore also his concept of church and ministry is tied directly to Christ’s word and the gospel which were all but lost under the rule of the papacy. In the place of Scripture and the gospel the papacy offered law and outward form. Its concept of church and ministry was based upon human reason, human fear and human ambition.⁶ If Pope Leo ever received and read Luther’s treatise on *The Freedom of the Christian* he must have been in the same awkward position as Pilate when Christ said “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37). Luther got directly to the point in his address to Leo:

Furthermore, to put aside all kinds of works, even contemplation, meditation, and all that the soul can do, does not help. One thing, and only one thing is necessary for Christian life,

⁴ LW 40, p. 14.

⁵ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, April 1963, p. 93.

⁶ *WLQ*, April 1963, p. 83.

righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, John 11 [:25]. “I am the resurrection and life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” and John 8 [:36], “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”; and Matthew 4 [:4], “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul. If it has the Word of God it is rich and lacks nothing since it is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory, and of every incalculable blessing.⁷

Obviously justification and ministry were much on Luther’s mind. For answers one must turn to the Word of God, not the pronouncements of man or decrees of councils. The same source of all truth for salvation and service was still very much on Luther’s mind fifteen years later in his commentary on Psalm 110:

But when people learn to know Christ through the Gospel, when they believe that they obtain God’s forgiveness of their sins through Christ and become acceptable to God for Christ’s sake, the right service of God develops as a consequence within the heart. Where such a faith exists, the Holy Spirit also works in the heart, as we have said before, so that a man develops such a desire and love for God that he wants to obey Him. Such a man begins to fear God with all his heart, he trusts Him under all conditions of his life, he calls upon Him in all his needs, he is steadfast in the confession of His Word, by his life he praises God before all the world, and for His sake he suffers and bears whatever God is pleased to send him. Such are genuine and true forms of service, and they please God very well because they are done with faith in Christ. They proceed from within the heart, which has now become a “new creation” in Christ, as St. Paul calls it in Galatians 6:15.⁸

Christians are Free

To proclaim God’s word is to know the truth. To know the truth is to be free, truly and forever free. “To the Jews who had believed him Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31-32). Basing his theology completely upon Scripture Luther could speak confidently to Leo of the Christian’s freedom.

You may ask, “What then is the Word of God and how shall it be used, since there are so many words of God?” I answer: “The Apostle explains this in Romans 1. The Word is the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies. To preach Christ means to free the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching. Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God, according to Romans 10 [:9], “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”⁹

With that Luther continues to dwell on the priceless freedom the Christian has in Christ in the first half of the treatise. His high opinion of the Scriptures and his deep appreciation for the doctrine of justification settles for nothing less than absolute freedom from all laws and rules, wrath and punishment, from man or God:

⁷ LW 31, p. 345.

⁸ LW 13, P. 293.

⁹ LW 31, p. 346.

Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom.¹⁰ I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.¹¹ From this anyone can clearly see how a Christian is free from all things and over all things so that he needs no works to make him righteous and save him.¹²

Luther comments at some length concerning this freedom in his commentary on Galatians. The verse under consideration is 5:1: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” I quote just the one paragraph to give the flavor of his remarks:

This is the freedom with which Christ has set us free, not from some human slavery or tyrannical authority but from the eternal wrath of God. Where? In the conscience. This is where our freedom comes to a halt; it goes no further. For Christ has set us free, not for a political freedom or a freedom of the flesh but for a theological or spiritual freedom that is, to make our conscience free and joyful, unafraid of the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7). This is the most genuine freedom; it is immeasurable. When the other kinds of freedom—political freedom and the freedom of the flesh—are compared with the greatness and the glory of this kind of freedom, they hardly amount to one little drop. For who can express what a great gift it is for someone to be able to declare for certain that God neither is nor ever will be wrathful but will forever be a gracious and merciful Father for the sake of Christ? It is surely a great and incomprehensible freedom to have this Supreme Majesty kindly disposed toward us, protecting and helping us, and finally even setting us free physically in such a way that our body, which is sown in perishability, in dishonor, and in weakness, is raised in imperishability, in honor, and in power (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). Therefore the freedom by which we are free of the wrath of God forever is greater than heaven and earth and all creation.¹³

Christians have all that is Christ’s

Christians are free because they, by virtue of their faith in Christ’s redeeming work, have all that is Christ’s. That thought also runs throughout the first half of Luther’s thesis on *The Freedom of the Christian*. It can be found already in the above quotations. At other times it becomes the emphatic note of Luther’s comments:

Since these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free, and peaceful words, full of goodness, the soul which clings to them with a firm faith will be so closely united with them and altogether absorbed by them that it not only will share in all their power, but will be saturated and intoxicated by them.¹⁴ Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were his own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits.¹⁵

Christians are Priest

¹⁰ LW 31, p. 353.

¹¹ LW 31, p. 355.

¹² LW 31, p. 356.

¹³ LW 27, p. 4.

¹⁴ LW 31, p. 349.

¹⁵ LW 31, p. 351.

If Christians are truly free and have all that is Christ's, then, Luther insists, Christians are also kings and priests. They need no one to rule over them. They need no one to act on their behalf or in their place before God:

Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priest we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things. These are the functions of priests and they cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in him, to be not only his brethren co-heirs, and fellow kings, but also his fellow priests.¹⁶

Luther speaks even more forcefully a few years later:

Indeed, all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians. Worthy of anathema are assertions that a priest is anything else than a Christian. For such an assertion has no support in the Word of God and is based only on human opinions on ancient usage, or on the opinions of the majority, any one of which is ineffectual to establish an article of faith without sacrilege and offense, as I have sufficiently shown elsewhere.¹⁷

Speaking years later on Psalm 110 Luther again identifies God's children as royal priests:

Here the prophet applies the priestly office and adornment to the Christians, the people of the New Testament. He says that their worship of God is to consist in the beautiful and glorious priesthood of those who are always in the presence of God and perform nothing but holy sacrifices. He endows them with the highest divine reputation and honor, for there is no greater name or honor before God and men than to be a priest. A priest is the kind of person whose proper office is to deal with God, to be closest to God, and to be concerned with nothing but divine things. Here he confers this honor, I say, upon all Christians; for they are the true priests who stand before God in their precious and beautiful adornment and serve Him with a true and holy service.¹⁸

The Ministry of Priests

Christians are priests. The nature of the priestly office is to serve. Luther describes that service in its simplest form in his commentary on Psalm 110. "From this you can see that the preaching of the Gospel is really the true priestly office."¹⁹ Earlier in the same discourse Luther described it in a little broader fashion: "Hence the priestly office consists of three parts: to teach or preach God's Word, to sacrifice and to pray. 'All three of these are abundantly referred to in the Scripture.'"²⁰ In his sermon on 1 Peter 2, commenting on verse 5, "offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," Luther again defines the ministry of priests in its simplest form, "Today everything is new and spiritual. Christ is the Priest and we are all priests. Just as he sacrificed his body, so we, too, must sacrifice ourselves. Here everything shadowed by the external sacrifice as they took place in the Old Testament is now fulfilled. Briefly stated all this means that the Gospel is preached. He who preaches the Gospel practices and does all this."²¹

¹⁶ LW 31, p. 355.

¹⁷ LW 40, p. 19.

¹⁸ LW 13, p. 294.

¹⁹ LW 13, p. 317.

²⁰ LW 13, p. 115.

²¹ LW 30, p. 54.

For a lengthy definition on the function of the Christian as priests one must turn to Luther's treatise to the Bohemian Christians in 1523. The Bohemian Christians, insisting on receiving communion in both kinds, were in schism from Rome, but held to most teachings of the Roman church including the sacrament of ordination. In order to carry on what they considered a valid ministry the Bohemians resorted to subterfuge. Candidates for ministry were sent to Italy to be ordained by Italian bishops only to return home to renounce their vow to serve communion only under one kind. Hoping to exert a positive influence upon the Bohemians Luther wrote *Concerning Ministry* where he demonstrated from the Scriptures that all Christians have the right to elect their own pastors since all Christians are priests. Luther lists these functions in the following order, taking time to substantiate from Scripture proof of what he says: preach the word, baptize, consecrate or administer holy communion, binding and loosing sin, sacrifice, pray for others and judging doctrine. Concluding the last of the seven functions Luther ventured to express the opinion:

With what fear and trembling bishops and councils would have spoken and issued decrees, if the judgment of hearers would have had to be regarded when decisions were made with respect to priesthood, to the office of teaching, of baptizing, of consecrating, of sacrificing, of binding, of prayer, of judging doctrine. Indeed, there never would have been a universal papacy if this right of judgment had prevailed.²²

A couple of pages later Luther comes right back to these seven points, as though he could not mention them often enough, and states quite emphatically:

Here we take our stand; There is no other Word of God than that which is given all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted. There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose. There is no other sacrifice than of the body of every Christian. No one but a Christian can pray. No one but a Christian may judge of doctrine. These make the priestly and royal office. Let therefore the papists either prove other functions of the priesthood or let them resign their own.²³

Public Ministry

Luther's emphasis in each of the writings cited is on the universal priesthood of all believers. That is the high office of which they, the Christians of Luther's day, had been robbed blind. However, not once did Luther stress the priesthood of all believers at the expense of the institution of the public ministry, as some have charged. Already in his *Freedom of the Christian* Luther anticipated such misunderstanding on the part of Leo:

You will ask, "If all who are in the church are priests, how do these whom we now call priests differ from laymen?" I answer: "Injustice is done those words 'priest,' 'cleric,' 'spiritual,' 'ecclesiastic,' when they are transferred from all Christians to those few who are now by a mischievous usage called 'ecclesiastics.' Holy Scripture makes no distinction between them, although it gives the name 'ministers,' 'servants,' 'stewards' to those who are now proudly called popes, bishops, and lords and who should according to the ministry of the Word serve others and teach them the faith of Christ and the freedom of believers. Although we are all equally priests, we cannot all, publicly minister and teach. We ought not do so even if we could."²⁴

²² LW 40, p. 21-32.

²³ LW 40, p. 35.

²⁴ LW 31, p. 356.

Luther made the same clear distinction in his treatise to the Bohemians a few years later, insisting on the priesthood of all believers without slighting the public ministry. With an eye toward doing things right and orderly in the church Luther writes.

It is of the common rights of Christians that we have been speaking. For since we have proved all of these things to be the common property of all Christians, no one individual can arise by his own authority and arrogate to himself alone what belongs to all. Lay hold then of this right and exercise it, where there is no one else who has the same rights. But the community rights demand that one, or as many as the community chooses, shall be chosen or approved who, in the name of all with these rights, shall perform these functions publicly. Otherwise, there might be shameful confusion among the people of God, and a kind of Babylon in the church, where everything should be done in order, as the Apostle teaches [I Corinthians 14:40]. For it is one thing to exercise a right without consent of the whole body or of the church. In time of emergency each may use it as he deems best.²⁵

Luther's argument all along is not against a public ministry, not even when he says that it is "no more than a public service."²⁶ Public ministry is valid. It is necessary. It is to be honored and respected. However, Luther is against every abuse of ministry and any kind of ministry that robs the body of Christians of the ministry that is theirs by virtue of their faith. Therefore Luther has only harsh words for Rome's misuse of the word priest:

On this account I think it follows that we neither can nor ought to give the name priest to those who are in charge of Word and sacrament among the people. The reason they have been called priests is either because of the custom of heathen people or as a vestige of the Jewish nation. The result is greatly injurious to the church. According to the New Testament Scriptures better names would be ministers, deacons, bishops, stewards, presbyters (a name often used and indicating the older members). For thus Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4 [:1], "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." He does not say, "as priests of Christ," because he knew that the name and office of priest belonged to all. Paul's frequent use of the word "stewardship" or "household," "ministry," "minister," "servant," "one serving the gospel," etc., emphasizes that it is not the estate, or order, or any authority or dignity that he wants to uphold, but only the office and the function. The authority and the dignity of the priesthood resided in the community of believers.²⁷

Luther's sermon on 1 Peter 2, written about the same times as his treatise to the Bohemians, states specifically what is clearly implied in his treatise to the Bohemians, one office of the ministry and no inherent authority in the office:

Thus those who are now called priests would all be laymen like the others, and only a few officiants would be elected by the congregation to do the preaching. Thus there is only an external difference because of the office to which one is called by the congregation. Before God, however, there is no distinction, and only a few are selected from the whole group to administer the office in the stead of the congregation. They all have this office, but nobody has any more authority than the other person has. Therefore nobody should come forward of his own accord

²⁵ *LW* 40, p. 34.

²⁶ *LW* 13, p. 332.

²⁷ *LW* 40, p. 35.

and preach in the congregation. No, one person must be chosen from the whole group and appointed. If desire, he may be deposed.²⁸

Call and Qualifications

One can find in Luther nothing but respect for the call, always upholding the right and duty of Christians to elect their spiritual leaders. At the same time Luther carefully underscores the qualifications that Scripture has established for those elected to office. Earlier he had encourage the Bohemian Christians:

When you have so prayed, have no doubt that he to whom you have prayed is faithful and will give what you ask, opening to him who knocks and granting to him who seeks [Matthew 7:8]. Thus you may be assured that you are not pushing this matter, but being pushed in it. Then call and come together freely, as many as have been touched in heart by God to think and judge as you do. Proceed in the name of the Lord to elect one or more whom you desire, and who appear to be worthy and able. Then let those who are leaders among you lay hands upon them, and certify and commend them to the people and the church or community. In this way let them become your bishops, ministers, or pastors. Amen. The qualifications of those to be elected are fully described by Paul, in Titus 1 [:6ff], and 1 Timothy 3 [:2ff].²⁹

We find Luther talking the same languages twelve years later in his commentary on Psalm 110:

Out of the multitude of Christians some must be selected who shall lead the others by virtue of the special gifts and aptitude which God gives them for the office. Thus St. Paul writes (Ephesians 4:11,12): “And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints” (this means those who are already Christians and baptized priests), “for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ” (that is, the Christian congregation or church).

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common multitude of Christians. His office is conveyed to someone else, and he becomes a Christian like any other.

This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests.³⁰

Unusual Cases

Critics of Luther love to argue that Luther changed his view of ministry, emphasizing the universal priesthood earlier in his life but backing off later in favor of the public office. Some of the misunderstanding has to do with Luther’s comments on what one might call unusual cases:

²⁸ LW 30, p. 55.

²⁹ LW 40, p. 40.

³⁰ LW 13, p. 232.

If we ask for an example, there is one in Acts 18 [:24ff], where we read of Apollos who came to Ephesus without call or ordination, and taught fervently, powerfully confuting the Jews. By what right, I ask, did he exercise the ministry of the Word except by the general right common to all Christians, as described in 1 Corinthians 14 [:30], “If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent,” and in 1 Peter 2 [:9], “that you might declare his wonderful deeds?” This man was afterward even made an apostle without the formality of ordination, and not only functioned in the ministry of the Word but also proved himself useful in many ways to those who had already come to faith. In the same way any Christian should feel obligated to act, if he saw the need and was competent to fill it, even without a call from the community. How much more then should he do so if he is asked and called by the brethren who are his equals, or by the whole community?

Another example is provided by Stephen and Philip, who were ordained only to the service at the tables [Acts 6:5,6]. Yet the one wrought signs and wonders among the people, disputed with members of the synagogue and refuted the council of the Jews with the word of the Spirit [Acts 6:8ff], and the other converted Samaritans and traveled to Azotus and Caesarea [Acts 8:5ff, 40]. By what right and authority, I ask? Certainly they were not asked or called by anyone, but they did it on their own initiative and by reason of a common law, since the door was open to them, and they saw the need of a people who were ignorant and deprived of the Word. How much more readily they would have done it had they been asked or called by anyone or by the community? And the eunuch converted by Philip [Acts 8:36.], whom we may reasonably believe remained a Christian, undoubtedly taught the Word of God to many, since he had the command to make known the wonderful deeds of God who called him from darkness into his marvelous light [1 Peter 2:9]. From his word resulted the faith of many, since the Word of God does not return in vain [Isaiah 55:11]. From faith sprang a church, and the church through the Word received and exercised a ministry of baptizing and teaching, and of all the other functions enumerated above. All these things a eunuch accomplished through no other right than that inherent in baptism and faith, especially in places lacking any other ministers.³¹

Without a doubt Luther, with the above statement, is making a strong case for the universal priesthood, but not at the expense of the public ministry. Furthermore, in view of the circumstances (to the Bohemian Christians) and the entire context no one ought to use these examples or any other comment by Luther to suggest inconsistency on his part toward a ministry that for Luther was always essentially one.

Ordination

We conclude our look to Luther on ministry with a word on ordination, which in itself reflects a high view of the public ministry and also expressed during those “earlier” years. Luther, who cited examples of ministry without a call, writes to the same Bohemian Christians:

Ordination was first instituted on the authority of Scripture, and according to the example and decrees of the Apostle, in order to provide the people with ministers of the Word. The public ministry of the Word, I hold, by which the mysteries of God are made known, ought to be established by holy ordination as the highest and greatest of the functions of the church, on which the whole power of the church depends, since the church is nothing without the Word and everything in it exists by virtue of the Word alone. But my papists do not even dream of this in their ordinations.³²

³¹ LW 40, p. 37-38.

³² LW 40, p. 11.

Conclusion

Hopefully this study of ministry according to Luther will serve as a good reminder for us who call ourselves Lutherans to go back and read what Luther says. It is one thing to read about Luther and much has been written for our reading. It is far better to go back and read Luther himself. We listen again to a voice from the past. On the 400th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation (1917) Prof. August Pieper wrote:

As we as evangelical teachers know the Word of God directly from Scripture, so as Lutheran pastors we must know Luther's teaching directly from Luther himself. This is a special curse of our time, the second, third, and fourth generation after Walther, that we know God's Word and Luther's teaching only second or third hand in fragmentary Luther quotations, and then rest content as though we knew both Scripture and Luther. This creates a false security. It might be enough for confirmands to know a number of chief passages from Scripture. Whoever is to teach God's Word and teach it in public, must be able to draw from the complete fullness of Scripture and must have the logical and historical context of those passages clearly in mind; it is from this that they win their full and exact, intended meaning. This is much more the case with a fallible writer, above all with a Luther, whose speech is often so unsystematic, whose expressions are often free and unrestrained, whose argumentation is so often cut to fit a specific situation, so that the uninitiated can easily draw false generalities from it. With such an original, powerful man, who always confronts the whole, always judges each situation from the essence of the whole, a man who especially in battle swings the sword of Siegfried, one must become "personally" acquainted in order to understand him, and this is possible only through repeated, exact study of his chief writings.³³

III. Ministry: A Synodical Conference Issue

We began our study of the ministry by turning to the Scriptures. Several key thoughts are apparent. The ministry is a divine institution, including also public ministry. The ministry that Christ instituted is a ministry of the gospel. All Christians are priests, and are urged to exercise their universal priesthood. All Christians are priests, but not all are public ministers. Only such who are called *minister* on behalf of others in public ministry. In the public ministry it is function, not form, which is vital.

We have also looked to Luther, not so much as a standard for the ministry but to gain valuable insight into his exegetical approach to Christian doctrine and the new ground he had to break after the Scriptural truths concerning church and ministry lay buried for centuries beneath the pomp and rule of the papacy.

Today our study takes another leap in place and time, from Europe to America, from the 16th century to the 19th and 20th centuries. Especially we look to the teaching of the ministry in the days before, during, and after the Synodical Conference. We shall not be able to do so without also giving some attention to the doctrine of the church. The teachings of church and ministry are for the most part lock step during the century and a half under discussion. Church and ministry is not the stated cause leading up to the dissolution of the Synodical conference. An impasse was declared by the WELS on the doctrine of church fellowship. But it is obvious to many that the doctrine of church and ministry was very much a part of the whole picture. How much? We should delay that question until later.

Before we look to the present or past teaching on the ministry within the churches of the Synodical conference and the more obvious matters which played a part in the development of a position on the doctrine of ministry we should recall that Luther's correct views of church and ministry were never fully put into practice in Germany. The laity of Luther's day was ill-equipped to carry out its responsibilities in the church.

³³ *WLQ*, January 1963, p. 13.

As a result Luther encouraged the Lutheran princes and councils to carry out the administration of the congregations. As long as it was understood that these men were functioning as members of the church and were acting in the place of their fellow-Christians within the church there was no problem. After Luther's death that distinction was lost. Aided by the peace of Augsburg in 1555 which established the *cuius regio, eius religio* principle, the Scriptural truth of the priesthood of all believers and of the authority belonging to believers was lost in the centuries which followed. Church affairs, church discipline and the appointment of pastors became political decisions. This was not all bad when the political rulers, as in Luther's day, were spiritually minded men and had the proper interest of the church in mind. However, it became disastrous for the church during the age of rationalism. Even the return of a confessional movement in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century did not result in a church polity which reflected the priesthood of all believers.³⁴ This lack of understanding of Luther's clear teaching of church and ministry can be found then in the Lutheran movement from Europe to America in the romanish ideas of Stephan of the LCMS and of Grabau of the Buffalo synod and even in the ministerium of the early Wisconsin Synod history. We will get back to these shortly.

Church and Ministry – 1961

It was with great fear and awe that the Floor committee on Doctrinal Matters of the 36th convention of the WELS submitted its report to the assembled delegates. This can be noted in the preamble to the report: "In fear and love toward God, with a deep sense of the awesome responsibility resting upon us, with concern for the souls bought with the blood of God's own Son and already given or yet to be given into our care, with a like concern for the spiritual health and welfare of our sister Synod...."³⁵ This can also be noted from the first resolve of Resolution No. 1: "that we now suspend fellowship with the LCMS on the basis of Romans 16:17,18 with the hope and prayer to God that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will hear in this resolution an evangelical summons to 'come to herself' (Luke 15:17) and return to the side of the sister from whom she has estranged herself."

An impasse had been declared by the WELS commission on Doctrinal Matters after more than 20 years of consultation, discussion and admonition. Fellowship was the doctrine under discussion. The lines were clearly drawn. The LCMS made a definite distinction between altar and pulpit fellowship and prayer fellowship and thereby defended certain unionistic practices with Lutherans with whom she was not in full doctrinal agreement. The WELS maintained what we have called the unit concept of fellowship. By 1961 the lines were also clearly drawn on the doctrines of church and ministry. The LCMS position on church and ministry played a definite role in her fellowship practice and therefore church and ministry were very much a part of the study and discussion of fellowship.

There was no difference in 1961 on what the church is nor on what the function of the ministry is. It was LCMS teaching that church is the communion of saints and therefore invisible; though invisible it is very real; it is present wherever the means of grace are used for it is by the gospel that the Holy Spirit gathers believers into the church. It was LCMS teaching also that Christ instituted one office in his church, the ministry of the gospel; that the purpose of the ministry is the edification of the church; that from the beginning men were appointed to carry out ministry on behalf of their fellow Christians but that this public ministry is not generically different from the priesthood of all believers.

The differences did not have to do with reality or function, but with form, with local congregation versus synod, with local pastor versus teacher and other called workers in the church. The LCMS insisted that just as there is but one true invisible church there is but one true visible form of the church, namely the local congregation. Therefore the local congregation is church; the synod is not. This had a direct influence on LCMS fellowship practices. What was improper on a congregation level, since it is church, was not necessarily improper on the synodical level, since synod is a human form, not divine. In a similar way the LCMS insisted

³⁴ WLQ 1982, p. 102.

³⁵ Proceedings of the 36th convention of WELS.

that in this true visible form of the church there is but one divinely instituted form of public ministry, namely the parish pastorate. Any other office or form, such as that of the Christian day school teacher or professor at a synodical school is a human form, not divine. They are auxiliary to the pastorate and receive their authority through the parish pastor. This also had a bearing on fellowship practices, Again, what was not proper for the pastor (divine form) was not necessarily improper to other called workers (human forms). Putting the two notions together the LCMS taught that only the parish pastor in and with the local congregation can properly dispense the means of grace.

Before 1961

It is easier to observe how the WELS came to its position on church and ministry than how the LCMS did. In either case it was a long road. At the same time it must be admitted that until 1961 there were those in the LCMS who held to a position closer to that which became the WELS position and there were those in the WELS who held to what became the LCMS position. The lack of a clear position for so many years sounds strange to anyone today until one begins to look at the history.

Both the WELS and the LCMS had their origin on European soil where there had been unhealthy distinctions between clergy and laity. Authority that Scripture assigns to the universal priesthood of all believers was vested in the clergy. Public ministry was determined more by ordination and appointment than by the call. Validity of the church, in turn, depended more upon the office of the minister. This is evident in varying degrees in the earliest days of both the LCMS and the WELS.

LCMS origins go back to Martin Stephan who led the immigration of about 700 Lutherans from Saxony, an immigration that included five pastors, ten theological candidates and four teachers. Before taking up settlement in St. Louis and Perry counties Stephan had himself installed as their bishop and had all members of the party pledge subjection to him as bishop. The stage was set for the Saxons to establish their new church upon romanish ideas concerning church and ministry brought from Germany. Today this strikes us as highly unusual, even presumptuous on the part of Stephan. For European Lutherans it was accepted without question. Sooner than anyone could have expected the new church's understanding of church and ministry was put to the test when personal scandal proved Stephan to be a hypocrite. The loss of leadership threw the young church into confusion. Immediately questions accompanied by serious doubts arose. Were they a church at all? Were their pastors truly Christian pastors? All ties with the mother church where they had been "properly" ordained and installed were broken. In fact some of their pastors had deserted their congregations to join the Saxon emigration. Laity within the young church were troubled. Some even demanded immediate answers. Prof. C. Lawrenz, in an essay presented at this same Pastors Institute eleven years ago, describes those difficult days for the Missourians:

Heavy accusations were hurled against the pastors. As a result, the preachers themselves began to doubt whether they had a right to continue their ministry. They were unclear whether they really still had a call. Thus they began to evaluate and examine the doctrinal positions which they had considered genuinely Lutheran. To their dismay and consternation they came to realize that they had thus far read the Bible and the symbolical books through colored glasses. They found this to be true especially with respect to the church, its ministry and the authority of the ministry. They had believed and taught romanizing and papistic instead of biblical Lutheran tenets in respect to these matters. They had misled their congregations, robbed them of their Christian freedom, and led them into spiritual and physical misery. As a result, the pastors freely confessed their sins and errors privately and publicly. Some resigned from their positions as pastors. Others were rejected by their congregations.

Yet God again gave them grace to come to a true scriptural understanding of the truths of the church and its ministry, especially at the hand of Luther's writings, the confessions of the church

and the private writings of orthodox 16th and 17th century teachers of the Lutheran church. Through Pastor C.F.W. Walther's Altenburg debate with Marback also the laity were again led back to scriptural truths concerning the church and ministry.³⁶

Already during the first decade of its existence Walther had led the infant church on the way to a scriptural understanding of church and ministry. This proper understanding is reflected in theses written by Walther in 1852, nine on the church and ten on the ministry. Walther's theses, however, were prompted not so much by the defection of Stephan as by the influence of another early immigrant pastor who troubled early Lutherans. John Grabau had also come from Saxony. With about 1000 followers he came to Buffalo, New York in the same year Stephan's group settled in Missouri.

Grabau held to the same romanish views concerning church and ministry of which the Missourians had just rid themselves and widely circulated them in his famous *Hirtenbrief* of 1840. The Missourians defended themselves against the Grabau errors and were severely criticized by Grabau. This early exchange paved the way for a controversy that lasted long after the Buffalo Synod (1845) and LCMS (1847) were founded. It was accompanied by excommunication by Grabau of anyone who opposed his views as well as of his own followers who appealed for membership in the LCMS. Finally Grabau pronounced excommunication upon the entire LCMS in 1859.

The above controversy had great impact upon the LCMS in its first two decades of existence. On the one hand it may explain in part Missouri's position on church and ministry a century later. The LCMS was not able to rid itself entirely of ideas that the earliest immigrants brought with them. On the other hand it would seem that Walther's own clear position on church and ministry as set forth in his 19 theses would have clarified for once and for all scriptural understanding for the LCMS and the other churches of the Synodical conference as well.

In these early developments prior to the days of the Synodical conference the WELS was not greatly affected. Her leaders obviously did not harbor the romanish views of a Stephan or a Grabau. Yet the early establishment of a ministerium, typical of the Lutheran synods of the eastern states, betray her European heritage. As things developed it did not take long before questions of ministry arose. Within a decade of the founding of the Synodical conference with Wisconsin as a member, questions arose in several Wisconsin conferences (Watertown, Oshkosh, Manitowoc areas) concerning the office of the parochial school teacher. Again, it must be said that the WELS did not come to her present position quickly and easily. The question was whether the office of the teacher should be considered divine or human, whether the teacher should be considered a called worker or as a kind of extension of parental authority and therefore like any other secular profession.

Those who held to a higher opinion of the teacher and insisted that the teacher should be considered a called worker did so in a round about way which suggests that they regarded the office of the pastor to be the divinely instituted form of ministry. The position of the teacher was tied to the function of the pastorate and therefore to be considered also divine. This was done in a rather non-exegetical fashion. Proof passages were cited which simply linked together the two offices: Acts 13:1, "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers..." Ephesians 4:11, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." Other passages brought to bear were Christ's words to his disciples: "Let the children come to me" and "feed my lambs," in order to demonstrate that the teaching of the children was a pastoral responsibility. "These sayings were interpreted to indicate a difference between the pastor and teacher and the latter's dependence on the former, in that the apostles' mission was the pastor's calling and the teacher received its divineness only through the benefit of clergy."³⁷ Though there were apparently those who questioned the use of the above passages to determine the sacredness of the teacher's calling, the thinking outlined above seems to have prevailed for the next thirty years. The office of the teacher

³⁶ WLQ, 1982, p. 82.

³⁷ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p. 231.

and his call were considered divine but the conclusion was reached by attaching his office and calling through that of the pastorate which was considered to be the divinely instituted form of ministry.

For a clear understanding of the doctrine of the ministry one must turn to the second decade of this century and the leadership of the Wauwatosa faculty through articles by Prof. Pieper in the *Quartalschrift* between 1910 and 1920. It hardly seems coincidental that this was taking place at the same time the lines were being drawn on the doctrine of the church by the synods of the Synodical conference. The latter involved a matter of church discipline known as the Cincinnati case that began at the turn of the century but was not resolved until 1911.

Two pastors and their congregations in Cincinnati had excommunicated a member for cause. When the excommunication was considered unjust, the congregation and its pastors were suspended by the Central District of the Missouri Synod. The congregations and pastors, in turn, applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. The synod deferred action because the Missouri Synod was still dealing with the case. The outcome of the case is not important for this discussion. What is important is the confusion that surfaced in both synods concerning the matter of church and ministry. By taking action against a congregation and its pastors Missouri Synod officials pursued a course which seemed to belie its apparent official position that the local congregation is the one divinely instituted form of church.

At the same time some within the Wisconsin Synod sympathized with the suspended congregation and its pastors and were minded to receive them into fellowship. Meanwhile Prof. August Pieper, in a series of articles in the *Quartalschrift*, sided with the action of the Missouri Synod officials and maintained that a suspension by a sister synod should be respected. Prof. Pieper's advice was not readily received by all within his synod. It was argued that synod is only a human arrangement. They insisted that local congregation is the divinely instituted form for ministry and therefore the action of the local congregation and its pastors should stand.

All of this confusion and difference of opinion called for a thorough study of the doctrine of the church. The Wauwatosa faculty (Prof. Pieper, Koehler and Schaller) led the way in this study of the Scriptures to bring the synod along the way to its present position. And all of this was taking place at the same time that the faculty was leading the synod toward a correct understanding of the ministry. These *Quartalschrift* articles took its readers back to Walther's theses, Luther's writings, and above all back to the Scriptures to clarify its position on both church and ministry.

Looking back at the years of uncertainty, even confusion, which existed a caution expressed by Prof. M. Lehninger during the synod's 100th anniversary celebration seems worth repeating:

Church history is replete with examples showing how dangerous it is for the Church to become satisfied with a stage it has reached at a given time in the development of its doctrinal position. Following the fierce struggle in the days of Luther and immediately thereafter in the Church called after his name, there came a period of slackness and relaxation, due to exhaustion and weariness from the strife in the time just passed. Had not the Formula of Concord settled all questions of doctrine for all time? Similarly, in the decades following the founding of the Synodical conference and the controversies thereafter, a weariness in our Church began to manifest itself in a growing tendency to settle questions of doctrine by a reference to the confessions or to the writings of Luther and old teachers of the Church, or of Walther, the champion of Lutheran orthodoxy in America.

It was after the turn of the century when an incident which called for a reorientation relative to the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry brought this home to us. Two men in our synod J. P. Koehler and August Pieper, professors of our theological seminary, were alerting us to the danger of trying to settle a disputed point of doctrine by quoting the words of a prominent teacher of our Church, which were biblically correct when spoken to controvert a specific error with which he then was concerned. They averred the basic unsoundness of a procedure which

wants to prove a point of doctrine by quoting human authorities, even the confessions and Luther. They reminded their fellow-Lutherans to show themselves true pupils of Luther by recognizing no other authority than the Holy Scriptures. They stressed the self-evident maxim, theoretically acknowledged but so often forgotten in practice, that we Christians must always go to the only fountainhead and source of faith and knowledge, the well of living water, the Bible as the norm by which all things in the Church, doctrine and life, must be judged.³⁸

It should be added that the Missouri Synod through its faculty at St. Louis did not agree with the position of the Wauwatosa faculty. For reasons not fully known she had drifted away from the clear position of Walther in favor of the opinion that both the local congregation and office of the pastor are divinely instituted forms.

To us today it might seem that there was an agreement to disagree on the part of the two synods. To keep things in perspective we must remember that there was much upon which the two synods agreed. The matter of form may not have appeared to be too serious when everything else was okay, not only concerning the doctrine of church and ministry, but all other doctrines and practices as well. Also, we recall what was stated earlier. For as long as anyone can determine there were Wisconsin Synod pastors who held more closely to Missouri Synod teaching on forms of church and ministry and there were Missouri Synod pastors who did espouse the Wisconsin position. Most importantly, there were a number of conferences between the two faculties over the years that sought to resolve the differences. One of these occurred as late as 1932. The conference ended with the well-known “Thiensville Theses,” which in effect substituted the words “God’s will and order” for “divine institution.” Today someone might even look upon this as a kind of compromise. Prof. Edward Fredrich places a better construction on the action:

If the effort was viewed as the final word on the subject, it is open to valid criticism. On the other hand, if it was to be a first step of establishing areas of agreement before getting at the core issues, then a more favorable judgment is in place. A strong case can be made for the second alternative. It is true no immediate follow-up meetings were held but this was because attention was diverted to Missouri’s involvement in LC and ULCA discussions and not because of doctrinal indifference.³⁹

Things did not change much, if any, in the course of the remaining days of the Synodical conference. With things going as they were between the Missouri Synod and other Lutherans and the impact it had upon the Synodical conference the matter of church and ministry was bound to resurface and play a part in the Synodical conference discussions. Prof. Fredrich presents a brief but concise overview to bring this section of our essay to a close.

In the course of dealing with this Missouri involvement and its ramifications, the church-ministry debate was resurrected. In 1946 the Synodical conference appointed a special “Interim committee” which was to deal with the problem but without notable success. It was hoped that much of the Missouri-Wisconsin problem might be solved if church-ministry agreement could be reached. Present day evaluation suggests that this hope rested mainly on an oversimplification. It is a fact that the Synodical conference split over other issues, specifically fellowship. How much indirect effect the church-ministry difference had in the splitting process is an interesting question that at this early date perhaps cannot be adequately answered and perhaps will never be conclusively answered. The long range view may eventually suggest that the church-ministry conflict tended to add to the climate of conflict and controversy and thus may have helped in

³⁸ *WLQ*, 1950, p. 102-103.

³⁹ *WLQ*, 1977, p. 53.

preventing the return of better weather. It will also underscore the difficulties of exercising intersynodical admonition, and for that matter intrasynodical discipline, when the church body toward whom the admonition is directed is committed to a policy of making the local congregation a necessary first step in the disciplinary process.⁴⁰

Since 1961

One could be very brief and simply say that since 1961 nothing has changed. Missouri Synod writings continue to speak of the office of the pastor as the divinely instituted form of the public ministry. Most notable of these sources might be a study pamphlet entitled “The Ministry,” produced by the Missouri Synod commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) in 1981. That nothing has changed in the Missouri Synod is evident in its definition of terms (p. 12):

The Office of the Public Ministry: It is the divinely established office referred to in Scripture as “shepherd,” “elder,” or “overseer.” This term is equivalent to “the pastoral office.” Within this office are contained all the function of the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the church.
 Auxiliary Offices: These are offices established by the church. Those who are called to serve in them are authorized to perform certain of the function(s) of the office of the public ministry. These offices are “ministry” and they are “public,” yet they are not the office of the public ministry. Rather, they are auxiliary to that unique pastoral office, and those who hold these offices perform their assigned functions under the supervision of the holders of the pastoral office. Such offices are established by the church as the need arises, and their specific functions are determined by the church. The most common auxiliary office today is the office of the teaching ministry.

The study consistently uses the office of public ministry and pastoral office interchangeably throughout the 42-page document.

The Missouri Synod has remained adamant in teaching that the office of the pastor is a divinely instituted office. It claims to have both Walther and Luther as its teachers. Key to understanding Luther and Walther is their use of the terms *Pfarramt* and *Predigtamt*. Luther uses the two terms interchangeably. Used generically either one simply means public ministry. Used as a species of the genus a form of the public ministry is meant. To understand Luther correctly one must look beyond the terms to the way he uses the terms and the entire context in which he uses the terms or speaks of the ministry. For example, Luther does speak much about the divine institution of the local pastorate but nowhere does he declare it to be the one divinely instituted office or place it above other forms of ministry. For Luther the office of the local pastor was one species together with other species. Conversely, he speaks of other species as also instituted by God. Note how Luther speaks of different forms of ministry without a hint of one form as the divinely instituted form:

However we deal with a different matter when we speak of those who have an office in the Christian church such as minister, preacher, pastor, or curate.⁴¹ The holy orders and proper estates, which are instituted by God, are these three: the office of priest, matrimony, and temporal government. All those who are in the local pastorate, or the ministry of the Word ... such as those who preach, administer the Sacraments, are in charge of the common treasury, serve as sextons, and messengers or servants to such persons, such are all holy works before God!⁴²

⁴⁰ *WLQ*, 1977, p. 53.

⁴¹ *LW* 13, p. 331.

⁴² St. Louis 20, p. 1098.

In a similar way Missouri theologians today fail to understand Walther. Obviously Walther was aware of Luther's use of *Pfarramt* and *Predigtamt* and also used the words interchangeably. Walther does so in Thesis I and II of his *Theses on the Ministry*:

The holy ministry of the Word or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priestly office, which all believers have. The ministry of the Word or Pastoral office is not a human institution, but an office which God Himself has established.

When Walther uses *Pfarramt* as a synonym for *Predigtamt* he, like Luther, uses *Pfarramt* as a species for the entire genus, but in mentioning this species he has every phase and form of public ministry in mind.

Missourians who claim Walther's theses as proof for their present day position on the ministry fail to read Walther in context. Walther wrote his theses with a very distinct circumstance in mind, the attacks of Grabau, and for Lutherans in Germany who favored Grabau's views. A divinely instituted form of the ministry was not the matter of controversy. The controversy concerned the distinction Grabau made between clergy and laity, obedience Grabau insisted the laity owed the clergy, as well as ordination and the call. These matters Walther ably addressed. It is unfair to make Walther's theses speak to and solve a problem that he did not address.

Instead Missourians must listen to Walther speak of other offices in the church to learn that Walther treats all offices with equal respect and that essence and substance of the public ministry were the important thing for Walther, not any particular form. Walther's high regard for the teaching ministry is reflected in an address delivered at the installation of two academy professors:

What should comfort us when men who have prepared themselves for the office of saving souls, yes, who have already carried out that office with blessing, take over the teaching office at our educational institutions at the call of the church? In answer, we should be comforted by this; 1. that also their office is the office of our God. 2. that also their concern is the concern of our Lord. God really ordained only one office, namely the office which in his name gathers, builds, governs, cares for and preserves his church on earth.⁴³

We should also look at a few passages that are often used incorrectly to prove a divinely ordained form of ministry:

Titus 1:5, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." Here Luther is misunderstood by those who seek a divine command for their form of ministry. "Whoever believes that here in Paul the spirit of Christ is speaking and commanding will be sure to recognize this as a divine institution and ordinance, that in each city there should be several bishops, or at least one." That Luther is speaking of the public ministry as God's command and not any particular form of ministry ought to be apparent from what Luther has said earlier: "For this reason we are firmly convinced on the basis of Holy Scriptures that there is not more than one office of preaching God's Word, and that this office is common to all Christians ... Since the Scriptures know of no other office of the Word of God."⁴⁴ What we have in Titus is an arrangement, not a command. Things were left to be done (*leiponta*) not as things that needed to be done to fulfill some divine command, but things not yet finished for the spiritual welfare of the congregation.

Acts 14:23, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust." Again one is hard pressed to find any kind of command for the present-day pastorate. First one would have to demonstrate that the office of the elder is

⁴³ *Lutherische Brosamen*, p. 346.

⁴⁴ *LW* 36, p. 155, 152.

equivalent to the form of ministry we know today as the pastorate, which is not possible. From 1 Timothy 5:17 it becomes obvious that not all elders functioned in the same way, some “whose work is preaching and teaching” and others not. Then one still has to find a divine institution. Here we might consider Prof. Schaller’s response to the question of forms of ministry:

Let us take note that one can speak of an *institution* of the apostolate only in an improper sense. God did not command that there be apostles, but he *made* apostles, and thereby that special ministry was established. We can also consider it as settled that nowhere in the New Testament can a definite *command* be cited that Christians should establish a *particular* form of the public ministry in their midst. But if one wishes to speak about an institution, one must, of course, be able to cite the instituting *command*. It was supposed, to be sure, that the divine institution of at least *one* form of the public ministry had been *indirectly* established. But it is certainly a questionable undertaking to try to establish a divine command, and hence a positive moral precept, by means of circumstantial evidence. Is it God’s practice otherwise in serious matters that directly concern our soul’s salvation to leave it to our reason to make a deduction concerning a particular act of the will? The Savior did not do it that way in the case of Baptism, and neither in the case of the Lord’s Supper. There we have a clear institution. Neither do we in other matters make laws in the church where the grounds for doing so might actually seem much stronger. It has never occurred to truly evangelical people to consider foot washing an institution, a commanded ceremony, even though the Savior even said concerning it, “You should wash one another’s feet.” Whoever is satisfied with an indirect institution can on the basis of the apostolic Scriptures amply prove an impressive array of divine ordinances and institutions. We could then speak of a divinely ordained office of fund raiser and of a God ordained Sunday offering (1 Corinthians 15, 16), of a divinely instituted office of almoner (Acts 6), of a divinely commanded deaconess ministry (1 Timothy 3:11), of a divine institution of the use of certain widows in the service of the church (1 Timothy 5), perhaps even of the divine institution of Christian slavery (Colossians 3:24. Philemon; etc.), and many other examples which could be cited.⁴⁵

Other passages quoted alongside Acts 14:23 are Acts 20:28, “of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers;” 1 Corinthians 12:28, “God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, etc;” Ephesians 4:11, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” Again, use does not make a command, an institution. The fact that God placed persons into the above mentioned offices is not the same as commanding a form of office. God today also places Christian day school teachers into their office and no one is minded to make it a divinely commanded form. Furthermore, to argue for divinely commanded forms from the above passages would mean not one form, but many forms. We would have to determine from Scripture exactly what was involved in each form and then see to it that each form is present in every congregation.⁴⁶

Hebrews 5:4, “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.” One dare not look here for a divine command for a form of ministry. The passage does not speak of the ministry. It speaks of the high priestly office of Christ and of its type. Nor does it speak of the institution of the office of a priest, but the call to that office. One must stretch the passage in at least two directions to find any support for the pastorate as a divinely instituted form.

Conclusion

⁴⁵ *WLQ*, 1981, p. 47-48.

⁴⁶ *WLQ*, 1981, p. 49.

When one looks back over the last 30 years one finds nothing to indicate a change in Missouri Synod teaching on church and ministry. Church and ministry was not the issue over which the Wisconsin Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod terminated fellowship with the LCMS. But it was divisive even then. I am not aware that church and ministry has even been mentioned in the several meetings that have been held since 1961 between representatives of Wisconsin and Missouri. The purpose of those meetings has only been to determine if there is any reason to resume doctrinal discussions between the two synods. To my knowledge these brief meetings have focused on church fellowship, the issue over which fellowship was terminated. If discussions were every initiated, fellowship would be the place to begin. And eventually church and ministry would have to become a part of the discussions.

IV. Ministry: In a Changing World

Choosing a subject for a Pastors Institute one cannot find a subject which is more personal and timely for all involved than the ministry. Ministry is our life; ministry is our calling; in every sense of the word, ministry occupies our thoughts almost every waking hour.

When we speak of the ministry we are discussing, on the one hand, something that is steady, stable, mostly predictable, even changeless. We have looked at the ministry through the writings of the inspired apostles, through the window of Martin Luther, yes, the ministry as it was taught throughout the days of the Synodical conference. Except for forms of ministry, everything we have discussed remained the same, no innovations, no restructure, no overhaul, no change.

Why then the frustrations often expressed when pastors get together? How many frustrations have been expressed within these four walls during the past three weeks, or as we drove with our brothers to and from these lectures? Why the feelings of inadequacy we may experience at crucial times during our ministry? Why the frequent resignations of brothers after 5, 10, 15, 20 years in the ministry? Though the ministry given by our Lord Jesus Christ to his church for all times and in all places has not changed, the arena in which we live and work does change. The world around us, all of society, has changed and continues to change, rarely for the better. Not many of these changes make the ministry any easier. Who will say that his ministry has gotten easier over the years? The hymnwriter said it well more than a hundred years ago: "Change and decay in all around I see." And yes, people change. People around us change. We change. Therefore we devote this part of our discussion to ministry in a changing world.

Speaking of change one hardly knows where to begin. It would be natural to begin with the wider world in which we live. Much has been said; much has been written. Comments about the world, its standard of morality, or should I say immorality, or lack of standard, cautions about the crass materialism of our day, admonitions concerning the godless society in and around us find their way into our sermons regularly. And they should. Without discounting these changes in the world and without belittling what it means for our ministry, I wish to focus on areas closer to home, changes which directly affect our ministry.

Congregation

Begin with the congregations we serve. Congregations differ. No doubt it could be said that no two congregations are exactly the same. Just moving from one called field of ministry to another means change for our ministry. It has been said, congregations have a life all their own. There are notable changes within a congregation from one generation to another. In returning to former congregations for anniversary celebrations I have noted both how little and how much, for better or for worse, that a congregation has changed. We all know what a difference a few changes in the membership of a church council or other key positions can bring in

a congregation. Who of us has not, without second guessing our Lord, both rejoiced in and regretted changes the election process can produce.

One senses changes in his ministry caused by the proliferation of meetings. Our congregations seem to be more organized than ever. Once the fall season rolls around and continuing all the way into the following June, weekly meetings seem to run our lives, at least our evenings five or six days a week. After a day of pastoral conference with instructive essays, lively discussions, committee reports and light-hearted banter over a delicious meal prepared by ladies of the congregation, it is interesting for a seminary professor to observe the parish pastors peel off one by one, even before sessions are over, to get back for this or that meeting or congregational activity. In the Metro North conference we have resorted to a conference outside the city just to get away from the congregational activities one evening for a little relaxation and fellowship.

One also senses a change in the expectations of our congregations. Congregations seem to expect more and more of their pastors. Gone forever are the days of the typical rural congregation where the pastor was the most educated person for miles around, and the mere quantity of his education and experience were enough to see him through any situation. Most of us serve congregations that have members who are our equals and even superiors intellectually. Many members work in highly competitive situations where top performance is demanded and rewarded and mediocrity is considered weakness.

Our congregations look to us more and more for service to special interest groups. Many of us can remember the days of a ladies aid, youth group and perhaps a men's club. Now we may also have couple's club, single's group, senior's activity, mission circle, parent-teacher society, boy and girl pioneers, etc. Much can be said for each of these. Each presents opportunity for Christian nurturing, fellowship and service. At the same time each puts more demands on an already busy ministry.

More and more we hear of and observe the demands placed upon the parish pastor in the area of counseling. Without entering in upon all the social, family and marital problems that have created the monster, one has to be blind, deaf and half-dead not to feel the pressure this places upon the parish ministry. Granted, our pastors are well qualified to meet the needs. They are equipped with the law and gospel. But so often those who come for counseling aren't seeking answers and strength from God's word. Precious time is consumed letting them talk out their problems before one can get them to listen to what their Lord has to say. Or we put undue pressure upon ourselves when we think we have to be semi-professional psychologist and delve into the secret passages of the mind.

Over against these demands placed upon the parish pastor we as pastors dare not become negative or give the impression that we have little sympathy or understanding. Not that it is beyond our rights to ask our people to be fair, patient and understanding toward us and if necessary even forgiving (1 Corinthians 4:1). At the same time we will not lose sight of the fact that the ministry is theirs, not ours (1 Corinthians 3:5). Our congregations have exercised their right and responsibility in calling us to their ministry. We are ministers, servants, of the congregation, yes, answerable to our Lord, but at the same time servants of men. "Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way" (2 Corinthians 6:4).

Synod

Maybe the changes are not as great and do not affect our ministry as directly or as much, but we can also speak of changes in our synod. By change I don't suggest any change that is necessarily for the worse, but change nonetheless. We, by many comparisons, are a small church body, by others, a large church body. Some of us may like to think that smaller was better. We can remember days when we knew everybody, when everything seemed more personal, and when we thought everyone listened when we expressed our views. Smallness has its advantages. While we lament the lack of greater growth, a growth of little over 1% a year,

God has given us moderate growth over the years which has resulted in a full-time president, increasing number of full-time executive workers and an expanded home and world mission effort. Growth has meant greater organization that is to mean greater efficiency. There are more boards, more commissions, more meetings. Throw in rather serious budgetary problems and before you know it we catch ourselves beginning to speak of them and us, we and they. Whatever changes have come under the blessing of God or the decisions of a synodical convention, we need to remember we are synod, synod is us. First vice-president Richard Lauersdorf shared some timely thoughts at the vicar-supervising seminar held at the seminary last July. The title of the essay already says much: The Supervising Pastor's role in Fostering Synodical Team Spirit. Nevertheless, I include a few selected thoughts. Having quoted our Synod's Thesis on Church and Ministry at length the essayist continues:

What do these words describe but team spirit! It's not "they, theirs, and them" and "We, ours, and us" from either viewpoint, neither from the Christians in the congregations looking at the synod nor from the synod looking at the congregations. It's not "What do *they* want?" as if the synod were some foreign body making demands on us in the congregations or "How come *they* don't do more?" scowling from the synod at the congregations. It's not "*Their* work is something *extra*, something for which we might do something after our essential work in the congregations is done." It's all *HIS* work, or at least it ought to be, the work of the great Redeemer who loved me and gave himself for me, work which he has made *MY* work, work which I carry out more efficiently and effectively as I join with fellow believers in my congregation and in my synod in the tasks assigned to each.

Co-Workers

Talking about change, there may be times when we would appreciate some changes in our brothers in the ministry. Aren't there some ways in which they could change, which would make my ministry easier? Why can't they see things my way, do things the way I do them, be more like me? Judgments, decisions, criticisms! Some of this goes with the territory. As ones called into public ministry we are in positions of leadership. People expect us to be decision-makers. Faithfulness to our call requires judgments. Even constructive criticism may be necessary. We try to do so only with correct and complete information and always with the interest of the Lord's kingdom in mind. So far so good! Add the element of human nature and it's a different ball game. We find ourselves questioning the judgment and decisions of our brothers or even making unjust criticism. The closer we are called upon to work with others in public ministry, co-pastors, day school principal and teachers, conference brothers, the greater the temptation to send out subtle or not too subtle signals suggesting change, calling for change, demanding change in their attitude, their efforts, their faithfulness.

In so doing we rob ourselves of the very support the Lord has supplied to make our ministry easier. Co-pastors, circuit and conference brothers and day school teachers should be recognized as opportunities to share and discuss our common interests and common problems. Older pastors, including retired pastors, can lend their experiences. Younger pastors bring their special zeal and energies. Each one, young or old, new or veteran can be both a teacher and learner, a counselor and one seeking counsel, one who gives encouragement and one who needs it. The called teachers in our congregations are also coworkers, servants of the congregation, but not our inferiors, not identical in call, but the same in calling. "For we are God's fellow-workers: you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). Harmony, sharing, and cooperation between all called workers can only bring blessing upon all within the congregation and make everyone's ministry easier.

Unfaithfulness on the part of called workers or loss of confidence in those who have been called cannot be overlooked. Beyond that God, not man, is judge of our faithfulness: "Now it is required that those who have given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1 Corinthians 4:2-5).

Family

Also part of the network of support that God has placed around the pastor is his family. The family in society and the families in our congregations have been placed under great pressure in today's changing world. No need to quote here statistics that bear out these pressures. Laxity in morals, the materialism of our age, the craze for all kinds of entertainment and sports activities pull families in many directions. They do not leave much time for the family to be family. The families in the parsonages are not unaffected.

Even without these pressures pastors struggle in trying to be all things to their congregation without neglecting or slighting wife and family. His family needs him; he needs his family. There will be times when congregational duties must come before a family activity. There may be times when duty in the congregation will have to wait. In the course of time the circumstance in the family may change so that it does not make the pastor's decision of who comes first quite so difficult. A general rule may be that when the pastor's family is young and growing he had better be there when they need him. More of his presence and participation in family things may be time saving in the long run.

Perceptions

So far we have talked about changes in others, the people around us, from our congregations and our synod to our co-workers and the members of our family. Perhaps it was natural, for it is easier to see changes in others, rather than in ourselves. If we are to speak profitably about the ministry, ministry in a changing world, we must also include ourselves. Have we changed? Is the change we see (only after some deep soul searching, to be sure) for the better?

We might begin with our perceptions. Perceptions for the ministry were, no doubt, formed at a very early age. As children, as teenagers, as young men, we had perceptions of the ministry. They may not have been entirely accurate. Very likely the perception was rather narrow. If the perception came by way of our home pastor, it may have been very limited. If it was the result of a pastor father or some close relative it may have been broader and more realistic.

The best perceptions were those that looked upon the ministry not so much as something we could be but as something we could do, not so much as something we could do for ourselves but as something we could do for others, not only as service to others but as a service to our Lord who saved us eternally. Paul's words to the Corinthians offer the very best perception anyone could have for ministry. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (1 Corinthians 5:18-20).

No doubt our perceptions were not so clear 30, 40, 50 years ago. Perceptions can be changed for the better. Isn't it possible that our perceptions are never as clear as they could be? It is difficult to get rid of every selfish thought and every personal ambition. Or, isn't it possible that we lose some perception along the way? Without casting a single judgment upon any individual, what should one make of the many resignations from the ministry? Why has it become increasingly difficult to recruit young people for the ministry? The problems other church bodies have experienced for the last 20 to 30 years in recruiting and retaining persons for the ministry seems to have found their way to our doorstep.

Expectations

Close to the matter of perception but different enough for separate consideration is one's expectations for the ministry. No doubt our expectations go as far back and run somewhat parallel to our perceptions. False perceptions lead to false expectations. False expectations could be an even greater cause for the discouragements, anxieties, frustrations and even depression that may dog one's ministry.

Did we ever expect it would be easy? If we did, I don't think anyone ever misled us. To the contrary, we were forewarned that the ministry is work. St. Paul's pastoral epistles, as well as his own example, must have impressed upon everyone of us that the ministry is work. Still, it may be true that we didn't know just how demanding the work would be, the demands which a changing world would place upon our ministry, or even how demanding a congregation could be. However, returning to the example of Paul and all the apostles and prophets we should be able to rid ourselves of every last feeling of self-pity when we feel overworked. We will never face the obstacles in the ministry that they faced.

No doubt respect was an expectation all of us had. Respect is hardly a reason for pursuing the ministry but it is one of those things almost taken for granted. And we must be thankful for the respect that our people have for the ministry, especially when scandals and an eager press of recent years have done much to erode confidence in the ministry. Though we may expect respect for the office, and rightly so, we must remember that respect is something to be commanded, not demanded. There is nothing like faithful work, dedicated service, concern for souls, and love for people to give respect to the office in which we are privileged to serve (1 Timothy 3).

Another expectation which might at first seem to some to be similar to respect, but which is poles apart, is praise or glory. This is not the same as appreciation. The need for appreciation is one thing. Most people see only what the pastor does on Sunday morning. If they are members who attend infrequently they may feel the pastor does very little. Unseen for the most part are the calls, visits and counseling and of course everything which goes on in the study to prepare himself for meetings, classes and services. Furthermore, the only thing that seems to matter to some people is that the pastor is friendly. If he is friendly guy, even buddy buddy, he is a great pastor. If he does not have a captivating personality, never mind how faithful and dedicated he may be.

Appreciation is one thing. The need for praise or glory is another (Galatians 5:26). Self-adulation has been called the besetting sin of a pastor. Even the unsought, polite praise of our members can easily become the tool of Satan to cause us to forget that all glory and praise belongs to God. We are only lowly servants, undershepherds, tools in the hand of him who has made us his own.

In all of our expectations nothing is more important than a healthy respect for the call: "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). Our preparation for the ministry held no designs on any particular kind of call except for parish ministry. Our synod demonstrated excellent judgment when it established our present system of placing graduates from the seminary for the public ministry. It is firsthand and up-front training to let the call seek the man and not vice versa. "Brothers, choose seven men from among you...." (Acts 6:3). Hopefully our expectations for place and type of ministry will never go beyond our present call to the ministry. Then I can truthfully say that there is no place that I would rather minister than right where I am. Then I can say that as far as I am concerned right now, this is where I plan to minister the rest of my ministry.

And the best preparation for any other ministry that the Lord might have in mind for me is to be content and faithful in the place and the work into which he has already called me. If the Lord wants me elsewhere, he knows where I am.

Rewards

It is doubtful that any of us entered the public ministry for its financial rewards. That is as it should be (1 Timothy 3:8). And yet, though not the only danger, dissatisfaction, even complaint, in respect to money is one of the hazards of ministry. It will always be true, I expect, that many of those whom we serve have far more of

the “good things” of life with far less effort made. But then there are other of our members who do with far less. It is also true, most of us could get by with less if it were necessary. True, it is not becoming to the gospel for Christian congregations to be negligent in the support of their called workers. At the same time it does not serve the cause of Christ’s kingdom if its called workers give the impression that they can never get enough, or even that they are not satisfied. And if a salary is less than what it could or should be, the Lord has many other ways in which he can bless us, even financially (Ps 145:15-16). Furthermore, the ministry, hard work though it be, has so many other rewards which money cannot buy: to be able to work daily with the gospel, to be able to minister to God’s sheep and lambs, to be able to raise one’s family in the parsonage, to have the good will and fellowship of so many fellow Christians, to name a few.

Changelessness

So far we have spoken only of change, change in others, change in ourselves. Easiest to acknowledge is change in others. Every change in others, our congregation, our synod, our fellow workers, our families has a direct bearing upon our ministry. We come to expect change. You might say we become conditioned to change. More difficult to detect and admit is change in ourselves. All talk about change and propensity for change seems to cast a dark cloud over our ministry. How could I have gotten this far in the ministry? What is to keep me from becoming discouraged in my present ministry, or at least apprehensive about the future?

In the face of all the changes in a changing world we have a gracious God who is changeless. His word does not change. The message for the ministry remains the same. Necessarily our hearts become apprehensive, even fearful, when we look to ourselves, when we look at the hearts of men. We remember how pitifully Peter failed when he looked with himself (Mark 14:31). We hear the apostle Paul despairing of anything within himself for life and therefore also for the ministry: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). With the same breath the apostle looks away from himself to his changeless Lord: “Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:25). Our ministry will succeed only in the measure that we turn to our Lord for strength, cling to the promises of his word, and proclaim the message he has given for the ministry.

Changeless Lord

Where can one look better for advice for God-pleasing ministry than Paul’s pastoral epistles. Verses that immediately suggest themselves are in the opening chapter of Paul’s second epistle to Timothy. There is nothing that Paul wants more for Timothy than a fruitful ministry, not for Timothy’s sake, but for the Lord’s sake and for the sake of those whom the Lord will bring to salvation through Timothy’s ministry. For such a blessed ministry Paul directs all thoughts away from self, himself or Timothy, to the Lord of all ministry. “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Timothy 1:8-12). Prof. August Pieper’s comments on 2 Timothy, comments that seem to summarize especially these verses, speak so appropriately from the past to our ministry today.

The entire second epistle to Timothy can pretty well be summarized in the single admonition: “My son, take strength from the grace of God which is ours in Christ” (2:1, NEB). Paul provided ample foundation for this admonition. As servants of the Word, we have also received the proper

spirit for our ministry—not a spirit of fearfulness, but of strength, of love, and of self-control. Without any merit on our part God in pure grace rescued us from eternal death and converted us, in accordance with his eternal purpose in Christ. Our Lord Jesus has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. If we died with Christ, we shall live with Him; if we endure, we shall reign with Him. The Lord has risen from the dead; He provides for our bodily needs; He will give us everything we need to face the difficulties that confront us in our ministry; He knows His own. Of course, if we deny Him, He will deny us, but our unfaithfulness to Him does not annul His faithfulness to us, for He cannot deny Himself. Perilous times will come; hypocrites and deceivers will enter the church under the guise of true religion and will seek to win followers for themselves. But their successes will be short-lived, for God will expose them for the fools they are. The time will come when those who call themselves Christian will not endure wholesome teaching but will gather a crowd of teachers to tickle their ears. But all of this cannot and dare not rob you of your courage and strength, and make you fearful or weary in your work of love! Take hold of yourself, and keep a clear head by holding to the kind of sturdy, salutary words you have heard from me and by guarding that good deposit that was entrusted to you through the Holy Spirit. Entrust this to reliable men, who will also be qualified to teach others. Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, but in His strength endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Jesus Christ, competing according to the rules, doing your work faultlessly, keeping yourself clean from the contamination of evil. Rebuke all ungodliness, yet with kindness; shut the mouths of those who oppose you, and in view of Christ's imminent return be unswerving in preaching and teaching the Word with great patience and careful instruction. What is at stake here is the salvation of God's elect. This is how I have conducted my ministry, and I have not been put to shame. The Lord stood beside me, delivered me from all persecution, and strengthened me, so that through me the gospel might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. Now the Lord will deliver me from the last great evil and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. For I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day (1:12).⁴⁷

Changeless Word

The very first remedy for the ministry in a world full of change is faith in a changeless Lord, who has redeemed the world from sin according to his grace, established his ministry of reconciliation and continues to appoint men to this ministry. Faith in such a Lord also means trust in his word and promises which do not change (Isaiah 55:11; Jeremiah 23:29; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:19). We noted in our first essay that the institution of the ministry and God's word as the instrument for the ministry are inseparable. The command to preach, teach, be witnesses all have God's word as their one and only object "everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is also faith in his word, a prerequisite for a fruitful ministry. Again, it is interesting to hear Prof. Pieper combine the two:

The source for the power Paul displayed in all of his apostolic activity, in his prodigious output, in his untiring patience under suffering, his indestructible courage in danger, in his single-minded, self-denying surrender to his lord, in his quiet confidence in him even when facing death—lay not in the keen intellect and strong will which the Holy Ghost had given Paul and had placed into the service of Christ, but rather in his certainty of the grace, the power, and the faithfulness of his Lord and Master which he had experienced so richly. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). "I know what kind of a person I have entrusted myself to."

⁴⁷ *WLQ*, July 1975, p. 236-237.

What is there that we can learn from this discussion? We are to strive to become confident in our faith, firm and strong in the certainty of faith, so that we can overcome all our doubts about Christ and about his gospel. God wants us to dismiss doubts about whether or not God has called us to our present post, our doubts about God's promises, His faithfulness, and His power even over death—and to stand firm in faith amid all storms that threaten the world and the church.⁴⁸

Changeless Message

A changeless Lord and changeless word means also a changeless message in a changing world. It is the message we know as law and gospel. Forms of ministry may change. Vision statements may have to be updated. Mission awareness may wax and wane. But man's needs do not change. Unfortunately the sinful condition of man's heart is also changeless. By sin man has separated himself from God. The sin of Adam condemns all men. There is no peace for sinners apart from Christ. The voice that the church raises to the world must be one of reconciliation: "Be reconciled to God. God has made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:2-21). This is the only ministry that saves. This does not rule out a ministry of law. First the law must produce the awareness of sin. It must arouse and increase the feeling of guilt and shame. The preaching of law must not stop short of condemning the sinner to hell. Once the law has produced contrite hearts, it has done its work. It can do no more. It has prepared the way for the proclamation of the gospel. As the preaching of the law was unconditional, without grace, without hope, without exception, the preaching of the gospel must be unconditional, full of grace, hope-filled and for all, without exception. We turn again to a voice from the past (A. Pieper) concerning the ministry of Christ's church, the power of the word, the importance of its changeless message, law and gospel, and a correct and careful proclamation of both:

But there is one thing God did not do. *He did not arrange it* that His Word would have the power to convert and sanctify and save only when preached by a believing pastor. Instead God arranged it that wherever the gospel is preached it converts and sanctifies and saves people when it is preached properly and purely, with correct application of law and gospel. It may be preached within the framework of history, or using dogmatical categories and conclusions; it may be preached out of love or out of hatred, from pure or impure motives, with or without mental reservations, from a believing or an unbelieving heart. God has placed saving power in His Word alone, Romans 1:16; Jeremiah 23; Hebrews 4; 1 Corinthians 1 and 2; and a hundred other places. The compelling logic and rhetorical artistry of the believing preacher, his thundering and his whispering, his perfectly executed gestures, his classic language and poetic ability cannot contribute in the least toward the spiritual effect of his sermon. A frivolous pastor may love to have his hearers tell him: "Pastor, that was a beautiful and powerful sermon!" But that opinion is a very misleading criterion for measuring its true spiritual effectiveness. This is why Luther warned against this so earnestly. We humans, indeed, can with our own ability win people over to our way of thinking and perhaps even persuade them to do great things, but that is simply human activity. To have an influence on a man spiritually, to crush him, to bring him to faith and a new birth and a holy life is something only the almighty and all-knowing God can do. He is the One who searches the heart, the One who can call what is not into existence. For that reason He has said: "My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (and that includes pastors or professors who consider themselves quite capable, 2 Corinthians 3). We preachers and teachers can indeed impair, perhaps even hinder, the God-intended working of the Word through our preaching and offensive conduct and unfaithfulness. But if we wanted to make orthodox preaching effective, we would always be too late, for that power is already

⁴⁸ WLQ, July 1975, p. 247-248.

present in orthodox preaching. A pastor effectively destroys the power of God's Word if he refuses to say what the Word says, or if he adds to what it says, twisting it, applying it falsely, or rearranging its message improperly. He destroys the power of the Word if he treats weak Christians as if they were unregenerate, or the unregenerate as if they were Christians; if he strengthens a sinner in his sin or his error; if he withholds gospel comfort from sinners who have been crushed by the law until they have demonstrated true faith, deep-down repentance, and fruits in keeping with repentance; if he fails to direct terrified sinners who ask "What must I do to escape sin's punishment and to receive God's grace?" to trust God's promise, but instead sets all sorts of conditions for them to meet. Such a pastor is preaching law where he should be preaching gospel. That man is falsifying God's Word worse than a person who denies the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament. That man is doing what he can to confuse souls, to lead them either into the pit of despair or into pharisaic pride. That man is destroying the power of God's Word. If the Word is to bring its divine power to bear on a human soul, one thing is absolutely indispensable: it must be taught purely and applied properly.⁴⁹

Conclusion

What then if we are no more than jars of clay (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). It merely demonstrates that the power of ministry, the fruits of ministry, the successes, all of them, are not from us, not of ourselves. They are gifts of our ever faithful God whose word, whose message in the ministry, does not change. Left to ourselves in a world which is always changing, looking at others who are just as frail and mortal as we, we will have to cry out with the prophet: "Woe to me ... I am ruined" (Isaiah 6:5). Yet God has committed his ministry to men, to his church. He has moved us to say also with Isaiah: "Here am I ... send me" (v. 8). Turning to the Lord, taking to heart his institution of the ministry, trusting in his promises, confident of the power of his word we can say with the apostle Paul: "I can do everything through him who gives us strength" (Philippians 4:13).

The ministry will continue to be hard work. People may not always appreciate what is done. Perceptions may have been near-sighted. Expectations may have been unrealistic. But there is no work more wonderful. It is work that is meaningful to the universal priesthood. It gives special meaning and fulfillment to those who are privileged to be called into the public ministry.

V. Ministry: In the Year 2000 and Beyond

When will the Lord return according to his promise to judge the nations? Christians have asked that question for centuries and have waited with great expectations. If the Lord delays his return until the end of this present decade the second millennium of the New Testament church will have passed. Nearly 2000 years of history! Nearly 2000 years of ministry according to the Lord's command: "Go, make disciples, preach the gospel, be my witnesses." The study of the history of the church gives some insight into the fruits of that ministry. Heaven alone shall tell the whole story. Meanwhile we wait.

The year 2000 will also mark the 150th year of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Though 150 years is not exceptionally long for a church body, it is a long time from a confessional point of view. Comparisons are not easy to come by. The age of orthodoxy in Germany is one. It lasted about 150 years, give or take a few years. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is another. That confessional Lutheranism (Synodical conference) should take root in American soil is a miracle in itself, considering the lack of confessionalism in the European churches from which these Lutheran churches came. The Missouri Synod is the oldest of the former Synodical Conference churches. It is just short of 150 years, and has moved away noticeably from its confessional moorings, and shows little evidence of returning. For the Wisconsin Synod to remain a confessional church body after 140 years is the more remarkable when one looks at the groping for

⁴⁹ *WLQ*, July 1975, p. 248-250.

identity during the earliest years. This thought alone is sufficient to compel us to stop and join in a hymn of thanks and praise to a gracious and merciful God. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness” (Ps 115:1).

As we come to the concluding essay on the ministry it is difficult not to make some comparisons between then and now, between the task of the ministry given by the Lord to the church before his return to the Father’s right hand and the task of the ministry facing our synod as it looks ahead to a new millennium.

Ministry on the Go

At the Lord’s ascension the task given to Christ’s church was formidable, to put it mildly. From all outward appearance the church was ill equipped. The number of believers was small, not a big name or famous personality among them. The whole world was their field. The game plan was reasonable, Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria first. But the whole world? One can’t take lightly the hostilities (John 15:18). Jerusalem was no piece-of-cake. Enmity from their own countrymen was already apparent. After that there was the whole Roman world, Gentiles, heathen, idol worshipers, lover’s of this life, boasters, blasphemers, wickedness in high places.

The opposition made God’s plan impossible. But with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). The church in Jerusalem grew rapidly, 3000 on Pentecost, and it continued to grow daily (Acts 2). Soon there were 5000 (Acts 4:4). The inner growth was also apparent (Acts 4:32ff). Even persecutions against the apostles did not prevent the increase which included many priests (Acts 6:7). By what seems to be more circumstance than plan the gospel quickly spread beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria when the Christians were persecuted and “preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). And the march was on, Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch (Acts 11:19). At first the target area was mainly Jews. Soon Christians at Antioch initiated more of God’s plan. The Jews reached out to Greeks “and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:20). When Jerusalem heard of the success in Antioch the congregation sent Barnabas to assist. Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul and the next year finds this “distant” mission field sending out a team of apostles to the further reaches of the Roman Empire. Less than twenty years later Paul, part of that first missionary team and a team player if there ever was one, is able to write to the Romans: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world (Acts 10:18).

How shall anyone explain the success? The early Christians were not superior Christians. The apostles had demonstrated their share of weaknesses in their earlier days of discipleship. The apostle Paul included himself among the clay pots entrusted with the treasure of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4). The congregations established by the apostles were not perfect. The Corinthian church was beset with internal problems and abuses. The Galatian Christians were in grave danger of relapse at the hands of the Judaizers. In the Lord’s address to the seven churches in Asia Minor we find numerous admonitions because of the lukewarmness and indifference.

To the credit of the early Christians we find them sensitive to the needs of the church and a willingness to establish forms of ministry to meet those needs (Acts 6). We also find a great measure of lay involvement during the days of persecution (Acts 8). As far as we can tell Stephen’s witness in Jerusalem (Acts 6 and 7) was an act of personal ministry. The same can be said, at least initially, of Philip in Samaria. Nevertheless the increase in the church belonged to the Lord who supplied the church with the necessary gifts, gifts to speak and gifts to serve as well as what have been called Signifying gifts (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:11).⁵⁰ Above all the increase was a fruit of the Holy Spirit working mightily in the hearts of sinners through the word which the church proclaimed (Acts 2:38,47; 8:4-5).

A look back to the church’s beginning according to the Acts of the Apostles with an eye to the insights supplied by the inspired epistles appears to be vital as we look to the end of this century and the beginning of another millennium. The Wisconsin Synod faces great obstacles. We spoke last time of the changing world in which we are presently at work. It seems safe to say that the United States is no longer a Christian nation. North

⁵⁰ Scharf, Ralph, an essay: “Identifying Spiritual Gifts Within the Congregation.”

America is no longer a Christianized continent. No small share of the blame can be laid at the feet of organized religion that has forsaken the truth of Scripture. Sanctification before justification, synergism, pelagianism, pluralism, syncretism, social gospel, liberation theology, have all but hidden the gospel message from the hearts and lives of men. What chance does a conservative church body of less than half-a-million members have in such a chilling religious climate. If we were to allow ourselves the luxury of thinking this way, we would not be the only ones. A year ago (November 1989) *Christianity Today* did a profile on America's Lutherans on the basis of three broad questions: Who are they? What do they believe? Where are they going? The article identified quite accurately the growing liberalism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the struggle of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod to maintain its conservative past. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod? Too small a group to represent Lutherans in America! Too small to make a difference!

The picture doesn't get any brighter for the future of a confessional church body when one looks beyond the continent "into all the world." World missionaries will remind us that they do not find ready-made havens for the gospel. This past summer the WELS World Mission Seminary conference met in this room. One cannot foresee the obstacles, difficulties, frustrations that our missionaries face in establishing a world mission field. Even though the plan from day one is to build an indigenous church, the financial commitment remains great. And that is the least of it. It takes time and patience. One must learn the culture of the people. No two cultures are the same. Rarely can one simply impose a European-American way of ministry upon any other culture. World missionaries need to be sensitive to the culture of the people, flexible, and willing to find new methodologies. Invariably every mission field faces its share of trial and error.

Work in world mission fields is not made any easier by the various American cults. North America has spawned her share over the last two centuries. When American cults have faced tough going at home they have invariably moved across the oceans to find fertile fields for their propaganda. It becomes a case of Satan joining forces with Beelzebub.

Ministry for the year 2000 and beyond may be complicated further by a manpower shortage the likes of which our synod has not known since its earliest days. The day of graduates waiting for a call appears to be over. This would not have happened if it had not been for budget stringencies that reduced mission openings. Too many pastoral candidates was a "luxury" which congregations with vacancies may not know for years to come. Seminary graduates without a call was not a pleasant problem. It may prove to have been the lesser of two evils. It seems certain that this decade will not even supply enough pastors to fill vacancies caused by retirement, resignation and death. As a synod we could easily allow ourselves to fall into a maintenance kind of ministry. And if present budget problems continue, it will be even more tempting to pull back in both home and world mission outreach.

Add to a lack of pastoral candidates a clergy that is already overextended. I hesitate to say overworked. We have committed ourselves to hard work as the Lord gives us health and strength. But who of us in pastoral ministry has not regretted the work which does not get done, the lack of time to plan or carry out plans already on the drawing board, to make initial and follow-up calls, to attend to all the spiritual needs of our members. In the early years of my ministry it seemed to be widely accepted that the ideal-maximum sized congregation for one pastor to serve was a congregation of 600 communicant members. Today I get the feeling that that number has been cut in half. This seems to be borne out by the fact that calls to the larger congregations in the synod are not always easily filled.

Also part of the whole picture for today's ministry and beyond is the amount of personal contact that seems to be necessary to reach out to people with the gospel. Gone forever are the days when one could locate a church building strategically and wait for the people to come, or make a single contact with a prospect and expect him to pay our worship service a visit or join an instruction class. I attribute some of this to at least a couple of factors. One is the fact that we are no longer a Christian nation. We are reaching out more and more to people who have never been churched. Many of those who did grow up in the church have received little real religious training. Their religious experience has not gotten beyond certain "essential" religious days in their

lives, not unlike what one finds in most European and Latin American countries. Can it be that home mission outreach has become more like mission work on the world scene, which we often refer to as “raw” mission work?

Another factor has to be the affluency of our day. People’s lives are literally filled with work and play, getting ahead and enjoying the finer things of life, pursuing so many personal goals, ambitions, pleasures and enjoyment that the church is regarded as just one more social activity that they just don’t have time for – for now. Nor have we been able to shut down the back door losses that have grown over the years. Personal contact with members and prospective members is not the whole answer. It is never a substitute for law and gospel. It is still true, however, that we need to create opportunities for people to hear the word. We still have to get them into our services and involved in the church in order that we can fill their otherwise empty lives with the gospel.

If ever there was a time for the church to exercise its Christian freedom to use better already existing forms of ministry and at the same time to seek new forms of ministry as the needs demand, it is now. Several areas of ministry come to mind. Two of them are not new. The other is for the most part new to our congregations.

Laity’s Personal Ministry

We begin with the ministry that is common to all, lay ministry. To be exact we must call this the laity’s personal ministry, inasmuch as laity may also be called into the public ministry, which is the next part of this essay. This ministry of the laity is its functioning as royal priests in personal ministry. Often the term lay ministry has been used in contrast to the ministry of the clergy. In some ways this is unfortunate. Laity (*laos*) is simply a term meaning people. In the Greek New Testament it is used for various groups of people. It can refer to any particular group (Matthew 27:25) or all people in general (Revelation 7:9). Invariably it is used as a technical term to refer to God’s people. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a *people* belonging to God.... Once you were not a *people*, but now you are the *people* of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10). Laity is a term of highest honor and worth. Strictly speaking clergy is not a group in contrast to laity. Clergy are laity called to minister on behalf of others. The clergy are still, according to their faith, a part of the “*laos*.” What is more, clergy also have a personal ministry though it is not always easy to distinguish in view of the broad scope of the pastorate. It is a fallacy then to think of the personal ministry of the laity as a lesser form of ministry than the ministry of the clergy.

The laity is a ministry which is already in force, has always been in force. The church does not make ministers of the laity. They are ministers of God from the moment of rebirth. It is not surprising at all to see Scripture use the same root word (*diakonia*) to refer to the laity (Ephesians 4:1.2) and to those in the public ministry (1 Timothy 3:8).

The ministry of the laity begins with worship with study and with prayer. This personal ministry takes place in the public assembly of the believers. Again we avoid any false distinction between the clergy and laity. In the public worship clergy function on behalf of but not in the place of the laity. The personal ministry also takes place in the Christian home. There no clergyman is present. Christians act as priests as they sing and pray, worship and study. The personal ministry of laity begins with individual worship, study and prayer. In public and private the laity worship: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you ... sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16). They study: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life” (John 5:39). They pray: “Pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The personal ministry of the laity begins with worship, study and prayer as daily Acts of service to God. Their ministry includes more, much more, found also in the home and congregation and often in society as well. A kind of first act of personal ministry is teaching in the home: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). Personal ministry includes encouragement to all the believers: “Let us not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). As the need arises personal ministry

requires reaching out to others with aid, comfort and strength: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). As necessary it includes admonition: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently” (Galatians 6:1). A Christian is keenly aware of his own attitude and behavior as an example for others. Living a godly life is also a way to minister: “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). A Christian will not want to neglect the ministry of outreach: “That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In order to impress upon Christians the high calling which is theirs before God Scripture uses other descriptive terms in addition to priests and ministers, to describe God’s people in their peculiar ministry. All Christians are disciples (John 8:31), stewards (1 Peter 4:10), ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), workers (Matthew 20:1-6), witnesses (Acts 1:8), soldiers (2 Timothy), salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13), and lights on a hill (Matthew 5:14).

Without taking anything away from the public ministry also instituted by God the personal ministry of all Christians has to be considered the frontline and trenches for the work of the ministry. Where would the church be today without this ministry? Where would it have been at any time in the past without individual Christians functioning as priests in their particular place and circumstance in life? We have already cited examples from the early church, Stephen (Acts 6:7), Philip (Acts 8), Apollos (Acts 18:27) and the Christians who fled Jerusalem during the persecution. We can add Aquila and Priscilla to these names (Acts 18:26). During the Lord’s ministry we can cite as examples Andrew (John 1:41), Philip (John 1:45) and the Samaritan woman (John 4:28). Some of the best examples of personal ministry and its importance to the church will be found in the homes of believers. Paul cannot say enough for the training that Timothy received from his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Who would not like to know more of the manner and efforts employed in the home to train Moses before he was taken away to be raised in the courts of the Egyptians. Today we still speak of the home as the backbone of the church as well as of society. It seems safe to say that our congregations will never be any stronger than the homes of the members of the congregation. And even if the public ministry could step into each home and do the ministry which our laity is doing there, we could never reach out into the community as it also can. It becomes a mere matter of statistics, of numbers. How many lives can you or I touch in one day. On some days it may be less than 10 or 20. Every day the members of even a small congregation touch hundreds and thousands of lives. We can barely find the time to uncover and follow up promptly on a dozen or so prospects at any given time. We can only dream when we think of each member of any given congregation gaining one new member for the church each year.

The congregation and the function of the public ministry shall never be able to take the place of the ministry of the laity in their individual lives. But there is something, much, which the congregation through its called workers is able to do: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:11-16). The key phrase is “to prepare God’s people for works of service.” The ascended Lord has given gifts to his church, apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers, functions of public ministry, for the purpose of equipping the saints for service. The entire verse (12) consists of three prepositional phrases. The preposition “*pros*” is followed by “*eis*” and “*eis*.” Literally the verse reads “for the equipping of the saints to the work of ministry to building of the body of Christ.” The KJV places a comma after the first phrase and leaves the distinct impression that it is the leadership in the church which is to do the work of the ministry: “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Notice that the KJV makes no

distinction between the prepositions. The participle equipping (*katartismos*) implies a purpose, equipping for what. The participle with the prepositions “*pros*” followed by “*eis*” suggests that the second phrase depends on the first. The NIV renders the two phrases very well when it translates: “to prepare God’s people for works of service,” and makes the third phrase dependent on the second, “so that the body of Christ may be built up.” In his commentary on Ephesians Prof. I. Habek says of this verse:

The spiritual leaders the Lord has given them are to equip them for this service to the body of Christ, his church, his believers. Each saint will function in keeping with the measure of grace Christ has given him. This implies individuality and spontaneity. No elaborate organizational set up is needed before the saints can function. Saints who have learned underlying principles from their spiritual leaders will be alert for opportunities to serve and make the most of them.

If the church is going to meet the challenges of the ministry in the year 2000 and beyond it will need to seize every opportunity available to equip the saints for their personal ministry. Our people do minister. We sell them far too short if we suggest in any way that they don’t. Each Christian in his own way ministers. It is the very nature of the new man. At the same time there is always room for growth even among our strongest Christians. Objectives three and four of our synod’s vision statement address the importance of such preparation:

3. to help each other grow and mature in the faith through public worship and life-long study of the word of God.
4. to encourage and equip each other for the application of our faith in lives of Christian service, for the Lord, his church, his world.

Such preparation for personal ministry begins in our studies every week with thorough preparation for our sermons, Bible study and instruction classes. Though it takes extra time and effort, we will want to use the various organizations in the congregation to equip the saints for their personal ministry. Equipping the saints for the ministry is a never-ending task, but always an enjoyable one. Every opportunity to present law and gospel and to unfold the precious truths of Scripture is precious. It is the launching pad for a personal ministry that reaches out to the great benefit of the souls of men.

Laity’s Public Ministry

As we train laity for service in their personal lives it would be shortsighted for a church not to recognize and use special gifts which the Lord has given to its members to perform acts of the public ministry. Public ministry by the laity may not be the long suit in our congregations. It has been said more than once that we are a clergy-oriented church body. Though things have changed considerably in the last decades there still seems to be substance to this criticism in many of our congregations. As pastors we like to think that no one can do a task better than we ourselves or that it takes less of our time to do a task ourselves than to train someone else. Both may be true. Both would be very short-sighted on our part.

None of this is to suggest that the laity’s public ministry has been overlooked by the church or denied to God’s people. Laity have been set aside for public ministry in every congregation at least in several areas, administration (church officers, church council, committees, boards), education (Sunday school, vacation Bible school), worship (ushers, organists, choirs). In these areas we have learned to use quite effectively the talents to be found among our members, In other areas we may not be doing as well, such as youth ministry, stewardship, visitation, counseling and outreach.

Nor is any of this to suggest that being somewhat clergy-oriented is all bad. Though I am sure that there are other factors involved, our church body has remained confessionally sound. That must always be a great

concern. We will never want to sacrifice our doctrinal integrity for the purpose of outward growth or numbers. Strong leadership among the clergy is essential for a church body to remain true to the Scriptures. In addition we want the pastor's primary task to be that of a shepherd, caring for his flock, laboring for and alongside those entrusted to his spiritual care. Nor do we ever want lay involvement to become a kind of gimmick – keep them busy so that they remain loyal to the cause. A church can be busy, busy, busy and still not be meeting the real needs for ministry within its midst, in the community and throughout the world. Feelings of busyness and importance are no substitute for service that is motivated purely by love for the Savior.

If we begin with the need for ministry and the best interest of God's kingdom, all the while not failing to recognize the gifts God has given to his church, use of laity in the public ministry ought to take care of itself. In view of increasing needs for the ministry and a pending shortage of candidates for the preaching and teaching ministry one can see only a greater need to develop forms and opportunities for service by our laity. Most of the areas of ministry mentioned above are performed without any formal call, and without remuneration. Yet they are performed willingly. They are done quite well, sometimes exceptionally well. I have no doubt that the church is the richer for it and that God will continue to bless these forms of ministry.

All in all, use of laity in the public ministry only adds to the sense of ownership within the church. After all, we said that the keys belong to the church, not to the clergy. Clergy are called to shepherd the flock, to provide leadership and to equip the saints, not to usurp the ministry given to the church. A well trained clergy which is willing to share responsibilities for gospel outreach, ready to train people for service and sensitive to the ideas and interests of the members of the church bodes well for the future.

A sense of ownership and participation from planning to performance has been proved to be vital in home and world mission outreach. The Board for Home Missions learned long ago that an involved laity is as vital as a good missionary for mission planting, yes, even more vital. Not a few exploratory missions have failed for lack of lay leadership and willingness to get involved. The Board for World Missions also knows this well. In the World Missionary conference held at the seminary this past summer all the world mission seminaries shared their plans and methods for training workers and planting an indigenous church. There was no thought of trying to do this in exactly the same way in each mission field. The idea was that one field could learn from another. But whatever the plan, it was repeatedly emphasized that the nationals be involved in the plan. The best plan, if only ours (the expatriates) will probably fail.

Spiritual Growth

Training Christians for both personal and public ministry is a major goal of the synod's spiritual renewal project. Initiated by the 1987 synod convention the spiritual growth project seems to be well on target for completion in 1992. The emphasis of the project is adult spiritual growth. The first aspect of this focus is a formal curriculum of Bible study entitled *Training Christians for Ministry* that is scheduled for publication in 1991. It will include 12 week survey courses of Old and New Testaments, a 22-week inductive study of Christian discipleship and mini courses on church and ministry and spiritual gifts. The plan is that the courses will be offered annually in the congregations. Videotape and printed tools will be included so that mature laymen who have completed the courses will be able to teach others.⁵¹

Not to take anything away from the other three aspects of the spiritual growth project (personal family devotions, specific challenges of contemporary life and an integrated religion curriculum from cradle through the twelfth grade) *Training Christians for Ministry* should play a vital role in ministry for the year 2000 and beyond. Hopefully this spiritual growth emphasis will not be regarded just as a "project" to be completed by a certain date or as something every congregation ought to experience once. If it proves to be an ongoing concern in all of our congregations it could become a great blessing for both personal and public ministry in the lives of God's people.

⁵¹ Report to the Twelve Districts, June 1990, pp. 119-124.

Staff Ministries

Up until now we have discussed the ministry, as it is most familiar to our congregations. Previously we noted the distinction between the universal priesthood of all believers and the public ministry, both instituted by God, yet not two ministries, but one essential ministry, a ministry of the gospel. Today we have spoken of the laity's personal ministry and their part-time public ministry. Both have served our synod well over the years. Both allow room for growth and improvement. A vital part of the spiritual growth emphasis established by the 1987 synod convention must be the equipping of our people to meet the growing demands for ministry.

Another form of ministry under serious discussion and nearly ready for synod approval and implementation is what has been called alternative forms of ministry. Because the word alternative is open to misunderstanding the term staff ministry seems to be more appropriate. The idea was first explored when the 1983 synod convention, in response to the president's report, requested a study of additional forms of ministry and a *Committee on Ministry Needs* was appointed. In its report this committee concluded: "It is the considered opinion of the committee that developing programs for the training of evangelists, directors of Christian education, deaconess, etc. is not warranted at this time."

However the idea was not allowed to die. The report of the *Committee on Ministry Needs* had some positive recommendations. In 1986 a discussion document entitled "Alternative Forms of Public ministry" made a number of interesting observations.

- An increasing number of congregations are seeking a second or third pastor to meet needs and opportunities.
- Lower enrollments at Northwestern College, along with increasing retirements and resignations, suggest that there will be a shortage of men for dual and triple Pastorates.
- congregations do not always require the skills of a seminary graduate for additional staff positions.
- There are dedicated WELS members who consider some form of ministry as a second career, who are discouraged by the prospect of a full Seminary course.
- There are younger members of the WELS who are interested in a form of ministry other than that of pastor or teacher.
- This is an appropriate time to explore ministries for women which are in keeping with scriptural principles.⁵²

A direct result of this study was the appointment of a *Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry*. After two years of considerable study and research this committee, in April 1988, submitted its report to the Board for Parish Services. The report, which included a theological study and two research papers, presented the following six documents:

- Recommendations to the Board for Parish Services, Board for Worker Training and conference of Presidents
- A Rational for accepting and Encouraging Alternate forms of Public Ministry
- Recommendations relative to Certification of Alternate Forms of Public Ministry
- Position Description for Alternate Forms of Public Ministry
- A Process for Determining the Need for and Structure of Additional Staff in congregations considering Alternative Forms of Public Ministry
- Implementation of Recommendation⁵³

⁵² Report of the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry.

⁵³ Report of the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry.

On the basis of the above documents The Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry has made the following recommendations:

That the *Board for Parish Services*:

- 1) assist congregations in determining ministry needs and opportunities, as well as options to consider in meeting these needs and opportunities
- 2) make sample position requirements and position descriptions available to congregations and other agencies of the Church
- 3) consider for guidance the document "Implementation of Recommendations"
- 4) dismiss the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry

That the *Board for Worker Training* propose degree and non-degree programs for training people for alternative forms of public ministry and present these to the Synod for approval.

That the *Conference of Presidents*:

- 1) endorse the concept of calling paid professional workers to alternative forms of public ministry
- 2) establish certification requirements and a certification process in order to provide a means for recommending qualified people to congregations or other calling bodies (cf. the document "Recommendations Relative to Certification for Alternative Forms of Public Ministry")
- 3) recognize persons serving in alternative ministries
 - a. by listing them in the *Yearbook* as "Staff Ministers"
 - b. by including them in the Synod's pension plan
- 4) encourage a consistent use of terminology:
 - a. Lay ministry = the ministry of all God's people, the priesthood of believers
 - b. Public ministry = the service of those who are called to act on behalf of and in the name of the Church
 - c. Professional public ministry = the service of those called to public ministry as their principal vocation
- 5) encourage congregations, where appropriate, to consider calling staff ministers who are neither pastors nor teachers.⁵⁴

Time may prove that *The Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry* was not able to think of everything in order to implement staff ministry for our congregations. But one cannot fail to be impressed with the scope and thoroughness of its study. The members of the committee researched both the need for staff ministry and the interest in the use of staff ministry. Their report contains detailed recommendations concerning qualifications, training and certification for such ministry.

This report is now in the hands of a committee of seven men appointed by the synod president for the purpose of reviewing the work of the task force and putting it into a brief, presentable form for the 1991 synod convention for its approval or disapproval. The members of the committee represent the conference of Presidents, Board for Worker Training and Board for Parish Services, the three divisions of synod which would be directly involved if the synod should approve of the concept of staff ministry in any way.

Conclusion

We conclude our study where we began, both this essay as well as our series of essays: "Go, make disciples, preach the gospel, be my witnesses." The ministry remains the church's mission. The world is our

⁵⁴ Ibid.

field. The Gospel is the means. God will bless our efforts. Judgment day will reveal the results. Meanwhile we wait, not idly, but as people on a mission, God's mission. May we rededicate ourselves as God's called ministers. May we faithfully prepare God's people for ministry to usher in Christ's return and a harvest of souls.

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