

# Lay Ministry: The Wave of the Future?

by Kurt Ebert

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The topic at hand has been on the ballot for our pastor and teacher conference since 1990. While we do not know the intent of those who originally suggested it, this title may be interpreted a couple different ways. Someone may think, "Our church has not made good use of its lay members in the past; maybe this generation can help involve its people in a more meaningful way in the gospel work before us. Let's study the issue." In view of the increased publicity being given to the issue of lay ministry, someone uncomfortable with the implications might emphasize the question mark to suggest that using laity in Gospel ministry may actually subvert our gospel work by undermining the called or public ministry of Word and sacrament. Either way, the topic is relevant and timely.

Let's begin with two mild cautions, the first dealing with the "pendulum effect." When it comes to trends in any field, but also in the church, the pendulum of outlook rarely stays centered where it should be, veering neither to the right nor to the left. If there is a tendency to overcompensate for a fishtailing rear axle on icy roads, so there is an equal inclination to overreact in doctrinal matters when we feel a certain Biblical outlook has been neglected. One generation sees the venerable and nearly infallible "Herr Pastor" as the model for Christ's ministry; the next may view the role of pastor as being nearly expendable because the laity is being mobilized and has ownership of God's Word as much as any pastor. We may become children of our times rather than adopting the more balanced view God espouses for His church wherein we recognize that He has established both the spiritual priesthood of all believers as well as the public or representative ministry of the Gospel. The church will suffer if it does not take both seriously. It is the opinion of this essayist that the pendulum at this time has swung to the side of lay ministry over against the public ministry.

A second caution relates to the perspective of time. Each generation is tempted to believe that it has discovered, or at least rediscovered, a Biblical truth or application like few before it. A good example of this in our circles might be in the area of missions. Those who feel that the WELS is doing mission work like never before do well to read E.C. Fredrich's recent history, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, where one is humbled to find that our forebears in the 1850's to 1880's accomplished under God's hand some mighty endeavors in the forests of Wisconsin and plains of Minnesota as we have not witnessed since in home missions. So, also, in the area of lay ministry. Those who would like to believe that we children of the late twentieth century are first to become excited about lay people involved in gospel ministry should review the course of the gospel throughout the pages of Scripture, where we see the first "lay ministers" passing on the gospel torch to their sons, Cain, Abel and Seth; where we see common folk being called to become God's mighty prophets; where the early Christians who had been scattered by persecution ("all except the apostles," Ac 8:1 ff) preached the Word wherever they went; where Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos mature in his faith and were so zealous in their gospel work that Paul would call them, "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Ro 16:3), just to list a few of hundreds of examples. They should read the dozens of citations of Luther where, already 450 years ago, he spoke fervently about the gospel ministry entrusted to all Christians and so restored the truth of the priesthood of all believers to the medieval church. They should consider that every mother and father who have ever sat a youngster on their lap and told him about Jesus or sang a hymn have actually been on the front lines of lay ministry. History can be mighty humbling.

Exactly what is lay ministry? Our words lay and laity are derived from the Greek word *laos* which simply means "people," as Israel was called the "chosen people" or we are referred to as "a people belonging to God" (1 Pe 2:9). *Laos* had the idea of the people of a nation as opposed to its rulers or princes; in the context of the Jews in Jesus' day it would often distinguish the common folk from the priests or religious leaders (e.g., Mt 26:5, He 5:3). We often use the term to distinguish the members of our churches, the "sheep," from those

spiritual leaders who keep watch over their souls as men who must give an account (He 13:17), the “shepherds.” That shepherding is also done by those men and women called to be gospel ministers in our schools.

A ministry is a service performed, especially of those who execute the commands of others. The New Testament regularly uses the Greek term *diakonia* (our word deacon comes from this) in speaking of the ministry of the gospel. When the early Jerusalem church leaders found themselves overwhelmed with administrative ‘responsibilities in the work of charity, they chose seven individuals to “minister” to tables, that is, distribute the food to the poor, and so permit the apostles to devote their time and energy to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Ac 6:1-7). Paul often spoke of his preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles as a *diakonia*, as in 2 Co 5:18 where he refers to our “ministry of reconciliation.” Ro 12:7 mentions *diakonia* as one of the many special gifts Christ may give to His church, as though a person might have the special aptitude and desire to serve others above and beyond what He expects of every Christian. Finally, the early church apparently had established the office of *diakonos*, deacon, which, from what we gather in 1 Ti 3 and elsewhere, was a church leadership position somewhat akin to what we would call an elder.

In summary, then, by “lay ministry” we normally speak of the service in the church performed by those who are not called to be full time pastors or teachers of the gospel, yet in some way are supporting and furthering the message of the gospel. We quickly find, however, that this definition is full of gray areas and questions. What is the difference between the personal ministry of every believer and the public ministry that lay people may do in the name of the congregation? Can people who do not have an extensive theological training, as do our pastors and teachers, be rightly called “ministers”? What really is the Biblical difference—and is there one—between the laity and clergy? Isn’t every Christian serving his God, and therefore also a minister?

Questions like these have been examined in detail and were the catalyst behind a new venture in our Synod’s training program. At its 1991 convention, the Synod resolved to initiate a new staff ministry program as proposed by our Conference of Presidents, the Board for Parish Services, and the Board for Worker Training. While we have in practice involved the laity in “staff ministry” through such agencies as our church councils, Sunday schools or VBS, this program seeks to expand this concept by providing training for such offices as ministers of family and youth, evangelism, administration and deaconess.<sup>1</sup>

This paper seeks to do two things. First we’ll take a moment to review the doctrinal basis for lay ministry. While this is to be the “practical” paper for the day, we remember that doctrine is extremely practical and that our practice must always be rooted solidly in Christ’s doctrine to be edifying. Second, we will apply the truth of lay ministry in an effort to come away with some realistic ways to involve God’s people in His vital work within our own churches and schools.

### **A Doctrinal Basis for Lay Ministry**

Flattered as he may be at being asked to present this issue, this essayist would like first to confess an overwhelming inadequacy. This is a deeply doctrinal conversation we are about to have. To address the topic of lay ministry meaningfully, one ought also consider the mission of the church, church and ministry (specifically, the ministry of the keys), the priesthood of all believers, Christ’s church as His spiritual body, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God’s expectations for public servants. Our recent “WELS Symposium on the Ministry” at NWC spent two full days on the issue of the church’s ministry, primarily in response to the “new” emphasis on lay or staff ministry; for this a compendium of over 800 pages on the issue was assembled, featuring scholarly studies by some of Lutheranism’s best theologians, past and present, and suggesting further reading in a dozen more. For us (which is to say, me) to attempt to “cover” the issue of lay ministry in the next hour is the theological equivalent of trying to bring down a bull elephant with a pea shooter. But try we will! Let’s take a cursory look at the central teachings involved.

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<sup>1</sup> *Reports and Memorials for the 51st Biennial Convention*, 1991, pp. 175-187.

## The Mission of the Church

Before we can appreciate any ministry, we are obliged to understand our mission in Christ. He gave the church its marching orders in the Great Commission, clearly trumpeted in Mt 28:18-20, Mk 16:15, Jn 20:21-23, Ac 1:8 and elsewhere. All contain the same directives: “Make disciples by baptizing and teaching!” “Preach the good news!” “Forgive sins!” “Be my witnesses!” The mission of the church is a spiritual one, a mission of the heart. It keys off Christ’s own mission of reconciling the world to His heavenly Father by his substitutionary life and sacrificial death. It means making followers and students of Christ for time and for eternity by leading people to saving faith in His atoning work. It means inviting sin-stained people to personally be reconciled to their God. The Lord wants a rich harvest of souls at His return and desires to use His church to make this mission a reality. What a privilege! What a responsibility!

## The Gospel Ministry

But how is this to be accomplished? Our Lutheran confessors summed it up simply:

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.<sup>2</sup>

Note that this ministry, or service, was not given to pastors as the Old Testament ceremonies were entrusted to the Levitical priesthood. This service of administering the gospel was given to Christ’s church—His holy, justified people. Jesus was not only referring to Peter when He said, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 16:19), but to the two or three who come together in His name. This is a glorious task! Writes Paul, “If the ministry that condemns men (Moses’ law-oriented ministry) is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!” (2 Co 3:9). He further describes the grandeur of that ministry when he says,

God...gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Co 5:18-20)

As the Greek commander sent his famed runner with the good news of victory over the Persians from Marathon to the capital at Athens, so Christ sends His church as the messenger of peace between God and man, victory over sin and death, and repentance unto eternal salvation. Thus Isaiah speaks of spiritual Israel’s future glory,

You who bring good tidings, Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings, Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” (Is 40:9)

The Lord’s Zion, His church, would be a preacher of righteousness, a proclaimer of good tidings, centering on the person and work of the Word incarnate. This is the gospel ministry, entrusted to Christians. This proclamation comes in the form of both the spoken Word of forgiveness and the visible sacraments, offering and sealing that same forgiveness in connection with the visible elements. This possession and ministry is the glory of the Lord’s Zion—us!

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<sup>2</sup> *Augsburg Confession*, Article V, 1-2.

At this point we must make the observation that, while this ministry of the gospel is given to the church as a whole and there is no difference in status between clergy and laity, there is a difference in how this message is proclaimed, depending upon the setting.

### **The Universal Priesthood**

First God speaks of the universal priesthood of all believers: namely, that all Christians—men, women, and children—are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. 1 Pe 2:9 is a key passage in this regard: “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.” A brief diagram of this verse may illustrate the point better.

YOU ARE:   \* a chosen people  
                   \* a royal priesthood  
                   \* a holy nation  
                   \* God’s own possession

THAT YOU MAY: declare how great He is to the world

Every single Christian, in God’s eyes, is now a priest and may, even must, function as a priest before his God. No longer does the believer need any human being to approach God and intercede on his behalf, as did the Old Testament faithful. Every Christian is called to offer up the sacrifices of lips and lives that confess His name. Our lives are given new purpose and direction. We are people with a mission. Luther would ebulliently and frequently speak the blessings of this New Testament priesthood:

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.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that this priesthood was given not to a special class or order of believers, but to all. Any other understanding will lead to negligence and misuse of the Word and Sacraments entrusted to the church.

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 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.<sup>4</sup>

The ministry of the gospel was thus given to Adam and Eve in the first promise of a Savior, who handed it down to their children. It has always been the responsibility of parents to use this gospel to evangelize their children, both under Moses (Dt 6:4 ff.) and Christ (Mt 19:14). We dare never forget, nor let our congregations forget, that parents are the primary “priests” of the home and so will have the greatest influence on the hearts of the children entrusted to them. But not only do Christians use the gospel in their homes; Christ calls them to let

<sup>3</sup> *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 31, p. 355, as quoted in L. Dobberstein’s paper, “Ministry: According to Luther.”

<sup>4</sup> Schaller, J., “The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry,” *WLQ*, January 1981, p. 46, as quoted in Dobberstein, *ibid.*

their light shine before men that others may praise the Father in heaven. In our schools and work places, we are to speak about Christ. This will also mean using the “binding key” which shuts the door to the impenitent, that they may repent (Mt 18:18). But condemnation will always be the strange work of the Holy Spirit, who much prefers to announce forgiveness to the sorrowful, binding up their broken hearts with the balm of grace and leading them to joys eternal.

If all Christians truly are priests, then let them function as priests, fully understanding what a priest is and does. Luther drew up a task description over four hundred years ago for every believer. To Christians in Bohemia, who felt they didn’t have the right to call and ordain their own preachers but must have them ordained by bishops in Italy, Luther wrote:

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.<sup>5</sup>

Preaching God’s Word to others, baptizing, consecrating or administering the Lord’s Supper, binding or loosing sin as God’s representatives, offering sacrifices to God, praying for others and judging doctrine—these are what priests do. This is what Christians are to do.

### **The Public Ministry**

While all Christians are priests by virtue of their baptism, not all Christians are given the right to use their priestly function in every circumstance—particularly when the congregation of believers assembles. The admonition, “Let everything be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Co 14:40), was written to a congregation whose public gatherings were getting messy. Because God is a God of order, not disorder, He desires that Christians appoint or ordain leaders to represent them in using the Keys publicly to prevent chaos and disorder. While every Christian is entitled to perform the priestly function of baptizing a child, and should perform that function in extraordinary settings, our people will normally “handcuff” their priesthood in the public gathering of believers and let the called and ordained pastor do it. Likewise, we could point to the public reading and teaching of Scripture...the public absolution...public prayers...public consecration of Holy Communion...the public blessing. The only difference between pastor and laity is that he has been appointed to the office of public ministry of the gospel in the name and on behalf of the congregation of Christ’s priests and kings gathered before him. God’s Word makes it clear that such public ministers must meet up to certain criteria for service, as demonstrated by Paul’s admonitions in 1 Tim 3:1-13 and Ti 1:6-9. Scripture repeatedly reminds us that when God’s priests (believers) call a qualified representative to serve them in the ministry, there the Holy Spirit is actually extending the call. For that reason, we call it a divine call.

In the *Smalcald Articles*, Luther noted,

For wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the Gospel. There it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians (4: 8), when he says: “He ascended, he gave gifts to men.” And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church pastors and teachers, and adds that such are given for the ministry, “for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. Just as in a case of necessity every a layman absolves, and becomes the minister and pastor of another;

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<sup>5</sup> *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 40, pp. 21-32, as quoted in Dobberstein, *ibid*.

as Augustine narrates the story of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the catechumen, who after Baptism then absolved the baptizer.<sup>6</sup>

Dobberstein speaks of the relationship between public ministry and the universal priesthood of believers. They are not at all in competition!

Public ministry takes nothing away from the ministry which 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.<sup>7</sup>

I sometimes get the feeling that many in the church today are not content to be restricted to a public ministry which acts on their behalf. Pastors sometimes (and with growing regularity) get requests to have lay members read the Scripture lessons at their weddings; or give the obituary or (ugh!) eulogy at their relative's funeral. Some churches have chosen to adopt the regular practice of having lay readers at their worship services, inviting the predictable and vocal criticism, "Why lay men and not lay women?" While it is entirely within the Christian freedom of a congregation to make use of its priests (believers) in whatever priestly function God permits, it is not God's intent to abrogate the public ministry in favor of the universal priesthood. Instead a congregation should investigate ways to use its priests (believers) which will complement the work of its called pastors and teachers—even to free them up from responsibilities not directly linked to their call or to expand the ministry of the gospel—rather than to make them a second or third or fourth pastor.

All of which leads us to the practical question which will serve as the focus for the last part of this presentation: How can the church best make use of its laity in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

### **Making Use of the Laity in Ministry**

From the outset keep in mind that Christ desires for His church a coordinated function of gospel service that resembles the coordinated operation of the human body. For that reason, some have spoken of "body ministry." The apostle wrote in Romans 12:4-8,

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Both here and in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 the Lord points out the need for the church to edify its people with the Word and sacrament so that these people in turn can put to use their special gifts and abilities; or, as Paul put it,

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. (Ep 4:12-13)

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<sup>6</sup> *Smalcald Articles*, "Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops," p. 523, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Dobberstein, Leroy, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Every Christian has been richly blessed by God with special gifts or aptitudes to be used to His glory and the edification of the church. Some gifts may be very evident and used out in front, where everyone can see; others may seem a bit obscure and will be used so that hardly anyone knows it's happening. The Lord assures us that, whether big or small, obvious or hidden, public or private, every gift is important in His church and will be missed if it's not used. Even an ailing toenail can make a man limp.

### **Using the Laity Publicly**

This ministry by our lay people can also be done in a public way, that is, as they are called or appointed by the congregation. When the early Jerusalem appointed the seven deacons to oversee the distribution of food to the poor, those seven were acting in the name and on behalf of the congregation. They were "public ministers." In this way, then, we may cause confusion by referring to our pastors and elementary school teachers as the "called workers" of our congregation. Any worker involved in gospel ministry, whether trained in New Ulm, Watertown, or Boise, who is appointed or called by God's priests, is essentially a called worker. This writer once worked with a Board of Education which balked at the idea of extending a call to its Sunday School teachers because they weren't full time and didn't have the theological training of the LES teachers. Yet they, too, are ministering God's gospel in a public way at the bidding of the church. They are "called."

Another observation that can be drawn from the experience of the Jerusalem church is that public, or representative, ministry may not always involve the direct teaching or preaching of God's Word. Yet it will further the cause of the gospel. The apostles protested,

"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and ministry of the word."....*So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly...* (Ac 6:2 ff.)

The final result of any true gospel ministry is that the Word of God will spread; people in the church will be nurtured, people outside the church will be reached.

Our churches and schools already carry on a number of functions that are not one hundred percent gospel proclamation. Yet we do them because they assist and support the spread of the gospel. The only reason we spend two thirds of our church's budget on an elementary school, teaching math, science, reading, spelling, and social studies is that this enables us also to spread God's Word, both in its own curriculum as well as it is woven into the fabric of the other courses and extracurricular activities. Our Pioneer programs and some men's and women's organizations are not primarily forums for proclaiming law and gospel (although they certainly can be) as much as they are fellowship and service groups which support the teaching that goes on elsewhere.

Likewise we elect officers and boards to serve us in administrative roles that are intimately tied into our church's ministry, yet don't involve preaching the Word or administering the sacraments, public prayers, using the Keys, etc. We want those who serve in those elected positions to know, however, that whether they are balancing our financial books, installing a new furnace, or planning for the fall stewardship drive, they are part of our overall gospel ministry.

This point was made in a paper presented in December to the "WELS Symposium on the Ministry" at Northwestern College. In speaking of both the Acts 7 account and 1 Timothy 5:17, the author remarked,

Though the ministry of the church is the ministry of the gospel, we go too far to insist that one must be involved directly in preaching and teaching the word and/or administering the sacraments to be able to say that he or she is involved in the public ministry of the church. It is proper to say that also those whom a grouping of believers have called to support and assist the

public preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments are engaging in the public ministry of the church.<sup>8</sup>

One reason for developing the staff ministry program at DMLC is that there are areas of work in a congregation that do not necessarily have to be done by pastors or teachers, but would be best filled by someone who had a certain level of training in Scriptures beyond what is common among the laity. The program also recognizes that it is good sense to acknowledge a difference between “member ministry,” which is voluntary and not compensated, and “offices of ministry,” (e.g., minister of education, youth ministries, evangelism, etc.) which could be a person’s full-time calling and would be a paid position.<sup>9</sup>

Can laity also be involved in ministry which does involve the proclaiming of the gospel? We already believe they can, as we have already seen on a children’s level. But what about using lay members to teach adult classes? The three main Biblical requirements are: 1) that they be blameless in their walk with Christ, that is, not causing public offense, 2) that they be qualified to teach, and 3) that they be properly called to do so. As regards that second point, our WELS Board for Parish Services has begun producing materials for the *Training Christians for Ministry* curriculum—a level by level approach which will encourage continued spiritual growth and equipping of the saints for service. Churches can think of themselves as “mini seminaries” where they can provide thorough training to lay members so as to equip them with enough knowledge that they could confidently lead Bible studies under the pastor’s direction.

How we acknowledge the service of the public ministers in a church will vary.

Not all...receive formal calls, diplomas of vocation. Some are ordained, some installed, some inducted, some commissioned, some merely introduced, and some are simply put to work, perhaps even without special mention. Be all of that as it may, as long as members of the church, in whatever way they have gathered to express themselves, have asked the services of these people,... they all have divine calls.<sup>10</sup>

### Using the Laity Individually

The great majority of Christ’s people will not be serving in positions which we would call public ministry. They will be the unheralded who show up for church cleaning day, or stuff bulletins quietly down in the church office, or paint the flagpole on the school grounds that has been rusting for so many years. Some will perform a task on a regular basis; others will respond to a summons in the bulletin for a special need. In our schools, teachers may make use of parents who regularly sit in the classroom or design bulletin boards, help teach art class or correct papers, play the piano for junior choir, or clean chalk off the blackboards. Even here, there may be questions as to what is really public ministry and what is better called volunteerism.

In any case, this is where most of us will find the greatest use of our members. While we may find a need to establish the post of “Minister of Family Education” or some other, chances are that we can already take advantage of those priests before us in a more down-to-earth way. We can brainstorm ways to make our ministry open to others who may not know how they fit in to this great commission. We can examine whether some of the things we do “because we’ve always done them ourselves” could legitimately be passed on to another. The principal of our school has made an effort to do this when it comes to the time consuming job of checking in book orders from the various companies and managing our bookstore accounts; he now has laywomen taking care of these.

The familiar complaint often heard in congregations is, “We can’t find enough volunteers to do the work!” No doubt, this is partly due to a society head over heels in the business of two income families, kids involved as never before in sports and other activities, and the influence of a recreation minded generation. But there may be other reasons—things we full time church workers inadvertently do that may discourage people

<sup>8</sup> Valleskey, David, “Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers,” p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> 1991 *BoRaM*, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> 1965 *Proceedings*, pp. 57-58, “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys,” by Prof. em. Erwin Scharf, as quoted in Valleskey, *op. cit.*

from serving as they like. In an excellent presentation to a group of mission pastors, Prof. Valleskey from our seminary pointed out that Christians really do want to serve, according to their new man. Following are some things to keep in mind when we ask them to serve:

- \* People want to feel that they belong.
- \* People want to do meaningful work.
- \* People want to do work that appeals to them.
- \* People want to do work that is challenging.
- \* People want to do work they are able to do.
- \* People want to know what they are supposed to do.
- \* People want to know how much time is involved.
- \* People want to have a feeling of achievement.<sup>11</sup>

### **Your Turn**

This writer does not in any way consider himself an expert when it comes to involving laity in service. The times when he has, it's always been rewarding and helpful to the ministry of Word and sacrament. Now we will take a few moments to gain insights from the experiences of the "royal priests" gathered here today. As we divide up for discussion, address your attention to any or all of these three questions:

1. In what unique ways are we currently using lay members to enhance or support our public ministry of the gospel?
2. What are some obstacles that keep us from using the laity more?
3. What are some areas where we could, or should, be enlisting more of our laity—for their good and ours?

### **Conclusion**

Back to the title. Is lay ministry "the wave of the future"? From Scripture and our confessions, we see it is no more a futuristic kind of thinking than it was at the time of the apostles. It's actually a wave of the past! Could it be that we have not always exercised the truth of the priesthood of all believers? Certainly. Is it the cure-all for the church's woes? No. The Word of God is our cure, and it is our ministry. All the priests of God can rejoice in His world-wide message of grace and reconciliation. Can we continue working toward making the priesthood of all believers a visible reality in our churches? Can we do less? The laity can also exult in the privilege of being a part of the ministry of that gospel, both public and private. God lead us to carry on that ministry until the day Christ appears in glory, that together we may rejoice in the harvest and hear His approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

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<sup>11</sup> Valleskey, David, "Motivating and Mobilizing the Laity for Service," presented to the Nebraska District Missionaries' Conference at North Platte, November 6, 1990, p. 19.