

MINISTERIAL EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 21st CENTURY: MEMBER MINISTRY

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Without a doubt your district praesidium has chosen a timely topic for this year's district convention. The ministry--pastoral ministry, teacher ministry, staff ministry, member ministry--all are under considerable discussion within the WELS at the present time. About a year and a half ago (December 1992) the Synod's Board for Parish Services sponsored a well-attended two-day WELS Ministry Symposium at Northwestern College. Four essays on the ministry were presented.¹ The theological journal edited by the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, is at present running a series of articles on the same subject.

Study and discussion of the doctrine of the ministry is not a new phenomenon in our midst. In conjunction with the 1992 symposium at Northwestern College, the Board for Parish services compiled and published a two-volume, 839 page *WELS Ministry Compendium*. It contains essays by WELS pastors and professors on the doctrine of church and ministry dating all the way back to 1869.

Our specific assignment in this presentation is to center around the subject of *member* ministry. Before we do that, however, we need to carefully define a few terms, the first of which is "ministry" itself. What is meant by the term "ministry"? The most common word for ministry in the Greek New Testament is *diakonia*, which simply means "service." Jesus used this word, for example, when he said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served [King James Version, "to be ministered unto"], but to serve" [King James, "to minister"] (Mark 10:45). To minister means to serve. Ministry is service.

When the Lutheran Confessions speak of ministry, however, the focus is not on service, or ministry, in the broad sense of any kind of service one renders to another. In the Confessions the term *ministry* is connected with the *proclamation of the gospel*. Article V of the Augsburg Confession states:

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.

The Formula of Concord defines "the ministry of the Church," as "the Word preached and heard" (Epitome 12). The *WELS Theses on Church and Ministry* speak the same way:

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.

¹ "Ministry in the Minds and Lives of the Confessors"; "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry"; "Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers"; and "How Beautiful the Feet: The Dignity of the Public Gospel Ministry."

When we discuss the doctrine of the ministry, therefore, as we are doing at this convention, we are not talking about ministry in the broad sense of service of any kind. Rather, with the Lutheran Confessions, we are referring to ministry in the sense of ministry of the *gospel*.

The ministry of the gospel is carried out in two ways. Luther speaks of both of these ways when he 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.²

With these words, Luther reminds us that we need to make a distinction between the ministry of the gospel that is carried out by every Christian, which we might call *personal* ministry, and the ministry of the gospel that is performed in the name of and on behalf of a gathering of Christians, which we call *public* ministry. *All* Christians are called to the former; *some* Christians may be called to the latter.

The former (*personal* ministry) has to do with the priesthood of believers. The Apostle Peter reminds us that all Christians are priests of God. As priests, we—all of us—have received the call to “declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his [God’s] wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). One vital way by which Christians proclaim God’s praises is by telling others the Good News of Jesus Christ, i.e., by involving themselves in the ministry of the gospel. This is what the shepherds did after they had seen the infant Jesus (Luke 2:17-18). This is what the Samaritan woman did after her conversation with Jesus at Jacob’s Well (John 4:28-30). This is what the demon-possessed man did after Jesus drove the legion of demons out of him (Mark 5:19-20). They needed no call but the general call to be Christ’s witnesses that is addressed to every Christian. The Lutheran Confessions echo the Scriptures when they state:

The keys [i.e., the ministry of the gospel] 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).³

Luther speaks the same language as the Scriptures and the Confessions:

² American Edition [AE], vol. 39, p. 310.

³ Smalcald Articles, “On the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” 68-69.

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].⁴

John Schaller, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1908-20, says the same thing as the Scriptures, Luther, and the Confessions:

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.⁵

It has been said, "Every Christian is a minister." That can be understood correctly, even in the sense of minister of the gospel—in this respect: The ministry of the gospel, the general call to spread the Word to all people, has been entrusted to all whom the Holy Spirit has made priests, that is, to every Christian.

The statement, "Every Christian a minister," can be misleading, however, if it blurs the distinction between the ministry of the gospel entrusted to the church as a whole (and thus to every member of the church --*personal* ministry) and the *public* ministry of the gospel, reserved for those properly qualified and trained persons the church calls to carry out the ministry of the gospel in their name and on their behalf. By virtue of the fact that he or she is a priest of God, every Christian is a minister of the gospel; but not every Christian is called to engage in the public ministry.

Perhaps we should make sure at this point that we are clear on what is meant by *public* ministry. Contrary to what one might think at first hearing, public ministry is not the opposite of private ministry. Public ministry may, in fact, be carried on in private when, for example, a pastor gives private communion to a shut-in. By public ministry is meant ministry, or service, one is chosen to render on behalf of others. We might call it *representative* ministry, ministry carried out in the name of others, in contrast with the *personal* ministry all Christians render as priests of God.

In the Lutheran Confessions, however, public ministry is not just any form of representative ministry, or service. It is ministry of the *gospel* carried out in the name of and on behalf of others. It is, for example, the kind of ministry Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to do on behalf of the church at Antioch, when the church sent them out on what we have come to know as Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1ff). Public ministry of the gospel is entered upon by a call of the church, as Article XIV of the

⁴ AE, vol. 44, p. 130.

⁵ "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," as translated in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1, p. 39.

Augsburg Confession states: "No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."

When we speak of ministry, then, we are speaking of ministry of the *gospel*. And when we refer to *public*, or representative, ministry, we are referring to ministry of the *gospel* one is called to perform in the name of and on behalf of a body of believers.

Now, where does the concept of *member* ministry fit in? By *member* ministry we mean public ministry of the gospel carried out by lay members of a congregation. At times this has been called *lay ministry*. That term, however, is somewhat confusing since lay ministry could be referring either to the ministry every Christian has as a priest of God or to forms of *public* ministry performed by congregational members. To clarify this, it might be wise to use the term *personal* ministry for the ministry carried out by all Christians by virtue of the fact that they are a part of the priesthood of all believers, and to use the term *member* ministry for *public* ministry carried out by some members by call of their congregation or some other grouping of believers.

The term *member* ministry is an attempt to distinguish between full-time offices of public ministry, such as pastors and teachers and, just recently in our Synod, staff ministers, and those who are called to serve on a more limited, part-time, generally unpaid basis. The difference between *member* ministry and the other forms of ministry that have been or will be discussed during these days is not that the latter have to do with the gospel while the former does not have to do with the gospel. Both are public ministry of the gospel; for the public ministry of the gospel can take various forms. The WELS *Theses on Church and Ministry* summarizes well the teaching of the Scriptures on this subject:

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.

The pastoral ministry is but one form, howbeit the most comprehensive in our day, of the public ministry of the gospel. The teaching ministry is another form. Member ministry is still another form. And member ministry itself can assume many different

forms. The difference lies primarily in the scope and responsibilities of the various forms of ministry and, with that, in the qualifications, training, and supervision required (cf. the appended chart).⁶

What functions of the public ministry might congregational members be called to assume? The Scriptures do not give us specific direction on this, other than that one needs to be properly qualified for the task. Pastor Thomas Nass, in the paper cited above, writes (and we agree with his assessment):

I sense a general understanding among us, however, that there are four functions of the public ministry which will ordinarily be done only by pastors. The four functions are these: 1) formal preaching in public worship services, 2) general doctrinal and spiritual oversight of congregations, 3) administration of the sacraments, and 4) worship leading.

Certainly in the case of emergency, any of these functions may be performed by any Christian because all Christians have the keys. But I do not hear anyone in our circles advocating that these functions be shared with others ordinarily.

In other words, it is not the goal of a parish pastor to work himself out of a job by equipping others to do all the functions of the public ministry in the congregation....

It's not that pastors have a greater importance or higher "rank." It's just that pastors in our circles have been specifically trained to carry out these functions, and others have not.

Typically, "member ministers" will be asked to serve in such areas of public ministry as congregational elders; as Bible class, Sunday school, or vacation Bible school teachers; as congregational evangelists or stewards. Their call to ministry may come by means of an election. It may come through congregational appointment. *How* they are called is not essential; *that* they are called is essential to the public ministry of the gospel.

It is imperative that member ministers be carefully selected and then thoroughly trained. In Acts 6, which records the calling of the seven "deacons," we note that the criteria in choosing these men were that they be "full of the Spirit" (the spiritual qualification) and also full of "wisdom" (the practical qualification needed for the work to which they were being called). Congregations today also will want to look for people of proven Christian character, as evidenced by their fruits of faith, and for people with the aptitude for the task that needs to be done.

And congregations will want to provide the necessary training, which is one part of a pastor's "job description."⁷ In this connection, we should mention that the WELS

⁶ This chart is taken from an essay, "The Pastoral Ministry As a Distinct Form of the Public Ministry," by Thomas P. Nass, presented to the Milwaukee Metro-South Pastoral Conference, September 20, 1993. The essay will be published this year in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

Board for Parish Services (BPS) is committed to offering solid, scriptural resources for training member ministers. We list below a dozen of these resources designed to assist the pastor in training member ministers:

1. *Training Christians for Ministry (Level I)* Five video-assisted courses that will help to identify and qualify members for assisting with adult spiritual growth ministries. Available from Northwestern Publishing House. Level II is in the process of production.
2. *The Lutheran Leadership Series*. Five 6-lesson Bible classes for parish leaders. Available from the BPS office in spiral bound, loose-leaf, or WP 5.1 disc for \$5 (1-414-256-3229).
3. *Parish Leadership*. A 50 page periodical, published three times a year, for organists, Sunday school teachers, elders, stewards, committee workers, officers, youth counselors, VBS leaders, evangelists, choir directors, librarians, and other member ministers.
4. *Parish Assistance*. Long-term assistance for congregational leaders to emphasize adult spiritual growth and outreach, combined with practical help with training, planning, and organization. Contact Pastor Ronald Heins (1-414-771-1235).
5. *School of Outreach and Member Retention Workshops*. Motivational and training seminars for evangelists and elders. For information about these workshops and their locations, call Pastor Robert Hartman (1-414-256-3287).
6. *Elders' Training*. Offered to pastors and elders together. Available by appointment for circuits, conferences, and districts. Being offered this summer at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary as a one-week workshop. Contact Pastor Wayne Mueller (1-414-256-3118).
7. *Leadership Retreats*. Sixty-one have been conducted in individual WELS congregations nationwide at no cost to the congregation. A full day of biblical and practical study on gospel mission, Lutheran heritage, current parish problems, scriptural teaching on adiaphora, and role of leadership. Contact Pastor Wayne Mueller (1-414-256-3228).
8. *Training for Youth Counselors*. Workshops are conducted in districts through the Commission on Youth Discipleship. Contact Mr. Gerald Kastens (1-414-256-3224).
9. *Special Ministries Training*. Specific practical training in more than a half-dozen special ministries, e.g., Jesus Cares schools, prison ministry, hearing impaired, vision impaired, senior ministry. Contact Mr. Alfons Woldt (1-414-256-3240).
10. *Sunday School Teacher Training*. Contact Mr. Gerald Kastens of the Commission for Youth Discipleship (1-414-256-3224).

⁷ A pastor serves as both a nurturer of all the saints in the congregation through his ministry of preaching and teaching the Word and as an equipper of certain members for the ministries to which the congregation may call them.

11. *Stewardship*. For training congregational stewards in whole-life stewardship: "Christianity: A Whole New Way of Looking at Things." Contact the Adult Discipleship Office (1-414-256-3278).
12. *Visitation Ministry*. Ten 45-minute instructional videos for training members to participate in various forms of visitation within the congregation. Contact the Adult Discipleship Office (1-414-256-3278).

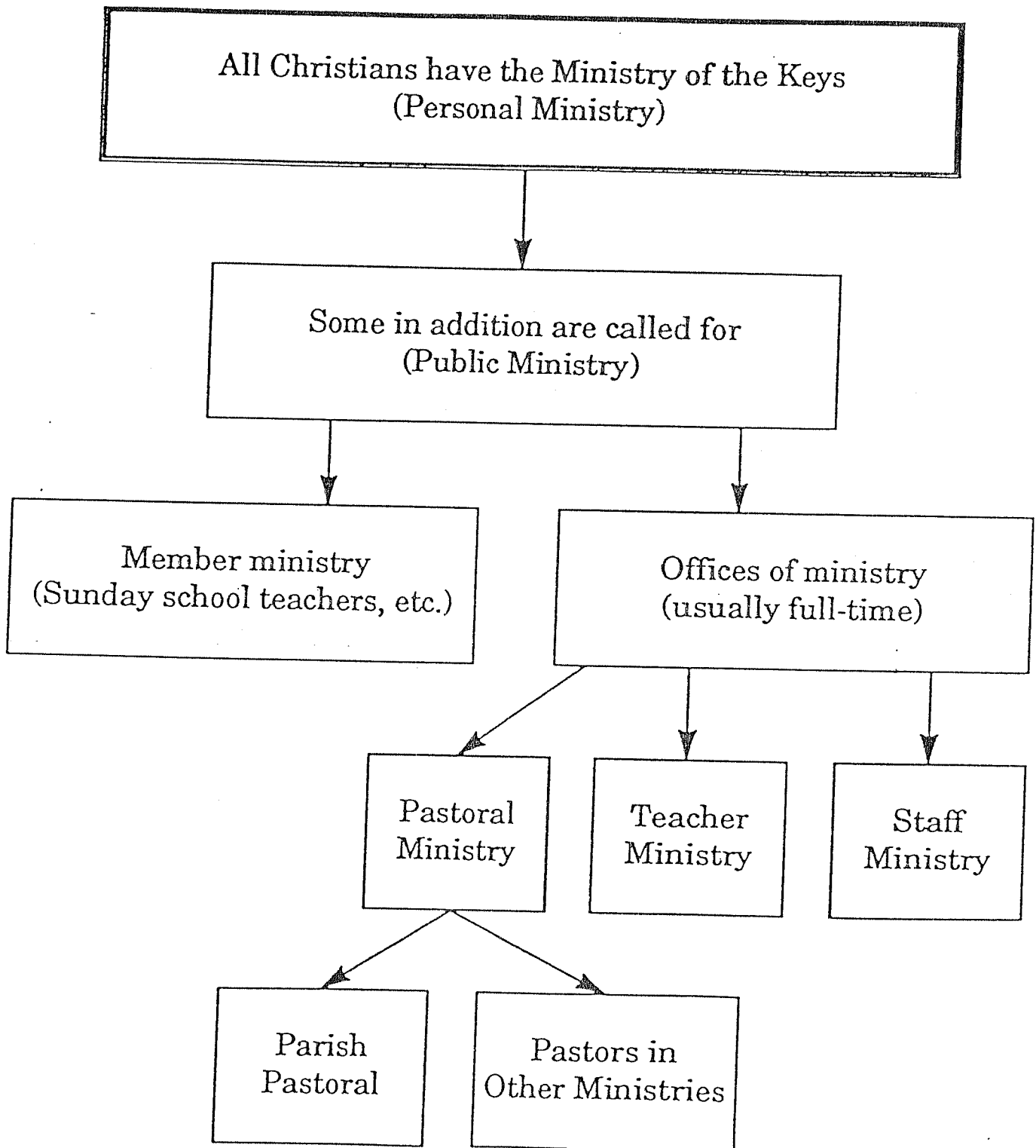
We can hardly emphasize too strongly the need for providing adequate training of those chosen to serve as member ministers. In a sense every congregation is a mini-seminary, with a part of the pastor's work being the training of such member ministers as elders, evangelist, stewards, Sunday school and vacation Bible school teachers, youth leaders, and Bible class leaders. Material such as listed above may help the pastor with this element of his ministry.

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The title assigned to this paper was "Ministerial Expectations for the 21st Century: Member Ministry." Up to this point we have spoken about ministry, about public ministry, and about member ministry, a form of public ministry. We have not mentioned the 21st century. That has been by design. What's needed for the 21st century, should our Lord delay his return that long, are not bold new innovations, not *avant-garde* approaches to congregational ministry. What's needed in our congregations is what's always been needed: pastors to preach and teach the Word, to nurture all the saints, and to train certain member for functions of member ministry the congregation may ask them to undertake.

We will want to emphasize that all of God's people, as priests of God, have a part in the one ministry of the gospel Christ committed to his church. Especially, in view of the lateness of the hour, we will want to make them aware that God has put them into their own personal mission fields--their homes, their neighborhoods, their places of work, their schools. And we will want to help prepare them to be able to bring to those in their personal mission fields the one message that saves. That is a part of the *personal* ministry of every Christian (1 Peter 3:15).

And we will want to make an ever greater effort to uncover the manifold gifts of God's people in the congregation and then to make maximum use of those gifts, by call of the congregation and after sufficient training, through various forms of *member* ministry. It is never time wasted for a congregation to locate and train member ministers. It is time well-used; for member ministers, carefully selected and properly trained, multiply gospel ministry. Is that not what we want to do, to work together, utilizing all the gifts of all of God's people, while it is day before the night comes when no man can work? Lord, as we wait for your coming, use all of your special gifts to the church--pastors, teachers, staff and member ministers--for the building up of your church, both internally and externally, all to your glory!



For Discussion and Reflection

1. Agree or Disagree? Only if a person is directly involved in teaching the Word of God, or preaching, or administering the sacraments can it properly be said that he is serving in the public ministry of the church.
2. Agree or disagree? A woman can serve as a member minister in the congregation.
3. Agree or Disagree? Telling those chosen to serve in the congregation that they are serving in the public ministry will degrade the office of the pastor in the congregation
4. Agree or Disagree? The more that members are trained to do as member ministers, the less work the pastor will have to do.
5. Agree or Disagree? It is better for only the pastor (or perhaps a Christian day school teacher) to lead a congregational Bible class.
6. How should a congregation determine which work should be done only by the pastor? Only by lay people? By both pastor and lay people?
7. Agree or disagree? The work that lay people in the congregation do as priests (*personal* ministry) is more important than the work they may do as member ministers (*public* ministry) and the work the pastor does as nurturer of all believers is more important than his work of training member ministers.