

# Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers

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The August 1991 convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, assembled at Dr. Martin Luther College, adopted the following resolution:

WHEREAS 1) several congregations of our synod have already created staff ministry positions;  
and

WHEREAS 2) other congregations are contemplating the formation of staff ministry positions;  
and

WHEREAS 3) there is an increasing need for specialized help to enhance the total ministry of a  
growing number of congregations; and

WHEREAS 4) this need has led church councils and the Conference of Presidents to recommend  
a staff ministry program; and

WHEREAS 5) the proposed staff ministry program is in accord with the Word of God; and

WHEREAS 6) the WELS itself has created a variety of ministerial offices to meet the needs and  
opportunities of contemporary ministry, e.g., mission counselors, administrators,  
etc.; and

WHEREAS 7) decency and order require theological training and certification of candidates in  
this form of public ministry; therefore, be it

**Resolved,** that the synod adopt the proposed staff ministry program.<sup>1</sup>

The staff ministry program referred to by the convention floor committee which brought this resolution is outlined on pages 175-187 of the 1991 *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BoRaM) for the Fifty-first Biennial Convention of the WELS. Entitled "Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry," it was prepared by a committee composed of members of the Conference of Presidents, the Board for Parish Services, and the Board for Worker Training.

The report was the culmination of a series of studies on this subject. The 1983 synodical convention, evidently in response to the Conference of Presidents' endorsement of "the proposal of the Dr. Martin Luther College planning committee for a conference on the office of 'Minister of Christian Education,'"<sup>2</sup> adopted the resolution "that we encourage the Conference of Presidents to continue the study of additional forms of ministry and their impact on our synod's congregations and worker training schools."<sup>3</sup> Several committees since that time have done just that. The Conference of Presidents, the Board for Parish Services, and the Board for Worker Training have all been studying this issue. With the 1991 synod convention these three groups came together to bring the joint "Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry" adopted by the synod.

This essay on "Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers" flows from the context of this decision of the 1991 convention to inaugurate a synodical program of staff ministry, a decision which even now is in the process of being implemented.

In a certain sense the synod is hardly charting a new course. From the beginning of the synod's existence we have been operating with the concept of staff ministry in our congregations, though we have not always acknowledged or labeled it as such. I'm thinking, of course, about our Lutheran elementary school teachers, whom we have come to recognize as being involved in the public ministry of the church, though the

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<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Fifty-first Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1991, pp. 94-95.

<sup>2</sup> 1983 BoRaM, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> 1983 Proceedings, pp. 41-42.

scope of their call is not so broad as that of the pastor's. With the recommendation to provide training for such offices as ministers of family and youth, evangelism, administration, and deaconess we are simply expanding that concept.

Yet it is good for us to pause for a moment to study the ramifications of the expanded program of congregational staff ministry envisioned in the 1991 synodical resolution. While we do that, it will also be beneficial for us to look at how the service of congregational members fits into the whole picture. Hence, the title, "Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers."

Though the assigned title, "Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers," indicates that this is to be more in the nature of a practical than a theological paper, there is a key theological issue that needs to be resolved first. This is the issue: How do these four forms of service in and for the church—pastor, teacher, staff minister, and member minister—relate to each other? Can we rightfully look upon each of them as a different form of the public ministry? If so, what is the common denominator (or denominators) that identify these forms of spiritual service as public ministry? If not, what is it about one or more of these forms of service that prohibits them from being called public ministry?

It is the conviction of this essayist that all of these forms of service in and for the church, including staff and member ministry, as different as they may be from one another in many ways, lie on the same plane. Each can properly be called public ministry. We plan first to offer the biblical, as well as the confessional, basis for this contention. Then we will turn to several practical applications. The following seven propositional statements summarize what we intend to cover:

- + Including staff ministry and member ministry, together with pastor and teacher ministry, under the term public ministry is biblical.
- + Utilization of staff and member ministry is beneficial, both to the individual Christian and to the church as a whole.
- + A careful selection, based on both spiritual qualities and practical aptitudes, is critical.
- + Thorough training, commensurate with the responsibility given, is essential.
- + A precise delineation of the scope of duties of pastor, teacher, staff, and member ministers is vital.
- + To avoid confusion, a careful use of terminology is imperative.
- + For the best interests of the kingdom, a mutual respect for each other's ministry is indispensable.

**Biblical Basis: Including staff ministry and member ministry, together with pastor and teacher ministry, under the term public ministry is biblical.**

Parts of what we have to say in what follows may be somewhat repetitive in view of the two essays we heard yesterday. I will therefore cover this section as briefly as possible. We need to begin with the biblical basis, however, to set a proper foundation.

### **Mission**

First, some thoughts on the mission Christ has entrusted to his church. There is a close correlation between mission and ministry. When one is clear on the mission of the church, then the church's ministry also comes into sharp focus.

Even a cursory study of the four Gospels, particularly their closing "commissioning" verses (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-23), gives us a clear picture of Christ's mission for his church. Matthew's account of the Great Commission emphasizes the end result our Lord had in mind: "Make disciples," he said. A disciple literally is a "learner." In the way the four evangelists use this term, however, it is generally

synonymous with a follower of Jesus Christ, a believer. Matthew's account also specifies the means by which disciples are made: by baptizing and teaching.

Mark's account begins with the means: "Preach the good news to all creation." The result? "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

In the last chapter of Luke, Jesus tells what his followers will do in his name: "Repentance and remission of sins will be preached in his name." With these words Jesus is pointing to the powerful effects of using the means of grace. They work the miracle of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." The assumption, of course, is that his disciples will employ the means the Holy Spirit uses to work forgiveness of sins.

In summary, in his last days before returning to his Father the risen Christ set this mission before his church: make disciples, bring to people the blessings of repentance, faith, and forgiveness of sins, by faithfully using the means of grace.

Making disciples includes nurturing those who have become disciples. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Jesus tells his church to "make disciples" by "baptizing" and by "teaching them to obey **everything**" he had commanded. The word translated "to obey" (Greek, *terein*) might better be rendered "to guard, to hold firmly to." What should people hold firmly to? **Everything** Jesus had taught. That implies the need for being taught, of course, since one cannot hold firmly to that which he or she has not received. And it also implies being taught more than the foundational truths necessary for salvation.

From the Great Commission, then, the church receives its charter not just for making disciples of all the nations of the earth but also for nurturing those who have been made disciples. Those who have **become** disciples through the means of grace are also to be given opportunity to **grow** as disciples as they are taught everything Christ commanded.

## Ministry

When Christ commissioned his church, he thereby also established its ministry. If the *mission* of the church is to make and nurture disciples, then the church's *ministry*, its *diakonia*, the way by which it serves its Lord, will necessarily center around the means through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes this mission. That is the way the Scriptures and likewise the Confessions speak. The Augsburg Confession says: "In order that we may obtain this faith [i.e., saving faith in Christ], the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted."<sup>4</sup>

The Formula of Concord puts it even more simply. It speaks of "the ministry of the church, the Word proclaimed and heard."<sup>5</sup>

In line with the way the Scriptures and Confessions speak, the doctrinal statement of the WELS entitled *Theses on the Church and Ministry*<sup>6</sup> states:

Christ instituted one office in his Church, the ministry of the Gospel. It is the task of proclaiming the gospel in word and sacrament. Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Jn 20:21-23; Ac 1:8; 1 Pt 2:9; Lk 22:19-20. This office or service, the ministry of the keys, has been given to the Church, i.e., to the believers individually and collectively. Mt 16:19; Mt 10:32; Mt 18:18; 1 Pt 2:9.

## Universal Priesthood (personal ministry)

<sup>4</sup> Article V, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XII, 30.

<sup>6</sup> This statement, prepared by the Doctrinal Commission of the WELS, was adopted in 1969 by the Fortieth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and subsequently printed in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2 (April 1970). The quote is from pages 128-129.

What Christ said to Simon Peter as representative of the apostles (Mt 16:19), he also applied to his whole church: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 18:18). The ministry of the keys, the gospel ministry, is the possession of the church and thus of every member of the church. The Confessions state:

The keys [i.e., the gospel ministry] were given to the church and not merely to certain individuals: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Finally, this is confirmed by the declaration of Peter: “You are a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9).<sup>7</sup>

Luther never tired of extolling the virtues of the universal priesthood of believers. Commenting on 1 Peter 2, he writes:

Peter names the people and the congregation very clearly, and he calls them all together a royal priesthood and commands them to preach the deeds of God who has called them... Thereby the Holy Spirit teaches us that ointments, masses, sermons, etc., do not make priests or give power. Rather, priesthood and power have to be there first, brought from baptism and common to all Christians through the faith which builds them upon Christ the true high priest.<sup>8</sup>

Again, he writes:

No one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest... But if it is true that they have God’s word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread [his word].<sup>9</sup>

All of God’s people are called to serve as priests in their private lives. This is their personal ministry. They do this in two ways. By the testimony of a godly life they function as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). This may well be the primary way by which Christians will be able to touch bases with an increasingly secularized society which is not necessarily overtly hostile to religion but simply doesn’t find it particularly relevant or meaningful. The testimony of a Christian’s life may lead a person to ask about “the reason for the hope we have” (1 Pt 3:15). That in turn may be the opening the Lord provides for the Christian to share the life-giving, life-changing gospel.

Christians carry on their personal ministry as priests of God also by the testimony of their lips. Jesus told the demoniac of Gerasa out of whom he had driven a legion of demons, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mk 5:20). John Schaller gives a few examples of such private functioning by God’s priests:

When Christians at a social gathering privately discuss with one another the great deeds God has done to accomplish the salvation of sinners, even if this is in a most informal way, the gospel is then under discussion, and the one who gives expression to it is carrying on the ministry. When a member of the family or a Christian neighbor who is not a pastor, yes, when a mother, sister, or Christian neighbor lady offers a sick person the comfort of the forgiveness of sins or in some other way strengthens his patience by pointing to the goodness of God our Savior, spiritual priests and priestesses are functioning in the New Testament ministry.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Smalcald Articles, On the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> American Edition of Luther’s Works, henceforth AE, vol. 39, pp. 236-237.

<sup>9</sup> AE, vol. 39, p. 309.

<sup>10</sup> John Schaller, “The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 1, p. 39.

That all Christians are priests with a “ministry” to perform—serving their God with lips and lives—is, I am safe in assuming, not only a deeply-held conviction among us, but a biblical teaching that all of us, with Luther, highly prize and cherish.

### Public Ministry

A special form of that one ministry of the gospel, a form which is of particular interest to us in this essay, is the public ministry, that is, ministry which one is called to do in the name of and on behalf of one’s fellow Christians. Here again I am confident we are in agreement that there is no essential difference between the personal ministry Christ has given to every Christian (universal priesthood) and the public, or representative, ministry. A study of the Scriptures makes it clear that no duties are assigned to public ministers that have not also been made the responsibility of every believer.

There are certain functions of the ministry of the gospel, however, that can hardly be carried out by all at the same time without disorder and confusion, e.g., preaching in the worship service and administering the sacraments when the congregation is gathered together. There are also functions of the ministry for which not all Christians are equally trained or gifted.

It is for this purpose that Jesus instituted the public ministry. Luther writes:

You should put the Christian into two places. First, if he is in a place where there are no Christians he needs no other call than to be a Christian, called and anointed by God from within. Here it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel to erring heathen or non-Christians, because of the duty of brotherly love, even though no man calls him to do so...Second, if he is at a place where there are Christians who have the same power and right as he, he should not draw attention to himself. Instead he should let himself be called and chosen to preach and to teach in the place of and by command of the others.<sup>11</sup>

The Confessions likewise emphasize the need for a call by a body of believers: “Nobody should preach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called.”<sup>12</sup>

The public ministry, ministry in the name of and on behalf of a group of Christians, is a divine institution. It did not simply develop in the church as a matter of expediency; nor was it merely derived from the universal priesthood. The Confessions state: “The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly, for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it.”<sup>13</sup>

This confessional statement echoes the way the Scriptures speak. Though one will search in vain for a direct word of institution for the public ministry<sup>14</sup> as, e.g., for baptism, the Scriptures assume the existence of what we have come to call the public ministry. The need for a call (Ro 10:15), the listing of qualifications (1 Tm 3; Ti 1), the Lord’s command “that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16; cf. also 1 Tm 5:18), the counsel to honor and obey one’s spiritual leaders (He 13:7,17), the Pauline example of appointing elders (Ac 14:23), the Pauline command to Titus to appoint elders (Ti 1:5), all of these make it clear that the public ministry is God’s will for his church. Public ministers of the gospel are Christ’s own gifts to his church (Eph 4:11ff). Those who exercise spiritual oversight in the name of and behalf of a group of believers are established in that position by the Holy Spirit himself (Ac 20:28).

<sup>11</sup> AE, vol. 39, p. 310.

<sup>12</sup> Augsburg Confession, Article XIV.

<sup>13</sup> Apology, Article XIII, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Some try to link the institution of the public ministry with the institution of the apostolic office. This is hardly plausible, though, since the office of apostle was a distinct, non-transferable office. The apostolic office is evidence, however, of the Lord’s intent that his church be served by spiritual leaders.

## Forms of the Public Ministry

Important for the topic at hand, however, is to remember that, while the public ministry is a divine institution, the Scriptures do not prescribe the precise form or forms that this ministry will take. The Scriptures themselves, in fact, give several examples of forms that the one public ministry of the gospel can assume. They speak of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers (Eph 4:11-12), of elder/overseers and deacons (1 Tm 3; Php 1:1).

Former Northwestern College professor, Walter Schumann, in an essay for the Thirty-eighth Biennial Convention of the WELS, held at Watertown in 1965, is simply stating the way the Scriptures speak when he writes:

God has given us no rules, he has instituted no specific, outward forms in which and through which the gospel is to be preached. That matter is left to the church according to the peculiar needs of the day and the circumstances in which it lives. The exigencies of the age create, develop, and shape the historical form it acquires, needful and peculiar to its time. In the United States we have the pastorate. Pastorate, or “Pfarramt,” is not a biblical term. It must not be identified with the term “ministry” of the New Testament. It has the relation to it of species to genus. It is one of the historically developed forms of the general term, the genus.<sup>15</sup>

The WELS *Theses on Church and Ministry* puts it this way:

There is...no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry. The one public ministry of the gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand. Acts 6:1-6. The specific forms in which Christians establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to his New Testament church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need. Various functions are mentioned in Scripture: 1 Tm 4:13; Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28; Rm 12:6-8; 2 Tm 2:2; Jn 21:15-17 (feeding); Ac 20:28 (watching); 1 Tm 3:2; 4:11; 6:2 (teaching); 1 Tm 3:5; 5:17 (ruling). In spite of the great diversity in the external form of the ministerial work, the ministry is essentially one. The various offices for the public preaching of the gospel, not only those enumerated above, e.g., in Eph 4:11 and 1 Cor 12:28, but also those developed in our day, are all gifts of the exalted Christ to his church which the church receives gratefully and with due regard for love and order employs under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the spiritual body of Christ; and all of them are comprehended under the general commission to preach the gospel given to all believers.<sup>16</sup>

The scope of the work may be broad; it may be narrow. The training needed may be extensive; it may be relatively minimal. The gifts required may be many; they may be few. The work may call for full-time service; it may call for part-time service. The person serving may be a man; within the scriptural guidelines (e.g., 1 Tm 2:11-14), the worker may be a woman. The position may be permanent; it may be temporary. The worker may receive remuneration for his work; he may do it gratis.

None of these are determining factors as to whether or not a person is involved in public ministry. The key is this: Has the person been called by the congregation (or another grouping of believers) to help carry out the ministry of word and sacrament in its name and on its behalf? The call could come in a formal way, as, e.g., it does in our circles to a pastor or a Lutheran elementary school teacher; or it could come in a more informal way through, e.g., a congregational appointment or election. Formal or informal, if a grouping of believers requests a person to become involved in the ministry of the gospel in its name and on its behalf, that constitutes

<sup>15</sup> “The Ministry of the Keys—Its Essence,” 1965 Proceedings, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 2 (April 1970), p. 130.

a call into the public ministry. The assumption is that the calling body will call only one who is capable of carrying out what the call requires or will see to it that the person receives the necessary training. More on this point later.

Can one serve in the public ministry of the church without being involved directly with preaching and teaching the word and/or administering the sacraments? The Scriptures themselves, which prescribe no specific forms of the public ministry, give us some examples of ministry done in the name of and on behalf of the congregation that did not directly involve the administration of the means of grace.

The seven “deacons” of Acts 6:1ff, for example, were not called by the congregation to preach the word or to administer the sacraments, though in time at least some of them, e.g., Stephen and Philip, did begin to do just that. Their assignment was to assist with welfare work in the congregation, to make sure the needy widows were properly and impartially provided for. They were not directly involved in word and sacrament ministry, but they did serve in an important supportive capacity, permitting the over-burdened apostles to “give attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Ac 6:4).

Writing to Timothy, Paul says, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching [*malista hoi kopiontes en logo kai didaskalia*]” (1 Tm 5:17). If some elders labored in preaching and teaching, obviously there were other elders who labored in different areas. Some of them, for example, may have had the gift of administration. That this was also a form of the public ministry can be seen from the fact that Paul lists it along with the offices of apostles, prophets, and teachers and speaks of them all as “appointed” (*etheto*) by God (cf. 1 Cor 12:28). Significantly, in the 1 Timothy passage quoted above both those who labor in preaching and teaching and those who are not directly involved in these activities have the same title, elder (*presbuteros*). If one group, those who labored in preaching and teaching, was in the public ministry, then the other group, who in some way assisted and undergirded those directly involved with word and sacrament ministry, were also in the public ministry.

Both of these examples from Scripture (Ac 6:1ff; 1 Tm 5:17) illustrate the same point: 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.

Luther makes this distinction in his treatise “Concerning the Ministry.” In it he mentions two of the seven “deacons,” Stephen and Philip, “who were ordained only to the service of tables.” That was the scope of their public ministry. “Yet,” he wrote, “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, and the other converted Samaritans and travelled to Azotus and Caesarea.”

“By what right and authority,” Luther asks, did these men do this? He answers his own question:

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?<sup>17</sup>

Following the lead of the Scriptures and Luther, Northwestern College Professor Emeritus Erwin Scharf, in a synod convention essay entitled, “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys,” speaks of those “who work among us in the public use of the Keys, preaching, teaching, aiding or guiding the precious activity of sharing the Gospel” [emphasis added]. He then asks the question, “Who of these people has a divine call [i.e., which of them is in the public ministry?]?” This is his answer:

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<sup>17</sup> AE, vol. 40, p. 38.

They all do...[The call] is simply this that a group of Christians, however great or small, their number matters none, has expressed the desire to have a chosen person to serve them in the public use of the Keys *in one capacity or the other*. And acceptance of that wish, fulfillment of it, completes the essence of the call [emphasis added].

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>18</sup>

Today, likewise, in our church body we can properly say that, e.g., a synodical or parachurch organization administrator, a prep school or area Lutheran high school English teacher, a Dr. Martin Luther College mathematics professor, a Northwestern College classical language professor, a Wisconsin Lutheran College chemistry professor, are all serving in the public ministry of the church. The determining factor is this: have they been called to directly preach or teach the word or, as in the case of some of the elders at Ephesus and the seven “deacons,” to aid and support the preaching and teaching of the word? If the answer is yes, then they are serving in the public ministry of the church.

So it is with the two forms of ministry with which this essay is especially interested: staff ministry and member ministry. A few years down the road a congregation may call a graduate of the staff ministry program just now getting underway at Dr. Martin Luther College and ask him to serve as a “minister of administration” in the congregation. If the congregation sees this task as a part of the overall ministry of word and sacrament in its midst, albeit in a supportive rather than a direct way, such a call is a divine call and the man who accepts it is accepting a call into the public ministry of the church.

Likewise, a congregational member who is asked to serve in the name of the congregation in the congregation’s ministry of word and sacrament, either directly, e.g., as an evangelism caller, or supportively, e.g., as a congregational officer, is serving in the church’s public ministry.

There will always be grey areas. In some cases, as Joel Gerlach brought out in an essay entitled, “The Servant’s Call,” it will “depend on how the church views the task in relation to its ministry.”<sup>19</sup> To give an example: In the congregation I served before coming to the Seminary we made a determined effort to demonstrate that maintenance of the church’s grounds and property was a part of the church’s overall ministry of word and sacrament, though in a supportive rather than a direct way. The congregation elected a board of spiritual leaders, the board of elders. Each elder, in turn, assumed responsibility for one function of the congregation’s total program. One man was designated property elder. By virtue of how the congregation viewed his work, it was clear that he was being called to serve in the public ministry of the congregation. As was true of the seven “deacons” of Acts 6, his job was to help support the ministry of the word in the congregation.

The concern has been expressed by some that such a broad definition of public ministry dilutes and even cheapens the concept of public ministry. The contention is that when everything is ministry, then nothing is ministry. A particular concern of some is that when so much is included under the title “public ministry,” respect for the pastoral office will be undermined. These concerns need to be addressed and will be in the balance of this essay.

At this point it is perhaps sufficient to add the following two comments. First, to say that one can be involved in the public ministry of the church even when he is not directly involved with preaching or teaching the word or administering the sacraments is not to suggest that every time a person does some work for his congregation, e.g., participates in a workday or helps with a mailing of the monthly newsletter, that then he or she is exercising the office of the public ministry. Both Acts 6:1ff and 1 Timothy 5:17 describe a call to some

<sup>18</sup> 1965 Proceedings, pp. 57-58.

<sup>19</sup> Joel Gerlach, “The Servant’s Call” (Essay file, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary), p. 9.



kind of ongoing leadership role—whether organizing and overseeing the distribution of food to the widows or serving as a non-preaching and teaching elder. It does not have to be a full-time position. It could have a specific time limit, e.g., an election or appointment to a certain number of years of service. It will, however, involve more than simply responding to a general call for volunteers. Public ministry, the Scripture indicates, carries with it some kind of leadership role, though the scope of leadership will not be the same in every form of ministry.

A second comment: Though those not directly engaged in preaching or teaching the word or administering the sacraments can under certain circumstances be said to be serving in the public ministry of the church, it should be noted that the Scriptures do make a distinction between the service of such persons and of those directly involved in the ministry of word and sacrament. Paul’s words to Timothy are instructive: “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Tm 5:17). In Acts 6 the need to provide time for the “ministry of the word of God” (Ac 6:2) brought about the need for the “ministry” of food distribution, not vice versa. Clearly, as Wilbert Gawrisch brings out,

Those offices that directly involve the preaching and teaching of God’s Word are, as the Apology says, “the highest office in the church.” But the others are important too, and those who do such work well are worthy of double honor (1 Timothy 5:17).<sup>20</sup>

Including staff ministry and member ministry, even that which supports rather than directly participates in word and sacrament ministry, under the term public ministry is biblical.

**Value: Utilization of staff and member ministry is beneficial, both to the individual Christian and to the church as a whole.**

### **Beneficial to the Individual Christian**

Utilization of staff and member ministry is beneficial to the individual Christian. God gives different gifts to different people. St. Paul writes to the Romans: “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” (Ro 12:4-6). He says essentially the same thing in 1 Corinthians: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men” (1 Cor 12:4-6). What is the purpose of this wide variety of gifts? Paul says, “To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7).

Whatever the gifts may be with which a Christian has been blessed, they are not meant to be hidden or to lie idle. St. Paul counseled that if a person has received a gift, he should use it (cf. Ro 12:6-8). The extended body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 (verses 12-27) drives home the same point. Just as the contribution of every part of the human body is vital to the functioning of the body as a whole, so it is with every part of the Body of Christ.

In our congregational stewardship programs we wisely remind our people that a Christian’s stewardship does not begin and end with but one aspect of life, that is, the way he handles his money. Christian stewardship has to do with the careful managing of every resource with which the believer has been entrusted, including his gifts—all to be used for the glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ. The Christian’s personal ministry as a priest of God includes a wise, prudent use of all of his gifts (cf. Lk 16:1-9).

The believer with special gifts in one or more areas may also be asked by the congregation to use his or her gifts in the name of and on behalf of the congregation and thus to serve in some aspect of the church’s

<sup>20</sup> “The Doctrine of Church and Ministry in the Life of the Church Today” (essay presented to the Fifty-first Biennial Convention of the WELS, 1991, and printed in the 1991 Proceedings, pp. 243-244). The Apology quotation is from Art. XV, 43; *Triglotta*, p. 327.

public ministry of the gospel. Our congregations have been doing that through the years by electing congregational officers, appointing Sunday school teachers, choir directors, organists, etc. Thus individual believers are able to use their gifts not only as personal ministers (universal priesthood), but, by call of the congregation, to utilize them as member ministers, a part of the public ministry of the church, though it be on a part-time basis.

But what about those believers who have a desire to serve their Lord full-time in the church's public ministry? Up to this point in our synod's history we have, with some few exceptions, offered two options: Train for the pastoral ministry, which, by the nature of the work involved, is restricted to men, or prepare for the teaching ministry, which until very recently meant teaching in an elementary school. Within the past few years, recognizing that gifts differ, we have set up a program for the training of secondary school teachers. Now a student enrolling at Dr. Martin Luther College has the option of preparing strictly for elementary school teaching or of including additional training for teaching on the secondary level.

Broadening the concept of staff ministry from that of Lutheran elementary school teacher to other areas such as youth and family ministry, deaconess, and administration enables people with gifts other than those required for serving as a pastor or teacher to serve in the full-time public ministry of the church. It can help to make fuller use of some with special gifts that do not fit into the pastor or teacher paradigm. That, too, is consistent with the way the Scriptures encourage those with gifts to use them as fully as possible.

### **Beneficial to the Church**

But not only does the utilization of staff and member ministry benefit individual believers by giving them special opportunities to use their gifts, it also is beneficial to the church. In the early days of our synod there were times when a pastor, in addition to all his duties as shepherd of the flock, served also as the teacher, the only teacher, of the church's school. That is unheard of today. The closest we come to it are the relatively few instances where the pastor serves as non-teaching principal of the school.

Why is that? Is it that today's pastors cannot handle as much as those who have gone before them? That they are not as willing to put themselves out to such a degree? That they do not want to spend such long hours? Such would hardly seem to be the case. There do not appear to be many under-worked pastors in our midst. A more likely reason is that we are not living in the same kind of world our fathers 100, 50, or even 25 years ago inhabited. The church has not escaped being touched by the various changes affecting the society in which we live.

In a recent, perceptive convention essay entitled, "The Changing Profile of the Public Ministry,"<sup>21</sup> Daniel Koelpin provides a vivid, thought-provoking look at the world around us. Among the challenges facing today's church, he lists:

**Materialism**—"an obsession with money and things";

**The breakup of the family**—"the fragmentation of society's most basic unit";

**Privatization**—"the flight from the rat race into the maze of self," as seen, for example, by the tendency of many toward "cocooning," isolating themselves from others even within the family of believers; Coworking of

**Pluralism**—which, carried over into religion, is the idea that all religions are "valid and equally worthwhile";

**The fast pace of life**—which is giving people less and less discretionary time, time for family, time for service within the church;

**The coloring of America**—By the year 2000 there will be close to 73 million blacks, Hispanics, and Asians in the United States. How will our churches handle this world mission opportunity right on our doorstep?;

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Koelpin, "The Changing Profile of the Public Ministry," essay delivered to the 1991 Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastor-Teacher Conference (Essay file, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary).

**The graying of America**—“For the first time in our history, there are more Americans over 65 than there are teenagers...The fastest growing age group in America today is the age group over 85. By the year 2000,...40% of all Americans will be over the age of 50.” How will the church care for the growing number of elderly people? How can it put their considerable gifts to work?;

**Mega-churches**—“striving to be all things to all parishioners.” How will the church handle the challenge of offering the increasing number of spiritual services some of our members are seeking? “Even traditional churches cannot afford to totally ignore the service concerns of its parishioners”;

**Women**—“changing lifestyles and expectations.” With 55% of American women working out of the home, a figure expected to increase to 61% , there is no longer a sizeable pool of willing volunteers for work in the church. How will that gap be filled? And how can the gifts of women who are able to serve and want to serve be more fully utilized?<sup>22</sup>

As he takes a look at our congregations, Koelpin offers the following observations, all of which are germane to the subject of staff and member ministry:

1. Large numbers of our church members...are spiritually and biblically ill-equipped to resist today’s worldly influences;
2. The Sunday morning worship service can’t carry it all;
3. The ministry we are not getting done is hurting us more than we know;
4. Pastors and teachers can’t do it all alone;
5. Member ministry [i.e., part-time ministry such as carried out by a congregation’s Board of Elders] has some working problems, among them being the difficulty in finding enough members with the time and gifts to do the work and in finding time for recruiting and training them;
6. There is a shortage of called workers for our present structure.<sup>23</sup>

What can be done? Koelpin offers as his first response: Take “an honest look at more staffing, creative staffing options, new forms of staffing.”<sup>24</sup> Such an action will not be a panacea, a cure-all for everything that ails us. Satan is alive and active on planet earth. We are living in the last days, a time when “evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse” (2 Tm 3:13). When we close one door to Satan, he will try to get in by way of another.

However, if the apostles sensed the need to add “staff ministers” in their day (Ac 6:1ff) so they could concentrate on prayer and ministry of the word, the value of doing the same today can hardly be questioned. With additional staffing to assist them, pastors can put their primary efforts into what they are called to do: preach and teach the word, administer the sacraments, and in that way nurture the members of their flock to keep them alive and growing and representing their Lord well in their lives.

In summary, utilizing staff and member ministry can help to put to work in the church the gifts people possess that are different from the gifts required for the pastoral or teaching ministry. It can help broaden and extend the word and sacrament ministry of the congregation by putting more people to work who bring their many gifts, representing “God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pt 4:10), into the ministry of the church. And it can help to give the pastor time to focus his attention on what he knows to be his primary pastoral priorities.

Several years ago then parish pastor, now Northwestern College professor, John Braun wrote:

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

There are so many things to do in the pastoral ministry that it is difficult to do them all...I have wondered out loud whether our established congregations are understaffed as a general rule. The shortage in manpower in the past years has perhaps created an attitude that is counter-productive for outreach. We hesitate to ask for additional manpower because it is needed somewhere else more urgently. So we end up struggling to do the work by ourselves, working long and difficult hours but accomplishing little more than holding action.<sup>25</sup>

If the need for additional staffing in our congregations was apparent in 1984, that need has hardly decreased today. There is still a shortage of pastoral graduates, and, apparently, will be for a number of years. Soon, though, there could be a pool of people trained for staff ministry positions, who could very well be put to work, according to their gifts and training, in areas now being neglected to a greater or lesser degree simply because of pastoral time constraints. Utilization of member ministry has already shown itself to be beneficial to the church (what congregation could long exist without the dedicated service of many of its members who serve in leadership roles in the name of and on behalf of the congregation?); utilization of staff ministry likewise has the potential to be of real benefit to the church.

We might also add that three years ago (February 1989) an ad hoc committee appointed by the synod's Board for Parish Services, the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Public Ministry, sent a questionnaire to a sampling of pastors in the synod soliciting their opinions about the subject of what we are today calling staff ministry. The committee chairman reported that "the responses elicited in [the] questionnaire seem to acknowledge the value and desirability of ministries which do not entail preaching and teaching."<sup>26</sup>

The designer of the questionnaire reported: "Several areas of ministry suggest themselves strongly as possible areas in which alternative forms of public ministry might be developed." Four ministerial functions in particular, the survey brought out, "evangelism, administration, counseling, and youth, suggest themselves as areas for which alternative forms of public ministry could be developed."<sup>27</sup>

A training program in precisely these areas, with the addition of family ministry and deaconess, is now either in the process of being implemented or, in the case of counseling, under consideration. In view of the breakdown of the family in our time, it is not difficult to see the value of a staff ministry position of family ministry. As for the position of deaconess, intended to provide "spiritual service to the women and youth of the congregation,"<sup>28</sup> the joint Conference of Presidents, Board for Parish Services, and Board for Worker Training committee which submitted the "Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry" to the 1991 convention of the synod said it well:

As we clarify biblical principles on the role and relationship of men and women for this generation, it is expedient to provide opportunities for women to serve in biblically appropriate ministries other than Lutheran elementary school teacher. The office of deaconess has both Lutheran history and contemporary applicability.<sup>29</sup>

A subsequent survey, distributed to pastors, teachers, and lay delegates at the 1990 district conventions, met with essentially the same response as the 1989 survey that went out only to pastors:

Responses...indicate a fairly high degree of acceptance and interest for staff ministry. 638 responded that WELS congregations "should strongly consider a staff minister instead of a

<sup>25</sup> John Braun, "Some Concerns for the Public Ministry," essay delivered to the Milwaukee Metro-North Pastoral Conference, 1984, p. 15 (Essay file, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary).

<sup>26</sup> "A Rationale for Accepting and Encouraging Alternative Forms of Public Ministry," 1989, p. 6 (prepared for the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Ministry and the Board for Parish Services of the WELS).

<sup>27</sup> "An Analysis of the Perceptions of WELS Clergy toward Congregational Ministry Needs and Forms," 1989, p. 31 (prepared for the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Ministry and the Board for Parish Services of the WELS).

<sup>28</sup> 1991 BoRaM, p. 182.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

second pastor,” in the event of a shortage of pastoral candidates. 398 said congregations “should strongly consider a staff minister instead of a third pastor.” Only 181 indicated that congregations “should not consider staff ministry an option.” 578 thought their congregations “would consider such staff ministry in long-range planning”; and 256 of these indicated that their congregation “might call a staff minister within the next six years,” whether part-time or full-time.<sup>30</sup>

Staff ministry may well be an application of the doctrine of the public ministry whose time has come for our synod.

We have been making certain assumptions throughout this essay, assumptions which we need to spell out clearly. That we intend to do in the next several points. For staff ministry and member ministry to be a God-glorifying, Body of Christ-building contribution to the public ministry of the church, we need

- + to make a careful selection of those asked to serve in these areas;
- + to provide adequate training;
- + to clearly delineate the scope of duties of those involved in the church’s public ministry;
- + to make careful use of terminology to avoid confusion.

**Qualifications: A careful selection, based on both spiritual qualities and practical aptitudes, is critical.**

No matter what form the public ministry takes—pastor, teacher, staff, or member ministry—the Scriptures indicate the need for a proven Christian character as well as the practical aptitudes required to carry out the task.

When the apostles sought help for administering the daily distribution of food for the destitute widows of the Jerusalem church, they asked the congregation to look for men with two specific qualifications. They should choose men who were “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Ac 6:3). The order is significant. The first qualification is that they be “full of the Spirit.” Spiritual qualities come first. The Spirit himself cannot be seen, of course, nor can his primary work in a person’s heart: repentance and faith. What can be seen are some of the fruits of faith, the kinds of qualities St. Paul enumerates in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, or, in a more general way, in Ephesians 5:22-23. A person full of the Spirit is a person who loves the Lord Jesus, whose love for him shows in his life, both in his love for and hunger for the word and in his love and concern for those for whom Jesus gave his life.

Congregational nominating committees are sometimes tempted to forget, or at least downplay, the need for the proper spiritual qualifications, and look first at a person’s abilities. At times they even nominate a person in the hope of getting him to become a little more active in church. It is instructive to note that even those chosen to be spiritual overseers, somewhat equivalent to our pastors today, were to be chosen above all, not on the basis of their abilities, but of their spiritual qualities. In the list of qualifications for the office of *episkopos* in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 the only ability mentioned is *didaktikos*, being able to teach. Everything else in the list is a spiritual quality. Clearly, **who** a person **is** must have precedence over **what** he is able to **do**.

“Able to teach,” however, **is** on the list and is not an inconsequential qualification for one who is to serve directly in the ministry of word and/or sacrament. Neither the Seminary nor Dr. Martin Luther College would be ready to recommend for the pastoral or teaching ministry one who lacks this practical aptitude, so vital for the pastoral and teaching ministry.

It is not just one’s Christian character, then, as important as that is, which qualifies one to serve in the church’s public ministry. The apostles stipulated that the ones chosen to administer the Jerusalem church’s relief work, in addition to being full of the Spirit, should be full of wisdom. That was the practical aptitude required for this particular call. The inequities in the distribution of food apparently had some racial, or ethnic,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-179.

overtones. Was it merely a coincidence that the widows being overlooked in the distribution were **Grecian** Jews? For that matter, were they really being neglected, or was it just their perception that the Aramaic-speaking widows were getting more favorable treatment? The church needed some wise men to dig into the situation and see to it that everything was done without prejudice or partiality.

The seven “deacons” needed wisdom; pastors and teachers need to be able to teach. Likewise there are certain practical aptitudes that are essential for those who desire to serve in member and staff ministry positions. The congregation’s nominating committee is not doing its job properly if it simply fills vacant positions with whatever warm body may be available. It should seek to match a person’s gifts with the job that needs to get done.

The same is true regarding staff ministry. An exemplary Christian character, a fervent desire to serve in the full-time ministry of the church, as admirable as that may be, is not enough. Wisely, the staff ministry training program outlined in the 1991 “Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry” requires evidence both of Christian character and of practical aptitude for the ministry—in addition to mandated courses to increase biblical knowledge and theological discernment. Regarding Christian character, the report states: “Applicants will demonstrate eligibility for entrance into the certification program through letters of recommendation and personal interview.”<sup>31</sup>

In regard to practical aptitude for ministry, the report recommended and the Synod adopted the following provisions:

Applicants will complete six credits which enable them to evaluate their disposition toward ministry:

- a) One course in the theology of ministry in which the role of the Christian in personal and public ministry is explored through congregational service in evangelism, stewardship, and other positions of service and in which the personal and spiritual gifts of the individuals are assessed;
- b) A practicum experience under the direct supervision of a field supervisor such as a parish pastor could be carried out in the congregation at which they are serving.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding this last sentence, I might prefer that it read: “A practicum experience under the direct supervision of a field supervisor such as a parish pastor is required. It could be carried out in the congregation at which they are serving. “

A careful look at both of these qualifications—spirituality and practical aptitude—is especially critical in the case of second career people, who may desire somewhat later in life to prepare for staff ministry. The qualifications, or lack of them, of the students in our synodical school system become clear over the many years—as many as twelve for the would-be pastor—they are in the system. After all those years our terminal worker training schools can generally say with a good degree of confidence, “We can (or cannot) recommend this person for the ministry.”

The synod does not have such a lengthy opportunity to observe a second career person. The amount of time that he or she, if already a college graduate, would spend in school would be relatively short. Hence, the need for a careful evaluation, both before accepting one into such a program and before recognizing him or her as a certified staff minister of the WELS.

The thorough kind of screening proposed by the Admissions Committee of Northwestern College for second career persons desiring to prepare for the pastoral ministry would appear to be necessary also for those desiring to change careers and become staff ministers. A recent issue of *Northwestern Today* mentions seven categories that need to be explored when screening such applicants:

1. Academic standards and curriculum;

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

2. Personal and psychological aptitude;
3. Family responsibilities;
4. Financial obligations and our financial aid;
5. The concept of public ministry and talent for ministry;
6. Spiritual health and leadership potential;
7. Physical, medical, and health considerations.<sup>33</sup>

A careful selection, based on both spiritual qualities and practical aptitudes, is vital.

**Training: Thorough training, commensurate with the responsibility given, is essential.**

Thorough preparation of full-time workers for the church has been a distinguishing mark of our church body down through the years. We have a core curriculum for the preparation of pastors and teachers that has changed relatively little over the years. Current debate over how much language training to include in the preparatory schools of the synod and at Northwestern College underscores how seriously we as a church take the Scripture's dictum that those called to handle the means of grace in the name of and on behalf of the church be "able to teach."

During this school year we at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary are engaging in a self-study in which we, among other things, are taking a close look at our curriculum. While there appears to be a need to expand the time allotted to certain practical courses, e.g., counseling, church administration, evangelism, there is no desire on the part of anyone to rob core courses in biblical, systematic, and historical theology of the time needed to cover them thoroughly. We want our graduates to be men who are able to "correctly handle the word of truth" (2 Tm 2:15). That means they need to know the truth and to be able to communicate it, especially its vital doctrines of law and gospel, in a proper fashion.

We have not opted for "quicky" courses—even for those who later in life desire to prepare for the pastoral ministry. Though certain requirements may be waived, e.g., ability to work with the Latin or German, for the most part the curriculum these men pursue at Northwestern College in preparation for entering the Seminary parallels the curriculum of those who follow the more traditional preparatory school (or area high school), Northwestern College, Seminary route.

We need to be no less thorough in our training of people to serve in member ministry and staff ministry positions in the congregation. This does not imply the need for as many years of training as we deem necessary for the pastors of our congregations. It does mean, though, training commensurate with the responsibility given to them. We already follow that policy with the preparation of pastor and teacher ministers. Four years of college is considered sufficient for preparation of our Lutheran elementary school teachers, while we require four more years for those desiring to become pastors.

Member ministers, those members of the congregation asked to serve in the name of and on behalf of the congregation in its ministry of the gospel as, e.g., elders, Sunday school teachers, and church councilmen, should not be put to work without adequate training. It would be better for the pastor to do it all or for some work to be left undone than to utilize untrained or insufficiently trained people in the church's public ministry of the gospel.

A major, though not sole, role of the pastor is, as Ephesians 4 brings out, "to prepare God's people for works of service [Gk., *pros ton katartismos ton hagion eis ergon diakonias*], 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" (Eph 4:12-13). In a broad sense pastors are fulfilling this mission through their faithful preaching and teaching of the word and administration of the sacraments. As they do this, they are serving as shepherds, feeding, guarding, and guiding the flock entrusted to their care (cf.

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<sup>33</sup> *Northwestern Today*, vol. XXII, no. 1 (Dec 1992), p. 7.

Ac 20:27-32; 1 Pt 5:1-4) and in that way equipping them to function as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-16).

In a narrower sense the pastor “prepares God’s people for works of service” by providing training to those members whom the congregation calls to assist in the public ministry of the gospel. The pastor is the person in the congregation most qualified to do this. He is the congregation’s “resident theologian.” In a sense every congregation is a mini-seminary with a part of the pastor’s work being the training of such member ministers as elders, evangelists, stewards, Sunday school and vacation Bible school teachers, youth leaders, and Bible class leaders. Together, then, pastor(s), member ministers, and teachers (in congregations with Lutheran elementary schools) carry out the work of the public ministry in the congregation.

We need to be no less careful and thorough in the training of those who prepare for full-time work in the church as staff ministers. Staff ministry should not be viewed as a quick and convenient short-cut to solve an impending shortage in pastors. In fact, if the staff ministry program is being proposed and implemented simply as a reaction to a possible critical future manpower shortage, as something that, however distasteful it may be, we have to do because of the circumstances, it does not bode well for the inauguration, much less for the future, of such a program. If we do not believe that the concept of staff ministry will be beneficial to the church (for reasons such as discussed above) whether or not we have a shortage of pastors in the future, we should not even think of starting it.

If, however, we are convinced that the concept of staff ministry is biblical and has the potential for great benefit to individual Christians and the church at large, then we will embrace the concept gladly. And we will not be satisfied with anything less than turning out quality products who have been thoroughly trained to serve the church with their gifts. The purpose of staff ministry is not to plug a hole that ideally would be filled by someone more qualified. The purpose is to enhance and expand the whole public ministry of the church by making available to our congregations people who have been trained to assist in certain specialized areas of ministry for which congregations have indicated a need for additional help.

It is encouraging to see that the staff ministry proposal adopted by the 1991 synod convention does not opt for the easy road, although one might wish that the requirements for the proposed Post-Graduate Certification Program would be a little stiffer. This program is for “graduates of schools other than Dr. Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary who wish to become certified for staff ministry but who do not qualify for a colloquy.”<sup>34</sup> It is open to two groups: Those who are already serving in a position of staff ministry within the WELS and others “whose spiritual maturity and experience commend them for the certification process.”<sup>35</sup> The academic requirements are:

- + One course which surveys the literature of the Old Testament;
- + One course which surveys the literature of the New Testament;
- + The equivalent of two semesters of Christian doctrine;
- + One course in American religious history;
- + One course in the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>36</sup>

One wonders if at least some of those eligible to enter this program would not be better served if they were required to take more than single courses in each of these areas.

The Post-Graduate Certification Program is one of three programs proposed for training staff ministers. The other two are five-year programs: a College Program in Preparation for Staff Ministry, and a College Program Combining Preparation for Staff Ministry with Preparation for Elementary Teaching Ministry.<sup>37</sup> The major difference between the two, as the program titles imply, is that graduates of the latter will also be qualified for teaching in a Lutheran elementary school. Both programs, though, include a solid base in liberal

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<sup>34</sup> 1991 BoRaM, p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 184 & 185.



arts, or general education, a major in religious studies, an area of specialization in staff ministry, and a period of internship (one year in the case of the former and a semester and a summer in the case of the latter). It appears that congregations which call a graduate from such programs should be able to do so with a good degree of confidence that the person called will have been well prepared for the work to which he or she is called.

The training proposed in the staff ministry proposal adopted by the synod in 1991 does seem to be commensurate with the responsibility that its graduates will be given. That is essential—and thus is good to see.

**Scope: A precise delineation of the scope of duties is vital.**

The Scriptures make it clear that the scope of the public ministry can vary widely. The scope can be as wide as the ministry of Barnabas and Saul who were sent off by the church at Antioch as missionaries to the heathen world (Ac 13:1-3); it can be as narrow as that of the seven “deacons” who were called by the church specifically to distribute food in an equitable fashion to the poor widows (Ac 6:1-7). It is the prerogative and responsibility of the calling body to define the scope of the calls it issues.

Especially when a congregation is being served by more than one full-time called worker, it is vital that the scope of each worker’s ministry in the congregation be clearly spelled out. Carefully drawn up written position descriptions will help to avoid confusion, hard feelings, and unnecessary overlap, as well as help to assure that all areas of congregational ministry are being covered. It should go without saying, however, that such position descriptions which outline the scope of a worker’s ministry are not meant to be applied mechanically or legalistically, either to “defend one’s turf” or to excuse oneself from doing anything not specifically included in his or her position description. They should be looked upon as guidelines to help assure smooth relationships in a joint ministry where each knows his or her place in the total ministry program of the congregation. They are not meant to be inflexible rules.

A document entitled, “Position Descriptions for Alternative Forms of Public Ministry,” provides the following rationale for written position descriptions that clearly define specific areas of responsibility:

- 1) They aid God’s people in ministering more effectively and thus bring more glory to God;
- 2) They aid God’s people in treating each other with Christian love since they spell out and do not assume what the responsibilities are.<sup>38</sup>

The same document lists four major components of a position description for a called worker in the church:

1. A statement of qualifications, which describes the spiritual qualities, theological acumen, ministry skills, and education required for the particular form of ministry.
2. A statement of responsibilities. Especially important, as the “Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry” brings out, “is the notation of what work is shared and what work is given solely to one minister.”<sup>39</sup>
3. A statement of relationships, which clearly sets forth the lines of communication and accountability.
4. A statement of review, which describes when and how the position description will be evaluated and by whom.<sup>40</sup>

One benefit of carefully spelling out qualifications, responsibilities, and relationships of all called workers is that this will help to keep it clear that those called to staff ministry positions are not called to supplant the pastor, to whom a congregation assigns oversight of the entire ministry of the gospel. Rather,

<sup>38</sup> Prepared in 1989 for the Task Force on Alternative Forms of Ministry and the Board for Parish Services of the WELS, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> 1991 BoRaM, p. 183.

<sup>40</sup> “Position Descriptions for Alternative Forms of Public Ministry,” pp. 1-3.

working hand in hand with the pastor and under his leadership, those serving in staff ministry positions will see themselves as assisting the pastor in the congregation's ministry in accordance with their gifts and the scope of their call.

Unless extraordinary circumstances prevent it, the norm for the spiritual leadership of our congregations certainly should continue to be that they are served by one who has both the thorough theological training and the gifts that enable him to oversee the whole spiritual ministry of the congregation. Staff ministers, whose training will be relatively narrow in scope, can hardly qualify as a replacement for the pastor, no more than can a teacher in one of our elementary schools.

In this connection, I feel constrained to inject a personal opinion about the Synod's decision in its 1991 convention to ordain male teachers.<sup>41</sup> I have read carefully the "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Restudy the Terminology, 'Ordination into the Teaching Ministry'"<sup>42</sup> and have also taken a close look at the "whereases" and "resolveds" of the resolution recommending "that WELS congregations employ the terminology 'ordination into the teaching ministry' when initially consecrating a male teacher for the teaching ministry."<sup>43</sup>

Both the report and the resolution bring out clearly that there is no theological impediment to ordaining male teachers, since ordination is a church rite rather than a scriptural mandate. On the other hand, neither the report nor the resolution adduce much in the way of theological reason to do so. Rather, it is presented as a matter of expediency to "eliminate the difficulties in communicating to civil authorities the nature of our teaching ministry."<sup>44</sup>

There is certainly nothing wrong with doing that which is expedient; but I would suggest that it is even more expedient to continue to employ the rite of ordination only in the case of those assuming the office of pastor. That is the way this rite has been used historically. Continuing to use it that way today will help to keep clear the difference in scope between the pastoral office and other offices of the public ministry.

To determine whom to ordain and whom not to ordain on the basis of whether or not they "**can** perform sacerdotal functions, that is, . . . **may** conduct worship services or administer the sacraments when called upon by the church to perform such ministerial functions [emphasis added],"<sup>45</sup> muddies the waters; for it defines eligibility for ordination in terms of what one is theoretically able to do rather than in terms of what one is called to do. Furthermore, to use the same term—ordination—for the rite by which one enters both the pastoral and teaching ministry tends to blur the major difference in scope between the office of pastor and that of teacher. Besides that, to begin to ordain male teachers into the teaching ministry opens a Pandora's box. To be consistent, in a short time not only male teachers but also staff ministers (at least some of them) would also have to be declared eligible for ordination.

At a time in our church body's history when many are apprehensive about what they perceive as a diminution of the pastoral office in our midst, is it wise to change a time-honored custom for the sake of the expediency of being able to interpret our position more clearly to civil authorities? The remark of Winfred Nommensen in an essay entitled, "The Practical Implications of Ordination/Installation," is still apropos, I believe: "I would rather be explaining to the state than cause confusion among our own people."<sup>46</sup> "'Everything is permissible'—but not everything is beneficial" (1 Cor 10:23).

**Terminology: To avoid confusion, a careful use of terminology is imperative.**

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<sup>41</sup> 1991 Proceedings, pp. 50-51.

<sup>42</sup> 1991 BoRaM, pp. 168-174.

<sup>43</sup> 1991 Proceedings, p. 51.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> 1991 BoRaM, p. 173.

<sup>46</sup> Essay delivered to the 1981 Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastor-Teacher Conference, 1981, p. 7 (Essay file, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary).

The various synodical committees who have studied the subject of the ministry over the past several years have all wrestled with terminology. Not all have suggested the same terms, though all have agreed that we need to define our terms carefully and then use them consistently.

Some earlier studies recommended the use of the term “lay ministry” when speaking of the service all of God’s people carry out as a part of the universal priesthood. This term, however, is quite easily subject to misunderstanding; for it could also be looked upon as the service that lay people perform in the name of and on behalf of the congregation. Thus lay ministry could refer both to the universal priesthood and the public ministry some church members perform by call of the congregation.

More recent studies, therefore, including the “Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry” to the 1991 synod convention, recommend the use of the terms personal ministry and member ministry to differentiate between the ministry every Christian has as a part of the universal priesthood of believers and the ministry some members, by call of the congregation, carry out in the name of and on behalf of the congregation.

In order to distinguish between the more limited member ministry and the public ministry carried out by such as pastors and teachers, the suggestion is that the term offices of ministry be used. Member ministry would typically be voluntary in nature and quite limited in scope and time, while offices of ministry would typically be a person’s primary vocation and therefore be compensated and normally not limited in time, and, of course, would require training commensurate with the responsibility given.

Earlier studies used the term “alternative forms of public ministry” to describe service by paid professional church workers who are called neither as pastors nor teachers but to serve in some other form of public ministry. That term has been replaced by the simpler and more descriptive staff ministry. The “Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry” defines the word “staff” as follows:

We use the word **staff**...to refer to a form of public ministry, like pastoral ministry or teaching ministry. The word **staff** has no reference to the temporary or permanent nature of the call, although a staff minister will usually receive a permanent call. **Staff** does not signify the full time or part time nature of a call, although a staff minister will often be called for full time service. **Staff** does not apply to the nature of the called minister’s support, although staff ministers will often receive full salary and benefits from their calling body.<sup>47</sup>

My assumption is that the title **pastor** will continue to be reserved for the fully theologically trained person or persons called to oversee the broad scope of the congregation’s public ministry of the gospel and that the title **teacher** will continue to be used in the way we have historically employed it in our synod. Those called to serve in staff ministry positions would undoubtedly be given the title “minister of...” or “deaconess.” It would appear to be best, however, that they be addressed as “Mr.” or “Mrs.” or “Miss.” In that way the distinction will be maintained between the various offices of ministry in the congregation. Pastor, teacher, staff—all are forms of the one public ministry of the gospel; but they are different species of that one public ministry.

The “Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry” to the 1991 synod convention did a creditable job in choosing and clearly defining terms. There appear to be no cogent reasons to change the terminology the committee recommends:

**Personal ministry:** The ministry every Christian has as a member of the Body of Christ (Universal Priesthood)

**Public ministry:** Ministry carried out in the name of and on behalf of the church, entered upon by call (formal or informal) of the church

**Member ministry:** Public ministry that some members, by call of the church, carry out in the name of and on behalf of the church (normally voluntary and limited in time)

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<sup>47</sup> 1991 BoRaM, p. 181.

- Offices of ministry:** Public ministry that is typically a person's primary vocation (normally compensated and not limited in time)
- Pastoral Ministry:** The office of ministry carried out by one who has received a full theological training, e.g., a graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
- Teacher Ministry:** The office of ministry carried out by one whose training has been in the field of education, e.g., a graduate of the teacher training program of Dr. Martin Luther College
- Staff Ministry:** The office of ministry carried out by one called to serve in a function other than that of pastor or teacher, e.g., a graduate of the staff ministry program of Dr. Martin Luther College

It would appear that the above three offices of ministry—pastor, teacher, and staff—would be included in the synodical Yearbook, thus adding a third category to the two currently listed. As is already done in the case of teachers, a method will have to be devised to distinguish certified staff ministers from uncertified ones, i.e., those who still have a program of education to complete.

### **Relationships: A mutual respect for each other's ministry is indispensable.**

Were it not for our old Adam we would not have to include this final section. We would at all times esteem one another as beloved co-workers, not competitors; as colleagues, not rivals; as associates, not antagonists. The existence of our sinful flesh, however, is a stubborn reality and affects our interpersonal relationships, also with coworkers. Undoubtedly that is why the Apostle Paul, when describing the qualities necessary for spiritual leaders, felt constrained to mention several qualities that have to do with interpersonal relationships.

Paul tells Timothy that the "overseer" (*episkopos*) should be "not violent but gentle" (1 Tm 3:3). The word translated "violent" (*plektes*) has in it the idea of striking a blow. It depicts a pugnacious person who is not adverse to throwing his weight around, bullying people to further his own personal agenda. How much different from the way our Savior describes leadership! This was his follow-up to the request of James and John for seats of honor in his kingdom:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:25-28).

The spiritual leader should not be violent, but "gentle" (*epieikes*). Thayer tells us that the word is derived from *eikos*, "what is reasonable." Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich gives as its first meaning "yielding," just the opposite of always insisting on getting one's own way. Writing to Titus, Paul emphasizes the same thing when he says that the overseer should not be "overbearing" (*authade*), literally, one who gives pleasure to himself. "Love (*agape*) is not selfseeking" (1 Cor 13:5).

Another quality required of a spiritual leader is that he be "not quarrelsome" (1 Tm 3:3). The word is *amachos*, which describes one who is not quick to pick a fight. He is peaceable, not "quick-tempered" (*orgilon*), as Paul tells Titus (1:7).

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul comes back to this same theme: "The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, . . . not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct" (2 Tin 2:24-25). Twice in these two verses, using two different words, Paul exhorts the Lord's servant to be gentle. "The Lord's servant must be *epios* (gentle) to everyone." It is the same word Paul uses to describe the way he carried out his ministry among the Thessalonians: "We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her

little children” (1 Th 2:7). And, says Paul, the Lord’s servant should “gently (*en prauteti*) instruct” those who oppose him, in the spirit of their Savior who himself is “gentle (*praus*) and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29).

All of this is vital for team ministry, coworking of pastor, teacher, staff, and member ministers. The alternative is anarchy, each one in it for self, with the result that the name of the Lord whom we serve is besmirched and the ministry carried out in his name “discredited” (cf. 2 Cor 6:3). Robert Hochmuth, in a recent essay, “Dealing with Each Other As Brothers When We Disagree,” said it well: “How pathetic that we who represent ourselves as serving the Lord on the same team collide with one another like outfielders in the bottom of the ninth, knocking each other out—and letting the ball drop.”<sup>48</sup> Such is the result when we let the flesh control the way we relate to one another.

I would suggest that the place to begin in assuring God-pleasing, Spirit-driven relationships among coworkers is with oneself. I personally can go and daily need to go in repentance to the foot of the cross with all of my pride, my self-centeredness, my judgmental spirit, in a word, my lovelessness, and then walk away from the cross a new person, rescued from the guilt and curse of my sin and also empowered for a new life of Christ-honoring, other-person-first love. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! “ (2 Cor 5:17). “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Ga 2:20).

Some 25 years ago the man now serving as president of Northwestern College, Robert Voss, wrote a gem of an essay on “Pastor-Teacher Harmony.” With a few additions it could serve well today as an essay on “Pastor-Teacher-Member-Staff Minister Harmony.” In this essay he reminds us that all workers in the church are co-workers serving God’s people together: “The privilege of all pastors and teachers [here we would add: and also member and staff ministers] is to be involved in God’s work in edifying Christ’s body.”<sup>49</sup>

“In this work of God,” he writes, “we have common goals and common objectives: to serve as God would have us serve; to serve him and not ourselves; to build his church .... It is well to remind ourselves ...that there is enough resistance outside of the church without contributing resistance within.”<sup>50</sup> Hochmuth’s essay put it this way: “The Father’s name is to be lifted up and will be as each of us can count on the other to be a trusty brace for withstanding the pressures besetting those who are serving Christ in the midst of a pagan society.”<sup>51</sup>

Voss reminds us that God himself is the one who has called each of us to our present field of labor. If we are coworkers, that is because God himself has brought us together into a particular field of labor. He writes, “In all human relationships attitudes are so vitally important, and our attitudes will change and be improved if we remember that it is God who gave us to each other. That ought to move us to get along with one another.”<sup>52</sup>

Voss concludes his essay with twelve “practical suggestions for encouragement of harmony,” suggestions that bear repeating essentially in the way he presented them as we bring to a close this essay on coworking of pastors, teachers, staff, and member ministers:

1. Remember that we are a team. Teams never get any place when there is strife and controversy. Teams have to pull together. Members of a team will not trample one another.
2. Matthew 5:44: We are to love even our enemies. Could it be true that we could not love one another?
3. If an offense has been committed by one or the other, Matthew 18 dare not be forgotten. ... This means that we communicate with each other and not with everybody else. Professional ethics also demand that we keep our problems among ourselves and refrain from spewing them out before ears which have no business hearing them.

<sup>48</sup> Essay delivered to the Arizona-California District Pastoral Conference, Oct 1992, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> “Pastor-Teacher Harmony,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 65:1 (Jan 1968), p. 9. The essay was prepared originally for the 1967 Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastor-Teacher Conference.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

4. Hold staff conferences and talk it over. [Here I would add: Include regular joint study of the Word in these staff conferences.]
5. Go back to the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule. When I have something bad to say about someone else, do I want that someone else to speak bad of me also?
6. Promote a little levity. Not that the work of the Lord is worthy of levity, but human relationships are. A little levity between pastors and teachers [and staff and member ministers] generally is a wholesome thing.
7. Each mind our own business. We don't need our fingers in every pie. Besides, we don't have enough fingers.
8. Live the fifth petition: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
9. Guard your tongue.
10. A suggestion for teachers: realize that the school is not an entity totally unto itself, but is a servant of the congregation. The teacher is called to serve the congregation.
11. Further mutual respect.
12. Use the privilege of prayer. Let us pray for one another, that we may meet the qualifications which God requires of us, that we may serve the purpose which he has set down for us—"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.