

The Gimbals of the Gospel

The Doctrine of Church and Ministry in the WELS

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Preface

The assignment seemed overwhelming: What is the WELS understanding of Church and Ministry, especially as it pertains to the doctrine of the call? Wow! We must understand *The Public Ministry* before we can understand its *Calling*. That's no small feat. In fact, if a little knowledge is considered dangerous, then in the matter of Church and Ministry many of us fear that we could be "lethal weapons?"

Perhaps you feel better equipped to speak of matters like the distinction between Law and Gospel? Good! In the matter of Church and Ministry it is a vital tenant of the Lutheran Faith:

This difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should know and be able to state this difference...But everything depends on the proper differentiation of these two messages and on not mixing them together; otherwise one will know and retain the proper understanding of neither the one nor the other; nay, while under the impression of having both, one will have neither...¹

Related to the distinction between Law and Gospel is the distinction between Justification and Sanctification. How does this fit into a discussion on Public Ministry? How can it not? The importance of distinction between the two is absolutely fundamental to the Lutheran Faith:

There is this about the article of grace (justification) that if one diligently and sincerely remains loyal to it, it keeps one from falling into heresy and from undertaking anything against Christ or His Christendom. For with it comes the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the heart by it and keeps it in the true, certain understanding, so that it is able precisely and plainly to distinguish and judge all the other articles of faith and forcefully to sustain and defend them. One plainly sees this in the ancient fathers. When they remained loyal to this article, based their doctrines on it, and drew them from it, they remained altogether pure in all articles. However, when they departed from it and argued without it, they, too went wrong and stumbled badly...²

It is not out of place to focus on Justification in the doctrine of Church and Ministry. It is essential to do so, especially as the doctrine of Church and Ministry boils down to the question of service. Who is serving whom in "ministry?" Is God serving us (Justification), or are we serving God (Sanctification)?

One concludes that the generic term "ministry" involves both God's service to us and our service to God. For example, is the worship service next Sunday morning going to involve God's service to us, or our service to God? It is a "service." Does he serve us, or do we serve him? It is both. We serve him in love, offering sacrifices of praise to the glory of his name, but this is distinctly separate from his greater service to us through the Public Ministry of the Word: "In the name of Christ, your sins are forgiven." One act of service is sacrificial, our service to him (sanctification). The other act is sacramental, his service to us (justification). The

¹ *What Luther Says*, Vol. II, p. 732.

² *Ibid.*, p. 703.

two cannot and should not be indistinguishably homogenized. This is a lesson we apply in our study of Church and the Public Ministry of the Word, as compared to general sanctified service (ministry).

Historical Sketch

Part of the current confusion over Church and Ministry stems from a proliferation of terms that spill into one another without clear distinction (Ministry, Office of the Ministry, The Gospel Ministry, The Ministry of the Gospel, The Ministry of the Word, The Public Ministry, The Public Ministry of the Word, and others). Some of these terms are old, some are new, some are old with new meaning which complicates the confusion. Looking back at our brief Synodical history helps us to better understand the doctrine's practical evolution among us, especially in light of how our predecessors applied the doctrine in controversies of their respective ages. Therefore, with obvious oversimplification, I present the following retrospective.

As the WELS emerged from its pietistic roots in the latter half of the 19th century, it matured into a more confessional position of Lutheranism, including the doctrine of Church and Ministry. A key expositor of the WELS understanding of Church and Ministry was Dr. Adolph Hoenecke who worked in the late 1800's through the early 1900's as a Synodical leader and professor at Northwestern College, the training school of WELS pastoral candidates. Hoenecke's *Dogmatik*, published after his death, exemplifies the indoctrination of his students regarding Church and Ministry (paragraph 68 Vol. IV):

1. The Teaching Office, under which we here understand the servants of the Word, the pastors, is of divine institution.
2. No one can become a public servant of the Word other than through an external, legitimate call.
3. Ordination does not make anyone a pastor, but it only confirms a pastor as being legitimately called pastor.
4. The power and right of the preaching office is to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, forgive or retain sins, and practice discipline.
5. Essentially, all preachers are the same in rights and honors.³

In exposition of Thesis 5, Hoenecke speaks against the Romanist view of a hierarchical priesthood. He elaborates further with an application from Chemnitz in the following four points:

- a. The Word of God sets no number of grades.
- b. From Scripture it is clear that at the time of the apostles the same gradus were not represented in all congregations.
- c. Likewise it is also certain from Scripture that the division into gradus was not a necessity, so that all activities were not often united in one person. Rather, the whole order was a matter of freedom, and was directed according to the need and the use of the church.
- d. All grades were not offices besides the preaching office, but the one and the same true office of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.⁴

In the years that followed, point *c.* and *d.* became the fulcrum of debate, especially against the Romanist view and even the view which became that of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod (LCMS). Add the names J.P. Koehler, August Pieper and J.P. Schaller to the list of those most influential in molding our understanding of the doctrine at this time. Under their influence the WELS expanded its understanding of the

³ Seth Neyhart, "The History of the Doctrine of the Ministry in the Wisconsin Synod," pp. 10-11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13. *N.B.* Hoenecke is speaking of "grades" within the Public Preaching/Teaching Office and is not addressing other forms of service outside the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Public Ministry of the Word and differentiated it from the false teaching that the Office of the Public Ministry was confined to one specific, mandated form, that of pastor.⁵

While the WELS viewed the Public Ministry as any form of Ministry of the Word without a specifically prescribed form, the LCMS viewed the local congregation and local pastorate as the only ordained structure of the church and office of the Public Ministry. This difference of doctrine became especially evident where cases of church discipline on the part of Synod were involved (e.g., the “Cincinnati Case”). For years the WELS and LCMS operated in fellowship with the difficulty of this doctrine in practical form. It was like two teams playing basketball on the same court, only with differing rules for what was considered “out of bounds.”

A key document was formulated in 1933 in the wake of the Protestant Controversy when the Presidents of the WELS and LCMS, together with the faculties of the Thiensville and St. Louis seminaries, presented “The Thiensville Theses” as a statement of common ground. It did not address all the differences, but was an expression of what unity did exist. While there are four major points to the Theses, we list the first two as pertains to the subject at hand: (Note the recognition of obligations on the part of the spiritual priesthood in point I and the recognition of a divinely instituted “Ministry of the Word” in point II which is different than the universal priesthood.

- I. As we know from Scripture, it is God’s will and regulation that Christians who reside in the same area also establish an external connection in order to exercise jointly the obligations of their spiritual priesthood.
- II. As we know from Scripture, it is furthermore God’s will and regulation that such Christian local congregations have shepherds and teachers, who in the name and on behalf of the congregation carry out the duties of the ministry of the Word in their midst.⁶

While the “Thiensville Theses” did not supply a distinct answer to all practical applications of Church and Ministry, it did provide an arena in which the WELS and LCMS could peacefully coexist, that is until another practical application of the doctrine was brought to bear upon all. The war-time decision of LCMS to send chaplains into the US. Military forced a return to controversy over the principle doctrines involved. Upon conclusion of World War II, the question was put to the Synodical Conference (of which WELS and LCMS were both part). The Report of the Synodical Conference Interim Committee was submitted with one dissenting vote, the voice of WELS pastor H.H. Eckert. His “Minority Report” simplifies the main dissension and reflects the WELS doctrinal position: “In the circles of the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference there is agreement that the Lord has given to the Church, the believers, the ministry of the Word.” They are differences in application:

- a. Some restrict the concept of a divinely instituted church local to the local congregation and consider all gatherings of believers, groups of Christians beyond the local congregation, such as synods, conferences, etc., a purely human arrangement.
- b. Others find in the descriptive name of church a term which applies with equal propriety to the various groupings into which the Holy Spirit has gathered his believers, local congregations as well as larger groups.
- c. Some restrict the idea of a divinely instituted ministry to the pastorate of a local congregation and consider such offices as teachers, professors, Synodical officials, etc., branches of this office without a specific command of God, established in Christian liberty.

⁵ In reading Schaller we find the frequent use of the word *ministry* applied to the spiritual priesthood of believers and their calling to share the Gospel. While some claim he defined the term *Predigamt* as different from the Preaching/Teaching Office, it is apparent from context that he was disputing the narrow definition of others in his age who claimed that there was to be no preaching other than that done through the Office of Public Ministry of the Word. Schaller’s use of the term *public* regarding public ministry was defined as something done out in the open, such as hymn singing, reciting the Creed, Lord’s Prayer or Confession of Sins. This is different than our current definition of the term *public* to mean representational of the congregation. Confer *WELS MINISTRY COMPENDIUM*, “The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry,” J. Schaller., (especially pp. 449-452).

⁶ *WELS MINISTRY COMPENDIUM*, p. 14.

- d. Others see in “ministry” a comprehensive term which covers the various special offices with which the ascended Lord has endowed the Church.⁷

While the LCMS and WELS differed as to specific definition of the instituted forms of the public ministry, we note the agreement that the Office of the Public Ministry is one associated with the Ministry of the Word, the public use of the keys. The WELS position “sees in ‘ministry’ a comprehensive term which covers the various *special* offices...”

With other doctrinal concerns compounding the problem, the WELS and LCMS eventually severed fellowship. In the decades that followed, the WELS spent its energy internally clarifying its doctrine of Church and Ministry, especially as the early 1960’s witnessed external growth for the WELS, and internal growth in areas of widening service (teachers, professors, Synodical officials, executive secretaries, etc.). The doctrine of Church and Ministry was again put on display and its application broadened in answer to the question, “Who among our various church-workers rightly has a call?” Professor Erwin Scharf, in his paper “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys,” which was presented to the 38th Biennial Convention of the WELS in 1965, exemplifies a broader application:

Today we have pastors, assistant pastors, vicars, ordained professors, un-ordained professors, instructors, tutors, missionaries, executive secretaries, male teachers, lady teachers, teachers on a great variety of grade levels, from the upper grades to nursery school, full-time teachers, substitute teachers, Sunday-school teachers, choirmasters, elders in the congregations, officers of the Synod, our Districts and our conferences. Even that may not be the full list of all such who work among us in the public use of the Keys, preaching, teaching, aiding, or guiding the precious activity of sharing the Gospel. It is hardly surprising that the question arises from time to time: Who of these people has a divine call?

In truth, that question can be answered very briefly. They all do. If you have not been able to discover up to this time in our essay what the definition of the call might be with which we are operating, then perhaps at this point you have come to note it...It 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.⁸

The expanded definition of Public Ministry was crystallized to include anyone called to represent the church (public) in the use of the keys of the kingdom, whether it be direct use or supportive of that use. Nevertheless, this expanded definition still appeared restricted to, (or at least understood by some to be restricted to), activity that was in some fashion related to public use of the keys.

Doctrinal study continued at the 1967 convention of the WELS where doctrinal statements were drafted, studied and revised, then adopted at the 1969 WELS convention. One wonders if a good deal of current confusion over the doctrine is not reflected in these doctrinal statements and the use of overlapping terminology. The official doctrinal statement of the WELS on Ministry is printed below:

II. The Ministry

A. Christ instituted one office in His Church, the ministry of the Gospel.

It is the task of proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9; Luke 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. Matt 16:19; Matt 10:32; Matt 18:18; 1 Pet 2:9.

A.C. (p. 44). “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

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ Erwin Scharf, “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys,” pp. 57-58.

through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel...”

F.C. (1100,20) “That the ministry of the Church, the Word preached and heard...”

- B. The purpose of this ministry is the edification of the Church, by winning ever further sinners for Christ, and by building up those who are already members in Christian faith and life. Matt 8:18-20; Eph 4:11-14; 1 Cor 12:7.
- C. From the beginning of the Church there were men especially appointed to discharge publicly (in behalf of a group of Christians) the duties of this one ministry. Acts 13:1-3; Acts 6:1-6.
- D. This public ministry is not generically different from that of the common priesthood of all Christians. It constitutes a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the Gospel.
 1. All Christians are equal before God, neither superior nor inferior to one another, and all are equally entrusted with the same ministry of the Gospel. 1 Pet 2:9. Hence no one may assume the functions of the public ministry except through a legitimate call. Art. Smalc. p. 522:67-69: The authority to call (*ius vocandi*) is implied in the authority to administer the Gospel (*ius ministrandi evangelii*) given to the Church. Hence it is proper to speak of the derived right of local congregations to call.
 2. God is a God of order; He wants us to conduct all of our affairs orderly, 1 Cor 14:33, 40, and in the spirit of love. 1 Cor 16:14.
 3. Christians are not equally qualified to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. The Lord sets forth the needed qualifications of those who are to perform publicly the functions of the ministry. 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-11. God gives to the Church men qualified for the various forms of the work required. Eph 4:7-16; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28-31.
 4. These gifts should be gratefully received and developed. 1 Cor 12:31; 1 Thess 5:19,20; 1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6-9.
 5. Thus these public ministers are appointed by God. Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28. It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency. (Hoefling)
 6. There is, however, 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 gifts 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 the Scripture: 1 Tim 4:13; Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28; Rom 12:6-8; 2 Tim 2:2; John 21:15-17 (feeding); Acts 20:28 (watching); 1 Tim 3:2; 4:11; 6:2 (teaching); 1 Tim 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 building up of the spiritual body of Christ; and all of them are comprehended under the general commission to preach the Gospel given to all believers.

Antithesis: We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation (*Pfarramt*) as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry.⁹

The statement begins in point A by identifying only one instituted office in the church, the ministry of the Gospel. This appears to be a Schaller definition inclusive of the universal priesthood. However, the Augsburg Confession which is cited in defense of this position more correctly speaks about the office of the public ministry of the Word (*Predigamt*), especially as it is used in context to expose the false teaching of the Anabaptists who denied the institution of the Public Ministry of the Word.

On two occasions (Point C and D-6) the expositors include reference to Acts 6:1-6 as being part of public ministry, (the passage refers to the table-servers in Jerusalem). However, when examples of various functions of the Public Ministry of the Word are cited from Scripture in point 6, all references are to functions in direct use of the means of grace. It is ambivalent.

Let's question point D-3. Does the context speak of the gifts given by God for the sake of the church as being general gifts (*χαρις*), or of men themselves being the gifts? Scripture clearly teaches both: gifts are given to all priests (men and women alike) for service in the church (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11), and *men* are given in specific offices of the Public Ministry of the Word as gifts to the church (Eph 4:7-16). The overlap is apparent.

In point D-5 we state our rejection of Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling (d. 1853). He was a German Pietist-Lutheran who contended that God did not ordain the Public Ministry of the Word, but it simply was devised by the priesthood of all believers out of necessity for good order, since Christians could not all exercise the power of the keys at the same time. While we reject his false teaching on paper, one wonders as to the validity of the observation made by Professor Kurt Marquardt of the LCMS:

Modern Wisconsin's Statements on Church and Ministry formally reject Hoefling's stand: "It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency (Hoefling)." Materially, however, the Wisconsin Statements suggest Hoefling's influence, for instance in the virtual identification of priesthood and ministry.¹⁰

In fairness to the 1970 doctrinal statements, we must remember that confessional statements are generally written to cut to the heart of a specific question, rather than be a comprehensive statement of every situation which may arise. For example, Luther's earlier writings concerning Church and Ministry in *The Power and Primacy of the Pope* do not contradict his latter writings in combating the loose canons called the Anabaptists. In each case his pen was pointed at a specific misunderstanding on the part of those parties who viewed ministry at opposite ends of heresy's spectrum.¹¹ In the case of our 1970 doctrinal statement, the WELS mind-set was still locked in "defense mode" against the incorrect limitation of the Public Ministry of the Word to the specific form of the office of the local pastorate.

The need to reexamine our doctrinal position of Church and Ministry is evident. The 1970 doctrinal statements do not answer the specific questions. They were not designed to do so and apparently were not understood or interpreted, (at least not by consensus), in the way they are currently applied.

This last point is illustrated by a phone interview with Professor Erwin Scharf (the 1965 convention essayist earlier quoted in this paper). He stated that an application of his essay today "could still ring true, if the service performed is in contra-relationship to the church, thus freeing others for service in the broader service to the church." However, it would be an injustice to state that current questions were considered or answered by

⁹ "Doctrinal Statements of the WELS 1970," pp. 9-11.

¹⁰ Kurt Marquardt, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry and Governance*, p. 220.

¹¹ On one end, the Papacy taught a separate hierarchical class of clergy marked with indelible character by the Pope and a denial of the universal priesthood. On the opposite end, the Anabaptists taught no need for and no divine institution of the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word, since all Christians were priests and possessed their "inner" calling.

the expositions of 1965, as Prof. Scharf goes on to say, “I find disconcerting the loose use of the term ministry without the definite article (*The Ministry*). It needs to be identified as public use of the keys, but to simply speak of someone celebrating his years in the ministry, without ever having had opportunity for direct use of the Word—I stumble on that.”¹²

“I stumble on that.” Those words ring in my ears and are echoed by so many questioning voices among us. Why do we stumble? Is it just a hurdle we need to get over, or a stumbling block and obstacle in hindrance to the Gospel? The need for careful examination is obvious to insure a future “walk together” as Synod.

The doctrinal statements of 1970 put the issue of Church and Ministry to rest, where for the most part it slept undisturbed for about 15 years. During that time nothing new happened to directly affect our position. But for the past 10 years a trend has appeared among us which disturbs some and calls for an awakening of the doctrinal issue. New applications of the doctrine have arisen, new practical considerations are espoused. Seth A. Neyhart, a 1994 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, makes a keen observation in his thesis “The History of the Doctrine of the Ministry in the Wisconsin Synod,” written for Senior Church History class. He reflects on the silent, sleepy years of Church and Ministry:

And they (WLS students) never had to seriously wrestle with the Doctrines of Church and Ministry any time else, either before in their training or afterwards in their parishes. As a result, when new practical considerations came up in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, many pastors were really caught off guard doctrinally. When it came to thinking through radical new practical questions like: “Can and should we ordain male teachers?” and “Can and should we create new forms of public ministry?” there was and still is a lot of reaction based on gut feelings and personal preferences instead of “What does the Bible say?” and “How can we best further the gospel?”¹³

Current Trends and Present Environment

While not much happened *directly* related to our 1970 doctrinal statement of Church and Ministry, there appear to be several external circumstances that lent themselves to the evolution of a different application in our midst. More than one voice has cried: “Hey, look at this! What of that?” This section attempts to pool some of those concerns so commonly heard among us.

It is not the writer’s intent in the following section to accuse or blame, but to cite observations and trends. If on occasion the poking and prodding hurts, I pray it not only is looked upon as constructive exploration like that of a doctor trying to determine an illness from its external symptoms, but that it also leads us to raise our prayers in earnest to the Great Physician of the Church that he might heal His Body where it may well be wounded.

In the spirit of Luther’s inquiring 95 Theses, I present the following observations for consideration as to how they may impact our current view of Church and Ministry:

1. In the wake of our Synodical mission boom at home and abroad through the 60’s and 70’s, there came a noticeable slow-down in external growth. It fostered a cause of concern on the part of many with the consequent conclusion that we may no longer be meeting the needs of the people. The current call to a fresh approach in ministry has oft been repeated: “We are no longer meeting the Germans at the boat,” as well as the caricature of the present ministry among us as “maintenance ministry,” a derogatory term used to describe pastorates considered too parochial.
2. We witnessed the prolific emphasis on the practical application of the universal priesthood throughout Christendom in the past decades. (It was not just an emphasis on the glory of our sanctified service, but included a practical restructuring in many congregations with Abdon seminars leading the way).

¹² Professor Erwin Scharf, phone interview of February 2, 1995.

¹³ Neyhart, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

3. To generate better awareness of God’s grace among the priesthood of believers, “gifts seminars” were conducted which called attention to our precious gifts from God and by progression of thought encouraged their use within the structure of organized committees and local programs. Awareness of the gifts was presented with a subsequent need for new forms of ministry in which to exercise those self-identified gifts.
4. For the first time in WELS history an outside, secular agency was extensively employed whose philosophy of “fund-raising” was adapted as a Synodical tool for the joint and orchestrated effort of “Reaching Out” in a special offering. This marks a major progression of adapting secular methodology by our Synodical body to achieve its goals.
5. The observation of slowed growth and perceived inactivity in our Synodical body brought a critical eye to bear upon our level of sanctification. We embarked on a Synod-wide “Spiritual Renewal” program. Its stated goal was not a gospel outreach, but an inner appreciation of the gospel and a sanctified response: (*italics added for emphasis*)

WHEREAS 8) inadequate staffing, misunderstandings of mission and ministry, impacts of the unbelieving world and other pressures have contributed to many congregations conducting “*maintenance ministry*” rather than aggressive, *growth oriented* ministry; and...

RESOLVED e) That under God’s hand of blessing we seek the following fruits of faith:

- *Substantially increased participation* in worship, in the Lord’s Supper and in Bible classes.
- *Broader understanding* of God’s mission for his church and *of the ministry* of all believers.
- *Substantially increased ministry* on the part of God’s saints in service to one another and in outreach to the community.
- *Substantially increased financial support* for all aspects of kingdom work that are carried on among us.
- *Further development* of our congregations and our Synod as a body of Christians who care for and love one another in Christ.¹⁴

6. The historical purpose of Synod’s existence as a tool through which the goals and will of the body at large could be disseminated has received criticism in a perceived shift towards a more centralized, executive form of aggressive leadership which makes policy and implements it in behalf of the body. These vocal concerns contributed to the appointment of the Committee on Program Review (CPR) whose self-study concluded that Christian liberty not only allows for all such ministries, but that they are deemed necessary for the present day function of the church to meet the needs of its people and workers.
7. Currently before Synod is the proposal to amend the Synod Constitution, Article IV, to include the Mission Statement of the WELS, accompanied by our “Mission Vision” statement. The practical emphasis of such a new mission statement is its ability to better serve as a management tool on the part of a centralized Synod leadership. It reflects a shift from our purpose of existence as a confessional body maintaining faithfulness to the word and spreading the Gospel, to a church body that exists to “make disciples” of people through the Word and a sanctified, result-oriented body.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Reports and Memorial for the Forty-Ninth Biennial Convention of the WELS,” pp. 270-271. The perception on the part of more than a few was that the implementation of “Spiritual Renewal” was done through the presentation of innovative forms of ministry, rather than the content of that ministry. Then again, wasn’t that the stated aim of the memorial?

¹⁵ Proposed Constitutional revision includes the change of Article IV which states the objective of the Synod. It read: “The object and purpose of the synod shall be to *extend and conserve the true doctrine* and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.” Some consider this to be backward-looking, maintenance-minded, and a hindrance to the growth in understanding our new goal to increase sanctified activity of Christ’s disciples. In addition, the constitutional revision deletes synodical responsibility to maintain a Synodical school system, thus creating greater flexibility of general education for the sake of increased ministry in the church.

8. A proliferation of special, thematic Sundays during the church year designed to emphasize our varied service to God and the community. This is in contrast to the historic pericopes with the annual presentation of God's service to us and his act of salvation portrayed for us from cradle to the cross and beyond. The revision of the hymnal to *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* includes liturgical formats with increased attention given to the response of the worshipper.
9. The confessional practice in our midst to abhor any forms of ministry which are tainted and structured from a false understanding of Christ's Church and His Ministry is replaced with the sentiment that we have freedom to borrow and sterilize any structure of ministry from heterodox churches for our own adaptation. Consequently, we are especially exposed to influences of Reformed ideologies, especially the Church Growth Movement which preponderantly relies upon expanded forms of ministry to accomplish its objectives.¹⁶

To illustrate the concern of the last point, I turn your attention to one of many books promoting new "ministry" and the Church Growth Movement. The book is entitled *Foresight* by Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon. It is filled with a Reformed-Presbyterian, non-denominational, Law-Gospel-confusing, heterodox philosophy about religion and their perceived function of the church. The purpose for inclusion in this paper is for you, the reader, to ascertain by comparison if this "camel" has managed to stick his nose in our tent of WELS Lutheranism.

In chapter five of *Foresight*, the authors claim that a new model for ministry and church is receiving attention among such groups as the Navigators, Youth with a Mission, Vineyard Fellowship, Maranatha Ministries, Agape Force, and others. Would we want WELS added to the list of "others"? The new model involves "Rethinking Leadership Styles" towards team leadership. They project the need for "modeling" churches and the role of pastors as "equippers," or "enabling models," which are considered better than the more traditional, institutional forms of leadership. They outline a comparative summary of two types of churches, one Institutional/old/bad and one Equipping/new/good:¹⁷

Institutional Model

Control model
 Emphasis on authority
 Over/Under
 Top-down process
 Institution-centered
 Survival-oriented
 Program oriented
 Focus on policies and programs
 Machine model
 Resembles Matthew 20:25

Equipping model

Enabling model
 Emphasis on mutuality, consensus
 Under/Up—Incarnational, elevational
 Interactive process
 Person centered
 Growth/development oriented
 Process oriented
 Focus on climate for growth
 Organism model
 Resembles Matthew 20:2

¹⁶ "Our Golden Calf." The Israelites were not able to sterilize this form of Egyptian religion and use it as a symbolic presence of the Lord among them. It didn't work for them! It couldn't work for them! Reformed structures cannot work for us as a tool to present Lutheran Theology and an emphasis on the means of grace, since they are based on a different concept of justification, Gospel and ministry.

¹⁷ Howard A. Snyder & Daniel V. Runyon, *Foresight*, Nashville: T. Nelson, 1986, p. 85.

Now parallel the above outline with the comparative outline below which describes a plan for a more “effective ministry” in a WELS congregation as printed in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, April 1994:¹⁸

Moving from A to B

(St. Somebody's) plan for more effective ministry: move from Model A to Model B

Model A

- *Day-to-day managing
- *Personal opinion-driven decisions
- *Activity-oriented
- *Inward-looking, congregation-centered

- *Emphasis on “how to do it”
- *Emphasis on administration of routines
- *Prime reliance on money and the material

- *Keeping things as they are or restoring the past
- *My needs and wants (my kids, my wife)

- *Desire for rules and regulations to solve problems and maintain system
- *First question: How much money do we have?
- *Most gifted people in administration

Model B

- *Future-focused management
- *Vision-driven decisions
- *Goal-directed, results oriented
- *Outward-looking, service-to-others centered

- *Emphasis on “what to do”
- *Emphasis on innovation
- *Prime reliance on people and the power of the Spirit (God's promises)
- *Meeting the needs of today, anticipating the future
- *Meeting the needs of others especially the hurting and lost
- *Prayer and spiritual encouragement and growth to solve problems
- *First question: What would the Lord have us do?
- *Most gifted people in ministry

¹⁸ *Northwestern Lutheran*, April 1994, p. 15. The name of the congregation has been purposefully deleted, lest it be construed as a personal charge. The comparison is simply laid out for the reader to ascertain if there is a hint of truth to the alleged encroachment of the Church Growth Movement among us. The reader should decide if there is credence to the conclusion this essayist once overheard: “If it looks reformed, feels reformed and is patterned after the reformed, then it must be Lutheran.”

In *Foresight*, the “Role of Spiritual Gifts” is presented as vital in establishing new forms of ministry, nor is the pastor portrayed as the public minister/administrator of the means of grace, but as “The Equipper/Enabler” who “focuses especially on the discipling process which leads believers into effective growth and ministry.” In our circles people have voiced their discomfort with the new term “discipling” or “make disciples” which has become popular in our literature. While the term appears unclear to us, it is not unclear to the reformed authors of *Foresight*. By their definition: “Discipling in the New Testament sense means helping all believers attain ‘to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph 4:13).”¹⁹ What causes anxious sighs in our body is the adaptation of terminology which may cast a shadow of confusion between justification and sanctification. For example, is the following use of the terminology as clear as we might desire?

Jesus adds two participles to explain how to make disciples, baptizing, teaching. Baptizing recruits disciples. Teaching trains and equips the recruits for authentic discipleship. What baptizing initiates teaching perfects...Teaching makes disciples.²⁰

At the end of chapter five, the authors of *Foresight* outline expected results for a church body with the *foresight* to follow their guidelines. The summary printed below is their own:

If the equipping model is adopted, the impact will be wide-ranging:

- *Greater practice of the priesthood of believers will result...*[Jacob Spener, credited with launching the Pietist renewal movement within German Lutheranism, is quoted favorably for use of the universal priesthood in his reform and the conclusion is made]: This concept proved powerful as a lever to renew the Church three hundred years ago. This may happen again.²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87. This definition fits into the entire scope of what reformed theology stands for and aims at, namely that through Godly effort an individual can strive to be justified, (*sanitive* justification as contrasted by the Lutheran definition of *forensic* justification). The sanctification-twist and abuse of the law is evident throughout the entire book and its strategic plan. Gospel is not presented as Gospel by our definition, but as a means of forced obedience to the law.

²⁰ Joel Gerlach, “The Call Into the Discipling Ministry,” p.6. I acknowledge Rev. Gerlach’s statement may be read correctly, if one squints at it long enough and hard enough. However, I share the fear that frequent squinting can cause “headaches” and “eye-strain” that may lead to an astigmatic view of other doctrines.

²¹ *Pietism* was a 17th century movement in the Lutheran Church led by Philip Jacob Spener, a Lutheran pastor under the predominant influence of Reformed Theology. As Pietism remains a continual threat to the Church, we recommend you read “Pietism, Past and Present” by John M. Brenner (presented in Southeastern Conference of Michigan District, January 23, 1989) and “Present-Day Pietism” by Ernst Wendland, (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 49, January 1953). Both of these authors, as well as others, are referenced in chapter 25 entitled “Pietism” of *What’s Going on Among the Lutherans?*, Leppien/Smith. For brevity, we quote from this source (pp. 259-260), including its references:

Practical teaching in the Bible (what Christ does *in* us), or “heart knowledge,” was placed over and above the doctrine (what Christ did *for* us), or “head knowledge.” Thus, the pietists stressed the subjective over the objective and made sanctification a “subtle form of work-righteousness” (Brenner, *op. cit.*, p. 8).

The lowered view of the means of grace and greater emphasis on lay involvement led to a blurring of the biblical distinction between the universal priesthood of believers and the public ministry (Brenner, *op. cit.*, p. 26). Every Christian is a part of the universal priesthood and is called to share the Gospel with others, but special requirements apply to the public ministry. Of special importance are the pastor’s training and responsibility for the administering of the Sacraments and safe-guarding the teaching of correct doctrine (Armin Scheutze, *Basic Doctrines of the Bible*, Milwaukee: NPH, 1986. pp. 75-78). In their eagerness to serve in the church, the laity got into areas in which they did not belong, such as lay-led Bible studies without pastoral guidance. In emphasizing subjective experience over doctrine, the pastor’s special training lost much of its significance and his role was modified. He was no longer primarily the “minister of the Word of God,” but rather the personally accountable representative, witness, and example of spiritual life, or “godliness.” (*What’s Going on Among the Lutherans?*, Leppien/Smith, pp. 259-260)

- *Emerging alternative forms of pastoral training* will accompany this trend. Dynamic, growing churches become impatient with the costly and heavily academic pastoral education provided by seminaries.²² Sometimes they need functional shortcuts...²³
- *Major reforming of seminary curricula.* A number of seminaries are offering courses in discipleship ministries, though in most cases there are elective courses added to a curriculum which fundamentally presupposed the more traditional professional clergy model. We expect that some seminaries will restructure their curricula more radically, and that new seminaries or training schools based on the equipping model will continue to spring up.
- *A practical and more organic integration of a wide range of ministries,* including evangelism and justice ministries, as well as the inward ministries of nurturing believers, may be expected. As believers are equipped for ministry, their emerging variety of gifts and callings lead them into a wide and unpredictable range of ministries...

For all these reasons, this trend is of fundamental significance for the shape of the church life as well as for effective, transforming ministry in years to come.²⁴

While I do not agree with the format of ministry and aim of the authors of *Foresight*, I will agree with their last statement in the sense that trends are of fundamental significance for the shape of the church. If trends indicate that we are being swept into a current of our secular times, its time to either swim upstream, get out of the trend or be swept along.

The Call: Ordination and Installation in the light of *Ministry*

Included in this assignment was the request to undertake a doctrinal study of the call into the Public Ministry of the Word. What is a call? Who may be called? What is the relationship of ordination and installation to the call? We begin in earnest to more specifically address this from the starting point of the Church.

1. What is the Church? The One, True, Universal Church of God (*Una Sanctum*) consists of all genuine believers in Jesus Christ, the elect of God whom he has called and chosen by his grace.

The Bible uses several related words to speak of the believer's calling and election. The word *καλεω* has a wide use of meaning: "to call, call by name, summon, invite." God *called* his Son out of Egypt (Mt 2:15), and since Jesus grew up in Nazareth he was *called* a Nazarene (Mt 2:23). Jesus *called* James and John to follow him (Mt 4:21) and in this sense it takes on its more specific meaning. It refers to God's invitation of grace or his summons into his Kingdom, but is not limited to those who shall go heaven for Jesus tells us that many are *invited* (*κλητος*), but few are *chosen* (*εκλεκτος*).

The *Chosen* of the Lord are those whom God chooses: *εκλεγομαι* = "choose, select (from among a number)." You did not *choose* Christ, he *chose* you (Jn 15:16), as he also *chose* the Twelve, with the exception of Judas (Jn 13:18).

God's *choice* is not restricted to the Twelve. All Christian believers are *chosen*, although not all Christians are Apostles, (*αποστολους* = specially commissioned as "the ones sent" to be personal witnesses of the Lord's work and life from beginning to end).

²² How firmly committed is the WELS to the cost of maintaining its schools of the worker-training system? How firmly committed were we only 5 years ago?

²³ Would you agree with the concern of those who demand extreme diligence must be maintained if we are going to incorporate a Staff Ministry Program in the WELS? In an effort to meet more needs of people in the next century, we dare never take the shortcut that cuts us off from *thorough indoctrination* of the Word of God in our church servants.

²⁴ Snyder & Runyon, *Foresight*, pp. 94-95.

Individually and corporately, believers are God's *chosen* (εκλεκτος) people (Col 3:12), a people *chosen* (εκλεκτος) by him who called (καλεω) us out of the darkness (1 Pet 2:9). As God's *elect* (εκλεκτος) we have full assurance of heaven and confirmation of God's promise of our election (εκλογη) in Jesus Christ.

These related words have in common the sense of *calling out*, as in a separation from others, like the sheep who listen to the calling-voice of their Master and are led out by him. Even the word for *church* is more literally understood in the sense of "the called-out ones" (εκκλησια), whether it be a congregation localized in a city like Corinth (1 Cor 1:2), in a wider region like Galatia (Gal 1:2), to seven specific churches in Asia (Rev 1:4), or to a wider body of "called-out-ones" (εκλεκτοις) who make up the Church of Christ (I Pet 1:1).

2. How does the Church come into being? The Holy Spirit alone calls believers to the Faith of Christ and sanctifies them in service to the Savior. He performed this work and continues to perform this work through the Means of Grace, (the use of the Keys of the Kingdom).

The Holy Spirit alone works faith and preserves faith in us through his sanctifying work. "He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:14). Thus, the Gospel in communication, is a vehicle of his loving work, for "faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Our God has also connected his declaration of and conveyance of forgiveness to physical elements in the function of holy baptism and holy communion. These are called sacraments, which together with the Gospel-Word make up the means of God's grace among us.

If ever we in practice diminish or try to supplement these precious tools of God's Spirit, we consequently diminish the *only* "effective" means whereby God performs his wondrous sanctifying work within and among us. Great caution should be exercised by the witnesses of Christ lest they set for themselves result-oriented goals over which God alone has control. Our calling as witnesses of Christ is a Gospel-sharing goal—"Proclaim the Gospel!"

3. Where, then, is the Holy Christian Church only to be found? The Holy Christian Church is found only where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are rightly administered.

The Holy Christian Church consists of believers; the Holy Spirit works that faith and he does so through the means of grace. These means of grace become the visible tools through which we can recognize the existence of the Church itself. They are called the "Marks of the Church."

Do not take this doctrinal truth lightly. It is an essential distinction between Law and Gospel. It clarifies what the Church is and where it is. You do not ascertain the Church's existence on the basis of morality, good works or sanctified living. This could be evident even among the pagan. You recognize the Church by the existence of the Holy Spirit's tools, the word and sacrament.

4. What is the purpose of God's believers (the Church)? Believers, individually and collectively, are called to a position in God's Kingdom of Grace for the purpose of holy, consecrated service in that Kingdom to the glory of God.

Our lives as Christians are lived as "called-out-ones" who are now αγιαζω: "set apart, holy, sanctified, dedicated" to the glory of our God. Collectively we are the *holy* nation (αγιον - 1 Pet 2:9); we are the church, described as those called to be *saints* (αγιαζω). Just as the Heavenly Father *set apart* his own Son in this world for service to us (John 10:36), and just as the Son *sanctified* himself in dedicated service for our salvation (John 17:19), so now God *sanctifies* us apart from worldly attitudes and passions (1 Thess 5:23), so that Jesus is *set apart* as Lord in our hearts and lives (1 Peter 3:15) and we are consecrated in his service. In simple terms: "God did not call (καλεω) us to be impure, but to live a holy (αγιαζω) life" (1 Thess 4:7).

Luther's explanation of the Second Article reminds us as to why Christ redeemed us: "that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and *serve him* in everlasting righteousness..." Every Christian lives to serve. For this purpose you were redeemed and sanctified, that God might "purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). While you live this sanctified life as an individual, you do not live it independently. You live it together with the others saints (believers) so that we are identified as the "Communion of Saints" with a single purpose of mind, the glory of God.

Professor John Brenner writes that God's purpose in our calling is "to *declare the praises* of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). He then elaborates what it means "to declare God's praises":

To praise someone is to tell others about the good things he has done. To praise God is to tell sin-sick souls that Jesus died for them. To praise God is to tell sinful human beings that God has declared them not guilty because he declared his own Son guilty in their place. To praise God is to proclaim the gospel. That is the privilege and responsibility of everyone of God's elect. That is the *ministry* God has given to the church.

Ministry (diakonia) is service. A minister (diakonos) is one who serves. The gospel ministry is the service of proclaiming the good news of forgiveness of sins in the crucified and risen Savior.²⁵

Elsewhere, the writer to Hebrews speaks of our Christian service as sacrifices we offer to our Lord. These are not sacrifices for atonement of sin, but thank-offerings of love in word and deed as we are told to "continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). What is the *name of God* that we honor? His name is associated with his reputation made known through his holy Word. And what is the *fruit of the lips that confess* that name, other than our testimony of his Word? The *fruit* of our faith is the testimony of the content of our faith. We glorify Christ as Savior!

This is service to God with no specifically mandated form. It is expressed throughout the full scope of your life as you "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1). Your worship of God is to declare his "worth," and his worth among us is revealed in his gift of love through the atoning work of our Savior from sin (Gospel). Therefore, "whatever you do, whether in word or deed, *do it all in the name* of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17).

5. What is meant by the term "Universal Priesthood of All Believers?" The "Universal Priesthood" is a descriptive term for a Bible-picture of the sanctified service of the Church (by individuals or corporately), but it is not synonymous with the established Office of the Ministry of the Word.

The inspired author Peter provides the most well-known "word-picture" of the Universal Priesthood: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a *holy priesthood*, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...But you are a chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness" (1 Pet 2:5,9).

This word-picture is one of many descriptive terms for the Church and to be greatly treasured. Luther strove to emphasize this truth among his hearers. However, if we permit the term "priest/priesthood" to spill over into the definition of what is the office of the Public Ministry of the Word, then we are greatly misled by

²⁵ John M. Brenner, "The Doctrine of the Divine Call and Current Practice," p. 5. Brenner calls this sanctified service "Gospel Ministry," a term also used by J.P. Schaller to explain that the sharing of the gospel is not confined to the clergy, but is integral to the purpose of every Christian's life as a priest. While the term can be understood correctly and was effectively used by Schaller to counter his contemporaries' claim that the *pfarrmt* (pastoral office) was the only "Gospel Ministry," it is not equally prudent or clear in its use today. The term blurs with "The Ministry of the Gospel," which was correctly used by the Confessors to identify the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word.

the term. Here Luther makes quite clear the distinction between the two in his treatise, “Concerning the Ministry”:

On this account I think it follows that we neither can nor ought to give the name priest to those who are in charge of Word and sacrament among the people. The reason they have been called priests is either because of the custom of the heathen people or as a vestige of the Jewish nation. The result is greatly injurious to the church. According to the New Testament Scriptures better names would be ministers, deacons, bishops, stewards, presbyters (a name often used and indicating the older members). For thus Paul writes in 1 Cor 4:1, “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.” He does not say, “as priests of Christ,” because he knew that the name and office of priest belonged to all. Paul’s frequent use of the word “stewardship” or “household,” “ministry,” “minister,” “servant,” “one serving the gospel,” etc., emphasizes that it is not the estate, or order, or any authority of dignity that he wants to uphold, but only the office and the function. The authority and the dignity of the priesthood resided in the community of believers.²⁶

One might consider Luther’s meticulous care in the use of words an adiaphoron, but Luther was very clear in his distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the Public Ministry of the Word. Luther purposefully did not call the pastors “priests” because that Biblical reference addressed all believers. At the same time he did not call members of the universal priesthood “ministers” because of the overlap it would cause by inference. This perhaps is one lesson we need to learn in our confusing times.

In the January 1995 publication of the *Northwestern Lutheran Rev.* Wayne Mueller makes the distinction between ministers and public ministers. He makes reference to Luther in the following, (the italics are added for emphasis):

Against the clergy-dominated Roman church, *Luther stated that priests* are baptized, not ordained. In private life, *every Christian is a minister*. Every believer studies the Word, shares the gospel with family and friends, and sacrifices his life as a thank offering of good works.²⁷

The content of the article makes a distinction between the universal priesthood and public ministers, but the point is clouded when we slide the terms *priest* and *minister* side by side. The inadvertent result accidentally infers that Luther called priests “ministers.” This Luther did *not* do, for the sake of clarity. Luther’s distinction in terms is an example we should heed as we turn to the anvil of contemporary “word-smiths” and forge terminology that supports our doctrinal positions, rather than obscures them.²⁸

The Biblical truth of the universal priesthood includes the following pertinent points:

- 1) None needs another, except Christ, in order to have access to God. We each go through only one Mediator, Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). He alone is our Way to God the Father (Jn 14:6).
- 2) Each believer is not only a priest, but one of a royal nature (1 Pet 2:9), thus describing not only our function in this world, but also our high-calling and glorious station in life under God’s grace.
- 3) To each priest (believer), the Lord has entrusted the use of the Keys of the Kingdom, the God-given empowerment to remit sins for the penitent and retain sins of the impenitent in the name of Christ, not in *public* forum (representative of the Church), but as individuals in their Christian life (Mt 16:19; Mt 18:15-18).

²⁶ *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 40, p. 35.

²⁷ *Northwestern Lutheran*, January 1995, p. 17.

²⁸ Someone may here interject, “But Luther called other people ministers, such as the sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons.” In fairness to Luther, he qualifies this statement in the preceding paragraph when he comments how nice it would be “that we might train and prepare fine, capable men to become bishops, pastors, *and other servants* of the church...” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 37, p. 364).

- 4) As a priest, each believer is called to offer his sacrifices to the Lord as a servant of Christ. These are not sacrifices of atonement for sin as ordained in the Old Testament Priesthood. This has been done, once for all, by the perfect sacrifice of our Great High Priest Jesus (Heb 9:26). The sacrifices we offer as priests are those blessed thank-offerings of our love, our sanctified lives, our love offered to God, our Christian service to the glory of his name.

6. Does the Church have a special, God-ordained form or structure? No. God has not prescribed or legislated any specific form for his Church or of our sanctified service to his name.

The statement speaks of our service rendered *to* God. This is our sanctified life, as individuals or as a church. It is our love offered *to* God and thus follows God's Law. In the New Testament age there is no legislated *form* of specific service. We follow the moral law of love. A sanctified life does indeed follow the clear definitions of what love for God and for our fellow man truly is, but it is not restricted to any specific form.

Do you want to start a school, an altar guild, a youth group, an organized church grounds committee, a nursery center, a soup kitchen, a bus service, a meals-on-wheels, a special offering to relieve the needs of the hungry or grant relief to the oppressed, etc.? We have no specific form legislated! There is no external law of form, nor are we mandated to specifically do these things, excepting the command: Love one another.

All of this is sanctified living, our love offered to God indirectly through our fellow man. It is our Christian vocation and purpose in life to glorify God through such works of service. And while it is supportive of the Gospel of Christ, it is not equated with God's gift of the Public Ministry of the Word given to the Church. Here we must make the distinction as God does between the whole nation of Israel which was sanctified by Sinaitic law to be his kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6), and the specific priesthood which God established to carry out his service to them. (While Old Testament regulated forms do not apply in the New Testament, the moral principle of God's structure does.) We must make the distinction, as we would make the distinction between sanctification and justification. We make the distinction, just as we would in our Sunday morning worship service, lest the coexistence of sanctified service to God (Law) and God's service to us (Gospel) be homogenized.

Our Lord does bless through such activity, just as he blesses through the sanctified activity of a worshipper on Sunday morning. But is it to be equated with the Gospel-ordained gift which God gives to the Church through the Public Minister/Administrator of the Means of Grace? No. Again, we here make the same distinction as we do in our divine worship services. The instituted sacramental acts of God are specific Gospel, all Gospel, and while conjoined with our service of love given to God, they remain as distinct as Law and Gospel.

7. What special power has God given to the Church (all believers) to carry out his will? God has given all believers his authority to forgive the sins of the penitent and retain the sins of the impenitent. This is called the "Keys of the Kingdom."

The use of the keys is a special power which God has given only to his church (his holy people, all believers, the universal priesthood), as the confessors have stated: "In addition to this, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the Church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify."²⁹

8. How are the keys of the kingdom to be used by a believer? Each believer is to use the "binding key" by declaring God's Law in the world with its condemnation of sin, as well as withholding forgiveness from the obviously impenitent. Each believer is to use the "loosing key" by declaring God's gospel in the world with its deliverance from sin in Christ and issuing that forgiveness in Christ to the penitent. This is done in the "private" or day-to-day individual life of a believer.

²⁹ *Triglot Concordia*, Smalcald Articles: Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope. p. 511.

Each believer has been given the keys, both keys, and both are to be used in the private realm of his own personal, individual life. This is what is meant by the term “private” use. In this regard we are told: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph 4:32). “Therefore confess your sins to each other” (James 5:16), and “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another” (Col 3:16).

9. Through whom are the keys of the kingdom to be administered publicly in behalf of the church? God has prescribed and instituted a specific function of his love for us with the public administration of the Keys of the Kingdom. It is the holy office of the Public Ministry of the Word.

First of all, by the term *Public* ministry, we do not mean it is something which occurs openly in the public. It refers instead to its *representational* feature. The Public Ministry of the Word is representative of Christ, drawn out from the congregation as it turns the key over in behalf of the church.

The public ministry is a service performed in the church, in behalf of fellow Christians, in their name. Like the public official in a state who functions in the name of his fellow citizens that have elected him, so the minister has an office in which he carries out responsibilities that have been entrusted to him by fellow Christians.³⁰

This office of the Public Ministry of the Word was not devised by men simply out of a need that things be done in decency and order. The Public Ministry of the Word was prescribed by God and established by him.

It would be unscriptural, however, to trace the public ministry, as did Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling (d. 1853), to mere expediency. He contended that it is the church which devised the public ministry from the inner necessity that all believers having the same power of the keys could not all exercise this power at the same time.³¹

While the New Testament *describes* several forms that this office took within the early church, these specific, external forms are not demanded or *prescribed* by God. The function behind them is, just as the office of the Public Ministry of the Word is instituted by God. We do have Christ’s commands: “This do!” However, we have no direct word of institution for any specific external structure of carrying out these functions. It is not, as some contend, specifically limited to the rigid definition of the pastoral office (*pfarrmt*) of a localized congregation.

Here again it must be said that the New Testament church has no binding legal regulations and prescriptions from God beyond that which is embedded in the moral law, God’s immutable holy will for all people for this earthly life...The one public ministry of the gospel may assume various forms as circumstances demand. These forms need not embrace all the functions of the public ministry.³²

The ordained, holy work and service of God through the Public Ministry of the Word is what qualifies it as the Public Ministry of the Word. This can come in a variety of forms, and not every function of the Public Ministry of the Word has to be included in the duties of a designated individual for his position to qualify as Public Ministry of the Word. However, a part of God’s ordained function of the office and public use of the keys must be in his charged duties for it to qualify as the Public Ministry of the Word. Serving perceived needs of the community does not make it Public Ministry of the Word. The divinely charged duties of God’s service delineate whether the office is of the Public Ministry of the Word.

³⁰ Schuetze & Habeck, *Shepherd Under Christ*, pp. 21-22.

³¹ Carl J. Lawrenz, “The Scriptural Truths of the Church and Its Ministry,” *WELS MINISTRY COMPENDIUM*, p. 536.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 537.

10. What, then, are the characteristics or qualities of the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word? The Divinely instituted Office of the Public Ministry is identified in Scripture and historical confessions as the “Ministry of the Word.”

Martin Chemnitz, one of the most keen-minded, spiritually-gifted confessors of Lutheranism provides an outline for us in answer to question #10:

- I. To feed the church of God with the true, pure, and salutary doctrine of the divine Word. Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:2.
- II. To administer and dispense the sacraments of Christ according to His institution. Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23.
- III. To administer rightly the use of the keys of the church, or of the kingdom of heaven, by either remitting or retaining sins (Mt 16:19; Jn 20:23), and to fulfill all these things and the whole ministry (as Paul says, 2 Tim 4:5) on the basis of the prescribed command, which the chief Shepherd Himself has given His ministers in His Word for instruction. Mt 28:20.³³

Just as one speaks about the “marks of the church” to identify its existence, can we not apply the same in parallel to the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word in this Church? I lay the following side by side for your comparative examination:

The Church marked by the Word

Does the church have a New Testament legislated form? No!

Does the church enter into sanctified areas of activity non-essential to the God-ordained mission of the church? Yes.

We call such organizations “para-church organizations.” They are good, God-pleasing efforts of sanctified activity which “support” the Gospel-ministry in the sense that whatever we do, we do to the glory of God and his word. However, they are para-church in the sense that they lack the key marks of the church, the Means of Grace in word and sacrament.

The Ministry of the Word

Does the office of the Public Ministry have a New Testament legislated form? No!

Does the church appoint public representatives to serve in sanctified areas of activity non-essential to the God-ordained Public Ministry of the Word? Yes.

These would be para-ministries. They are good, God-pleasing efforts of sanctified ministry which “support” the Ministry of the Word in the sense that whatever we do, we do to the glory of God and his word. However, they are para-ministries in the sense that they lack the key marks of the Ministry of the Word, the means of grace in word and sacrament.

³³ Martin Chemnitz, *The Enchiridion of Martin Chemnitz*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981, p. 26.

That there was a marked difference between the divinely instituted office of the Public Ministry of the Word in the Bible and dedicated, consecrated service of the priesthood of all believers can be observed by the use of the words written under inspiration. The Greek word for “service/ministry” is *διακονια*. This is the Greek word most bantered in the definition of what is “ministry.” It simply means “to serve.” It is the word used to describe the Apostolic ministry to which Matthias was appointed (Acts 1:25), the “ministry” of the Apostles in the church of Jerusalem, the “service” of the seven table-servers in Jerusalem (Acts 6:3), the “food-preparation/ministry” which distracted Martha in her complaint to Jesus (Luke 10:40), the service performed by the churches in their relief offering to Jerusalem (2 Cor 9:12), and many others. The meaning of *διακονια* is not intrinsic. Its specific meaning in regard to ministry comes from the “work/service/ministry” which is described in context, and occasionally from the word to which the term is attached to describe the service.

The fact that the definition of *διακονια* is intrinsically generic has been used by some to contend that all ministry was the same ministry. Acts 6:1-4 (table-servers) is often cited as the *sedes doctrinae* of this contention. But in reference to the service (*διακονια*) which the Apostles performed it is specifically labeled a Ministry of the Word (*διακονια λογου*). While not all Public Ministry of the Word is identified in the Bible with both words *διακονια λογου*, nevertheless when two different species of service were laid side by side, that’s when the distinction in terms was employed. While Acts 6:1-4 is commonly used in support of the concept that the Public Ministry is expansive and includes all acts of service, the writer below makes a most thought-provoking point:

Upon closer examination, this passage proves just the opposite: the public ministry was so important to the apostles that they considered it sinful to let anything hinder them from carrying it out...What is commonly pointed to as proof that these seven men were called into the public ministry is the fact that the same Greek root (*διακονια*) is used in the phrase “ministry (service) of the word” and the phrase “to wait” (minister, to serve) tables...Luke is using a play on words that was easily understood by anybody who read his Acts at the time it was first written. I suppose a somewhat equivalent expression today would read as follows: “It would not be right for us to neglect the worship service in order to serve Easter breakfast.”³⁴

Was table-serving part of the Apostolic calling? Is this what they conferred upon the seven men, or was it not simply a sharing of responsibility in consecrated works of love? Ask yourself if one service was an act of sanctification and the other a service of justification.

At first the apostles shouldered this extra task without much difficulty. But now it had grown to undue proportions and interfered with their essential work. The fact that some widows were thus overlooked was only one evil result; the apostles point to one that is still worse; their being forced into a task that really does not belong to their office. This point is worth noting. The theory that all offices in the church are derived from one central office and really constitute parts of it finds no support here. This theory has led to such ideas as that when the janitor rings the bell, sweeps the church, lights the lamps, he is only substituting for the pastor. The apostles have a different view and clearly state what the obligation of the Christian ministry is. Other tasks may arise, but these are extraneous, to be turned over to other hands. The apostles were not delegating a part of their divine office to others—they could not. They were relinquishing tasks that were not a part of this office, that were interfering with that office.³⁵

³⁴ Bruce Bitter, “What is Ministry?,” *Logia*, Vol. III, No. 3, July 1994, p. 31.

³⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961, p. 243.

Have things changed in our age with the proliferation of *Everyone a Minister*? Perhaps the following observation is not out of place:

Recall that the apostles appointed seven men to take care of the food distribution program so that the apostles could devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). In the present-day church we often do just the opposite, as pastors turn over “prayer and...ministry of the word” to the laity and instead busy themselves with the multiplication of programs and administration of parish business.³⁶

When Matthias was appointed to his specific function in the church, he was appointed to an office. It was deemed necessary to have another fill the *επισκοπην* vacated by Judas (Acts 1:20). He was appointed to the apostolic ministry (*διακονιας αποστολης*). This was true Public Ministry of the Word. Before this he performed the service of a disciple, a servant of Christ. Now he was an appointed Minister of the Word.

This biblical distinction of service has been preserved in our confessions. In Article XIII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, time and again reference to the Public Ministry and the Public Minister is incorporated in the specifically chosen phrase: Ministry of the Word:

The adversaries understand priesthood not of *the ministry of the Word*, and the administering of the Sacraments to others, but they understand it as referring to sacrifice...But if ordination be understood as applying to *the ministry of the Word*, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. For *the ministry of the Word* has God’s command and glorious promises, Romans 1:16...And it is of advantage, so far as can be done, to adorn *the ministry of the word* with every kind of praise...³⁷

Reoccurrence within the confessions and the writings of Luther on Church and Ministry abound with the same coupling of terms: *Ministry/Minister* and *of the Word*. Time and again as you read through the older published articles and older treatises in our midst, you keep bumping into the same connection of *Ministry* with the *Word*. It is, or was, so prolific in specific use that whenever you read it, it neither shocked you nor caused you concern. It was understood and accepted; there was no controversy of public ministry outside the definition for Ministry of the Word.

The same distinction was ingrained in our liturgical usage and rightly so, for shouldn’t liturgy be the confirmation of doctrine as well as the tool of our expression of God’s praise? Each time you came in worship before the Lord with a confession of sin, you could rest assured of God’s bountiful grace issued in the announcement: “Upon this, your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained *servant of the Word*, announce the grace of God unto all of you...” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*). That phrase is revised in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. It now reads: “...as a called *servant of Christ* and by his authority, I forgive all your sins.”³⁸

The old phraseology was not by accident. It distinguished the office of the Public Ministry of the Word from other forms of service/ministry performed in the kingdom of priests. You can easily recognize the distinction when the terms are again laid side by side, as in the Rite of Installation of Church Officers in the *Lutheran Agenda* where the Public Minister of the Word addresses the church council (servants of Christ):

³⁶ John T. Pless, “Catechesis for Life in the Royal Priesthood,” *Logia*, Vol. III, No. 4, October 1994, p. 7.

³⁷ *Triglot Concordia*, p. 311.

³⁸ The deletion of the term *ordained* was explained to this writer by a member of the Committee on Worship as an effort to clarify that ordination is not what gives the Absolver his authority to forgive sins. The Absolver has this authority only by virtue of his call. While it is possible that the Absolver may be called and not ordained, (e.g., a vicar), the effectiveness of the deletion remains to be seen. When asked about the change from *servant of the Word* to *servant of Christ*, the rationale was not at the committee member’s fingertips and he wisely chose not to be hasty in his comments.

Dear Brethren: You have been elected, in a regular meeting of this congregation, as members of the church council.

As Such, you are to be associated with me, the appointed *minister of the Word*...

You are also, as *servants of Christ* and officers of His Church, to set your own households and the whole congregation the example of a devout Christian life.³⁹

This distinction in terminology was used to communicate a clear reference to the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word. That it was understood in this sense among us is exemplified by the current reaction and confusion of so many over the revised usage of the term to include all who serve in representational ministry, regardless of their relation to the means of grace.

One current view among us is that the average WELS member has a misperception of the Public Ministry because of misunderstood *tradition* which is not Biblically grounded. The summary statement of a paper presented to the WELS Board for Parish Services Task Force on Alternate Forms of Public Ministry in 1988 encourages our Synod leadership to reconsider our historic position: (*Italics are added for emphasis*).

But until individual congregations better understand mission and ministry, it will be difficult to convince them of the necessity and utilization of new forms. The synod's own understanding of the nature of public ministry might be of some help in this direction...Our *tradition* of considering only pastors and teachers to be public ministers in the proper sense because they work with the word may need some revision.⁴⁰

That is the important question. Is it tradition? Is it merely an ill-conceived understanding on the part of many? Is it even possible that LCMS influence on the doctrine of ministry saturated *The Lutheran Agenda*, *The Lutheran Hymnal* and us by its liturgical use? Or is it Biblical doctrine that defined the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word and is now being redefined with an incursion of the universal priesthood? Regardless, many in the WELS apparently chafe from their conclusion that our Synodical leadership in the past six years has definitely taken the lead to follow the above advice and "convince us of the necessity and utilization of new forms." Doesn't this reiterate our compelling need for a clear understanding of the doctrine and its impact upon us, before a further proliferation of ministries in our circles?

11. But doesn't the Bible speak about all of God's "gifts" to the church simply being different forms of service? Yes. There are different forms of service, but there is also clear distinctions between those forms of the holy office of Public Ministry of the Word and "para-ministry."

There are several Bible passages that speak about God's gifts to the church and gifts given in the church for the edification and building up of the body of Christ. Three oft quoted passages are Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11,12.

In Romans 12:6-8 the apostle Paul uses the illustration of a body to illustrate some of the different gifts with which the Holy Spirit has blessed the Body of Christ (the church). It lumps together all forms of service functioning harmoniously within the church for the common good.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul again uses the illustration of a body to portray the Body of Christ (the church). He again summarizes the church as a whole with all kinds of gifts bestowed upon it, the gift of love preeminent on his list (1 Cor 13). It describes God's gifts to the church as a whole unit in different forms of service.

In Ephesians 4:11,12 Paul once more alludes to the illustration of a body to portray the Body of Christ (the church). This time the aim of his illustration is different. He focuses his point on the Office of the Public

³⁹ *The Lutheran Agenda*, pp.141-142.

⁴⁰ Wayne D. Mueller, "A Biblical Perspective of Christian Ministry," (Prepared for the BPS Task Force on Alternate Forms of Ministry, 1988, *WELS Ministry Compendium*, p. 592.

Ministry of the Word in different forms as gifts from Christ given *to* the Church. The body is the church as described in verse 12 and thus Office of the Public Ministry of the Word was given to build it up. He is not describing all believers by his use of the body illustration. Rather, he is describing the Public Ministry of the Word as a gift from Christ which performs a function for the body's growth, (or to mix metaphors: it's fruit), namely their works of service (*εργων διακονιας*) and sanctified life.

12. How does God supply his gifts for sanctified service in the Church? God the Holy Spirit distributes special gifts to priests (believers) in the kingdom for sanctified service in the Body of Christ.

“We have different *gifts* (*χαρισματα*), according to the *grace* (*χαριτι*) given us” (Rom 12:6). Believers are blessed with these gifts by the Holy Spirit who has “called” them to use those gifts in sanctified service for the general welfare of the work of the church.

While these gifts include those given to the Public Ministry of the Word, it is not limited to that. Believers are gifted for differing types of service within the body, but they all serve the goal of glory to God and the welfare of the church. “There are different kinds of *gifts* (*χαρισματα*) but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of *service* (*διακονιων*), but the same Lord...Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4,5,7).

13. How does God supply his gift of the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word to the church? God supplies his gift of the Public Ministry of the Word by virtue of a special calling, which our Lord does in a twofold way: either without means (directly appointed by him) or through means (appointed by God through a legitimate calling body of the church).

When you operate under the definition that *public* ministry is *any* ministry solely representative of the church, then you diminish or overlook an important aspect of the holy office. What has been diminished, or lost, is the aspect that the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word is an office of authority which does more than represent the congregation. It represents Christ. While every Christian is called to practice the responsibilities of the universal priesthood, to represent Christ in the world, bearing his name and proclaiming his name in word and deed, the Public Ministry of the Word is preceded by a specific call from God to do so as his specific representative of authority in the Church. Such a Public Minister of the Word is not merely representative of the congregation, but representative of Christ himself with Christ's authority. No individual is to assume this position/office of his own accord, but must be called/appointed by God prior to exercising the authority and right of this special privilege.

Paul writes in Rom 10:15 “And how can they preach unless they are *sent* (*αποστελλω*).” He is not speaking of a need for transportation. How can someone undertake public preaching unless he is *authorized* by Christ to do so as his representative? How can he publicly preach with the authority of Christ, unless commissioned by Christ with that authority? Paul employs the same word (*αποστελλω*) used to designate the apostles, the “sent-ones” of Christ. The apostles were personally authorized by Christ himself. The missionary is authorized by Christ through the congregation, the holder of the keys, but the owner of the keys remains Christ.

In Luke 10:1 we see Jesus “call” seventy-two of his disciples for special work, prior to their undertaking that work: “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.” The word for appointed (*αναδειχθυμι*) literally means “to show clearly, reveal” and by content can mean “to appoint or commission someone to a position; install.” These men were authorized by Christ to carry out this function of Public Ministry of the Word, representative not just of the group of disciples, but of Christ.

Jesus himself never assumed the office of the Christ nor did he begin his Public Ministry of the Word until he was publicly commissioned. Jesus was authorized by the Father, publicly commissioned as the Messiah,

a fact to which John the Baptist testifies: “For the one whom God has sent (*αποστειλω*) speaks the words of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands” (John 3:34,35). Jesus himself refers to his commissioning as the Christ, both as prophesied in the Old Testament and as fulfilled in his *public* ministry. In the synagogue of Nazareth, he reads from the book of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent (*αποστειλω*) me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...” (Luke 4:18).

In describing his own ministerial office, Paul tells the Romans that as a servant of Christ Jesus he was “called (*κλητος*) to be an apostle and set apart (*αφοριζω*) for the gospel of God—...Through him and for his name’s sake, we *received* grace and apostleship.” The word translated *received* (*λαμβανω*) is a word also used in reference to the special office of the Old Testament priesthood. It literally means “to take in the hand, hold, grasp, *receive*.” “Every high priest is *selected* (*λαμβανω*) from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Heb 5:1).

Regarding the necessity of the call Luther wrote:

For a great work a divine call is necessary and not merely one’s own devotion or one’s own prompting. Even those who are certain that God has called them will find it hard to do and accomplish something that is worthwhile...For it cannot be otherwise: he who does something without being called by God seeks his own honor (Ad Ps 82:4).⁴¹

Our Lutheran Confessions likewise make clear the necessity of the call into the Public Ministry of the Word, before one exercises the privilege of that preaching/teaching office: “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.”⁴²

As to *how* our Lord issues this “call,” the confessions have always recognized from Scripture that it is done in a twofold way: either immediately or mediately.

An immediate call from God is one done by God himself without the aid of other individuals. The prophets and apostles are examples of an immediate call given directly from God. An immediate call is not to be identified as some “inner calling” in which a person feels “moved” to perform a ministry for Christ. That is not a call into the Public Ministry of the Word. An immediate call is marked with accompanying miracles and signs, as well as the alignment of what is preached with the whole truth of God’s Word.

The second and most common method of God’s call into the Public Ministry of the Word is a mediate call. It is a call extended by God through the aid of the church or a legitimate calling body. To call it *common* is not to degrade the authority or grandeur of the call. One chosen through a mediate call is equal in efficacy and blessing to the ministry of the immediate call:

The prophets and apostles, who were sent by an immediate call, indeed have many and great prerogatives, in accordance with a larger measure of divine gifts. But the promises of grace, help, power, and divine efficacy in the ministry also apply nonetheless, according to each one’s measure, to those who have been mediately called in a legitimate way.⁴³

Theologian Kurt Marquardt effectively clarifies that there is no distinction between a Public Minister of the Word who was immediately or mediately called by our Lord:

While the Lord called his Twelve Apostles and St. Paul directly and immediately, He now calls and appoints their successors mediately, that is, through His church and her public ministry (2

⁴¹ Erwin Scharf, “The Call to the Public Use of the Keys,” p. 55.

⁴² *Triglott Concordia*, Augsburg Confession Art. XIV, p. 49.

⁴³ Chemnitz, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

Tim 2:2; Tit 1:5). In respect of the divinity of their calls, Holy Scripture makes no distinction between the immediately called apostles and prophets, and the mediately called pastors and teachers: all are equally gifted to His church by Christ himself (Eph 4:8,11; see also Acts 20:28).⁴⁴

14. What, then, is a legitimate calling body through whom God issues his divine call into the Public Ministry of the Word? God issues a mediate call into the Public Ministry of the Word through the aid of His church (the visible assembly of believers existing for the purpose of the administration of the means of grace).

Does this mean that local congregations have the right from God to call public ministers of the word to serve as gifts from God in their midst. Yes, obviously, as they are the visible church organized around the means of grace.

Does this mean that Synod would have the same right from God to call public ministers of the Word to serve as gifts from God for the blessing of the broader church? Yes, obviously, as it is a visible church (assembly) organized around the means of grace “for the purpose of establishing practical cooperation in the kingdom of God.”⁴⁵

Does this mean that the local congregation and Synod have separate rights which should act independently for the calling of individuals into the office of the Public Ministry of the Word? No! Not at all. They work in harmony as members of the one church in fellowship to whom alone was given the right of the call and use of the keys by Christ himself. (Specific functions or responsibilities may differ or even overlap between the two.) It is not correct to separate the two as to the right of calling, as if the apostles or Synod could arbitrarily appoint a Public Minister of the Word in his service without the consent of the church. Nor would it be correct for a calling body to willfully ignore the function of the Synod as representative of the church’s *Ministerium* (representative of the Public Ministry of the Word in oversight of doctrine) and its role in the calling process. Let’s elaborate.

In The Smalcald Articles: “Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops” the point is emphasized that the Roman Pontiff does not have exclusive right to call public ministers, anymore than Synod would have that *exclusive* right as a representative of the *Ministerium* among us:

For wherever the Church, there is the authority to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church.⁴⁶

The Public Ministry of the Word (here referred to as the *Ministerium*) is not the whole church, but only part of the Church. To the church was given the divine right of calling. It is evident in the New Testament that when the Church undertook the calling process it did not exclude the function of their *Ministerium* in the process. That would be to exclude a part of the Church. Instead, it employed the sound counsel of the *Ministerium* in their midst, as ones appointed by God to maintain sound doctrine (Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 2:2; Acts 14:23). Now, let’s look at how this comes to light by practice in our midst?

A congregation retains the right to call whomever the Holy Spirit so moves them to call. Included in that process is the congregation’s right to formulate a list of nominees for the congregation to consider in the call. To insure that these nominees meet the qualifications necessary for the Public Ministry of the Word, they turn to the assistance offered by representatives of the *Ministerium* (in this case Synod). Synod, through its District Presidents, presents to the congregation a list of qualified candidates. The congregation can add to this list, but is encouraged to do so only upon consultation with the District Praesidium. This process includes the church as

⁴⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁴⁵ WELS Constitution, Preamble.

⁴⁶ *Triglot Concordia*, The Smalcald Articles: “Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops,” p. 523.

a whole in the calling process: the Ministerium with its input as to the qualifications of the candidate and the call issued by the body of believers. When this system of good order breaks down, it is usually symptomatic of a deeper problem in the relationship between the Ministerium and the congregation.

For example, a congregation of the WELS requests a call list from the District President, which he provides. At the call meeting, the District President is advised that the congregation has chosen to add to the list of nominees the name of a WELS pastor whose current practice of doctrine is suspect. Despite the protests of the District President who cites doctrinal concerns, the congregation proceeds with the calling of the individual they desire. Thus, the congregation excludes the input of the Ministerium which was established to function as an orderly safeguard of word and doctrine. This is not only inadvisable for the good order of the church, but brings to light a deeper problem in the congregation's relationship to the Synod, as evident by their withdrawal from the Synod not long afterwards.

At the time of the Lutheran Confessions there were three segments of the church involved in the calling process. We have touched upon two: the Ministerium and the local calling body. The third involved the inclusion of the civil magistrate, as they operated under a system which did not separate church and state. In our current environment, the state does not directly exercise authority in our calling process. (Much of the legislation of good order formerly conducted by civil authority has been assumed/entrusted to Synod in our calling process.) However, as the state does grant the privilege of performing limited civil duties to the church's Public Ministry, we in turn rightly conform to the authority of the civil magistrates by publicly defining Ministers of the Gospel with the rite of ordination.

15. Does God give the church liberty to call whomever it desires into the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word? No. Our God, who has ordained the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word, has provided guidelines and qualifications for those to whom the public use of the keys is to be entrusted.

The Lord of the harvest has prescribed a certain form and rule through his apostles, which is, as it were, a kind of heavenly instruction as to what kind of people they should be, both in doctrine as well as in conduct, or life, who are to be chosen and called for the church ministries, 1 Tim 3:2ff; Titus 1:6ff. And the church should recognize in the fear of God that this norm or instruction is to be followed if it wants a call both to be called [divine] and to be divine.⁴⁷

Our gracious Lord has given us the gift of the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word and outlines his guidelines and his qualifications for his gift. The apostle Paul is most often quoted in defining these qualifications:

“Now the overseer (*επισκοπος*) must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap” (1 Timothy 3:2-7).

“An elder (*πρεσβυτερος*) must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer (*επισκοπος*) is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:6-9).

⁴⁷ Chemnitz, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Much discussion revolves around the terms “elder” and “overseer” to define what is the ordained Public Ministry of the Word. In short, those terms cannot be associated with our current definitions without great confusion. It would be like trying to talk about 1st century “horsepower” in light of today’s definition of the combustible engine. It doesn’t fit.

Without going into great detail, suffice it to say that the New Testament Church did not operate under the same forms of Public Ministry of the Word which we currently employ. The ordained functions are the same, but the forms differ. It becomes obvious from Scripture’s exposition that the New Testament structure transposed the system of church-government with which they were familiar, namely the establishment of a local body of elders and portions of the Rabbi (διδασκαλος - teacher) system. The elders were entrusted with oversight of doctrine, public preaching/teaching and administration of the same.⁴⁸ The rabbi/teacher was also considered among the Jews as the exegete, interpreter of the Law, revealer of the mysteries of God. Jesus was called a Rabbi/Teacher and charged his apostles to function as such teachers as well, however without the connotation of “master/Lord” associated with the title.⁴⁹

Oversight of doctrine and administration of the means of grace are all integral aspects of today’s Preaching/Teaching Office of the Word. As stated earlier, it can take any specific form that circumstances dictate. Nothing is legislated from God in this regard. However, our Lord qualifies that they be individuals who are apt to teach. The term “apt to teach” does not simply mean that they possess keen communication skills. It refers to their aptitude of passing on the apostolic teaching with which they were entrusted.

The requirement that he be apt to teach presupposes that he does possess a rather high degree of mental endowment which has been cultivated and directed by a *thorough academic and theological training*. (Italics added for emphasis)⁵⁰

Confessional training has always been a prerequisite for WELS candidates into the “*Reverendi Ministerium*” so that they might be enabled to maintain oversight of doctrine and be apt to teach it to others. The divine call into this Public Ministry of the Word has included the promise to conduct such a ministry “in accordance with the inspired Word of God and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as laid down in the Book of Concord of 1580...”⁵¹

Historically, our theologically trained men at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have been indoctrinated with a firm confessional position in the word and the emphatic charge to be faithful in its use. *Shepherd Under Christ* points out: “Of all the qualities that the Lord seeks in His pastors none ranks higher than faithfulness. ‘It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful’ (1 Cor 4:2).”⁵² In light of current trends are you among the ranks of those who find disconcerting the list of characteristics printed below which circuit pastors were asked to evaluate among the clergy in each circuit? What might you suppose proved unnerving to some of the circuit pastors, as well as their brothers in the ministry?

1. Appearance
2. Bearing
3. Self-expression
4. Personality
5. Attitude
6. Personal organization
7. Growth in ministry

⁴⁸ The elders and representatives of the Sanhedrin in Jesus’ day, performed a Godly duty when they went to examine Jesus’ teaching. Their sin was their unbelief and rejection of his teaching.

⁴⁹ Leon-DuFour, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 396.

⁵⁰ Schuetze & Habeck, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁵¹ Quotation drawn from the most commonly used call form in our circles: *In Nomine Jesu*

⁵² *op. cit.*, p. 12.

8. Emotional state⁵³

The issue of qualifications is also vital as the Synod embarks on a special Staff Ministry Program to broaden the scope of ministry among our parishes. More than just a mild word of caution is needed. The training will be different: “While pastors are trained for the broadest scope of ministry and for theological leadership, and teachers are trained in Christian classroom education, staff ministers receive *basic* theological training and *practical skills to equip* them to serve in other specific areas of parish ministry” (italics added for emphasis).⁵⁴ We must be highly sensitive to the prevalent fear that this program may become a shortcut for training the future workers in the WELS without saturated confessional indoctrination.

We must also ask what role gender plays in the qualifications of the Public Ministry of the Word. Some contend that the Public Ministry of the Word is open to all genders and only qualified when the Public Ministry of the Word involves the exercise of authority over a man. Does the Bible make that qualified distinction? Doesn't its prescription for the Public Ministry of the Word directly involve the exercise of authority? Authority is inherent to the office, not a lordship over others, but the authority of Christ himself in the handling of the keys of the kingdom to loose and bind the souls of sinners. To receive such a divine call into the office of the Public Ministry of the Word is to be “authorized” to function with the keys publicly in the name of Jesus, (cf. point #13 of this paper).

Couldn't the observation by Robert David Preus of the LCMS within his church body be equally applicable to the WELS?

Although the Confessions are silent on the matter, Luther and all the dogmaticians without exception say that women can and shall not be ministers of the Word and therefore should not be called into such an office. The confusion in our Synod centering in the question, whether an illegitimately chosen, called, ordained and invested person (who is a woman) can be said to have the public ministry of the Word could not have arisen at the time or have been possible according to the theology of AC XIV which we have delineated.⁵⁵

If we suppose that the question of gender in the Public Ministry of the Word has been put to bed and laid to rest, then the pen of Luther needles us and makes for a fretful sleep:

It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office, as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife.⁵⁶

The Reformation Confessors did not argue this issue, for to them it was not a question. It was clear from Scripture that God did not call women to function in the administration of the means of grace and into the office of the Public Ministry of the Word. Nor did the confessors envision the proliferation of para-ministries, or auxiliary offices, evident among us, especially such a ministry that would be regarded as a call into the office of the Public Ministry of the Word.

If this subject continually opens up a “can of worms” among us, then does the presence of those “worms” manifest some form of decay within the body? One flinches to read literature in our circles which so freely applies the passages of 1 Tim 3:2ff and Titus 1:6ff in sweeping comments inclusive of all forms of ministry, (men and women alike). As new exegesis is conducted on those passages we do well to hear the words

⁵³ “Pastor Information Form” distributed to circuit pastors in June, 1994, for “Official Record Input.”

⁵⁴ Lawrence Olson, point #3, “Questions and Answers about STAFF MINISTRY,” Handout on Staff Ministry Program distributed at the 1994 Michigan District Convention of the WELS, Saginaw, MI.

⁵⁵ Robert David Preus, “The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy,” pp. 41-42.

⁵⁶ *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41, p. 154.

of Professor William Henkel of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This “Watchman of the Gospel” was first heard in the 1920’s, deemed worthy of reprint without comment in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in 1962, and quoted below for your prayerful consideration:

The apostasy from Scripture among us obviously will not begin in this way that one or the other openly attacks its authority. It will most likely come in this manner that one shakes his head in doubt over one or the other passages of Scripture and disregards it. When called to account, one will first hide behind exegetical artistry and take refuge in an exposition which removes from the Scripture passage whatever is offensive to the flesh, but which does violence to the words themselves. After one has gradually freed himself inwardly more and more from the authority of Scripture, the outward apostasy will follow. Let us beware of beginnings! If what we have just heard about the God-pleasing status of woman in the public life of the congregation is doctrine of Scripture, then we shall not wish to consult with flesh and blood, least of all with the wicked and corrupt wiseacres of our generation; but we shall simply do the will of God and bear in mind that in the last analysis the point at issue is not woman suffrage, but the authority of Scripture.⁵⁷

Ordination/Installation

Among other assignments, this essayist was asked to address the practice of ordination/installation, especially in light of the WELS 1993 Convention directing the Conference of Presidents to restudy the WELS 1991 Convention decision to support the ordination of male teachers.

Neither ordination, nor the rite of installation, are divinely mandated. They are human customs developed in the church as public ratification of the call and of the qualifications of a candidate for the call. Neither ordination, nor installation, make a person a Public Minister of the Word. A person enters into the Office only by virtue of his call, and his call delineates by duties if he is in the Public Ministry of the Word, (cf. point #13). Therefore, we do not ordain individuals without a prior call, for ordination publicly affirms the call extended. For this reason, we also obviously do not perform any general rite of installation into the Public Ministry of the Word. Installation is performed only upon acceptance of a call into a specified area of Christian service.

At the time of the Lutheran Confessors, the Roman Papacy corrupted ordination as a tool which created a hierarchical priesthood and conveyed to its priesthood a mark of “indelible character.” Ordination performs no such function and does not establish a separate rank among the members of the universal priesthood. It simply ratifies the qualifications of a candidate for Public Ministry of the Word. In the Reformation Age the rite of ordination was continued, and with good purpose. Upon eligibility of a call a candidate was carefully and publicly examined by the Ministerium, then recommended as possessing the necessary qualifications of gifts and doctrine. Ordination was simply the “seal of approval.” This same custom is done in our midst, although the seminary faculty has assumed main responsibility for this ongoing examination in behalf of the synod. It may not presently appear as crucial a custom as it would if our Public Ministers of the Word were called from an outside source.

In a church body that gets its pastor supply from its own seminary, ordination will signify less than in church bodies whose candidates may come from the theological departments of universities and need to be examined and certified.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ William Henkel, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 1, January 1962, p. 31. The article entitled: “The Status of Women in the New Testament Church” first begins in *WLQ* Vol. 58., No. 3, July 1961.

⁵⁸ Edward C. Fredrich II, “The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry,” *WELS MINISTRY COMPENDIUM*, p. 785.

Once a person receives and accepts a call into the office of the Public Ministry of the Word, he is ordained and installed. Should subsequent calls be issued to and accepted by the individual, ordination is not repeated. The specific duties of his call have changed and he is installed into his new office (e.g., as pastor of a different congregation), but the ratification of his qualifications have continued since he first entered the Public Ministry of the Word. Installation then is ratification of his new call, both on his part before the congregation and on the congregation's part in public acceptance of their new shepherd.

As for the worthiness of this human custom of ordination, Chemnitz presents for us five weighty reasons for it to be observed:

The First reason is that, because of those who run and have not been sent (*self-appointed ministers*), a call ought to have the public testimony of the church.

Second: By that rite, as by a public designation or declaration, the ministry is committed in the name of God and of the church to him who has been called.

Third: By this very thing also, as by a solemn vow, he who has been called becomes obligated to the church in the sight of God to render the faithfulness in the ministry that the Lord requires in His stewards, regarding which He will also judge them.

Fourth: The church is reminded that it is to recognize that this pastor has divine authority to teach, and to hear him in the name and place of God.

Fifth, and this is most important: That rite is to be observed for this reason, that the whole church might, by common and earnest prayers, commit to God the ministry of him, who is called, that He, by His Holy Spirit, divine grace, and blessing, might be with his ministry.⁵⁹

Should a public minister of the word for personal reasons resign or retire from his office, his calling is then limited to that of every member of the universal priesthood. He is not called by God to continue independently in the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word. God forbid he ever consider that a "step down" in his worth, for that means he once actually felt that he had taken a "step up." There are no steps of "worth" involved in this service.

Upon resignation the individual does not retain the credentials of the term "ordained," since he has expressed either a lack of desire to carry out the functions of the Public Ministry of the Word, or *may* have manifested the lack of qualifications to carry out the office. (This is a general statement and not necessarily to imply that these two reasons are the cause in every case.) A retired Public Minister of the Word generally retains the human credentials of "Ordained." The term does not then certify a call, but certifies the qualifications of the individual for such service. He has no license to preach at whim, but his ordination credentials do serve to publicly make him more accessible to others who may "call" him to perform functions of a Public Minister of the Word, (e.g., guest preach, fill vacancy, assist pastorate, etc.).

What of the question as to whether or not teachers in our midst should be ordained? Since it is a human custom, the answer does not depend on Biblical grounds of ordination, but on the goal you hope to achieve by doing so and the ramifications it will have by perception among our members. Speaking from within the church, the ordination of teachers is an adiaphoron. You need only be specific as to what the ordination means in ratification of their specific calling. (That is not to say I recommend it, especially in our current environment where the office of the Public Ministry of the Word is so besieged with misunderstanding.) However, in regard to the state, the implications are different.

The 1991 convention of the WELS adopted the recommendation to ordain male teachers with an excerpt of the rationale printed below:

⁵⁹ *op. cit.*, p. 36.

- WHEREAS 3) civil authorities view ordained full-time ministers as leaders who have the ability to perform sacerdotal functions, that is, conduct worship services or administer the sacraments when called upon by the church to do so; and
- WHEREAS 4) the terminology “ordination into the teaching ministry” has been acceptably used by WELS representatives to explain the status and nature of teaching ministries to civil authorities, because congregations may also ask these men to serve as leaders who perform sacerdotal functions; and
- WHEREAS 5) the use of the terminology “ordination into the teaching ministry” is extremely important in applying many civil laws to the church’s male Christian teachers; and...⁶⁰

It is obviously an action related to civil matters. The term “ordination” refers to sacerdotal functions with the rationale that this function of the Public Ministry of the Word is implied in the male teacher’s call. No! It is not implied that “congregations *may* ask these men to serve as leaders who perform sacerdotal functions.” Such an assumption would manifest a skewed view of the Public Ministry of the Word, or it might be construed as a cloud of confusion offered to the IRS in hope to have male teachers certified as ordained. Where in the teacher’s calling is it implied that he is called to administer the sacraments? He possesses no more inherent virtue to do so than does the janitor or the pastor himself. Such authorization comes by virtue of the call and not some implied possibility or inherent right of his position as a teacher. (When it comes to women teachers, the committee withholds the rite of ordination because this would involve authority over men.)

The 1993 convention of the WELS adopted a resolution asking that we reconsider the 1991 memorial, or at least restudy the position:

- Resolved, a) That we ask the Conference of Presidents (COP) to restudy the use of the term “ordination” in our midst; and be it further
- Resolved b) That the COP establish an ad hoc committee to conduct this study in consultation with legal representatives of the Board of Trustees and other advisors deemed necessary.⁶¹

For the sake of clarity of communication in our Synod regarding what is Public Ministry of the Word, I would encourage the COP to recommend the 1991 memorial be rescinded. For the sake of honesty in our relationship with our civil authorities, (at least until such a time as the rite of ordination may be redefined from its present meaning, if we so desire), I see no other recourse than that the COP insist upon rescinding the 1991 memorial.

Laying on of Hands

Lastly, we address the custom of laying on of hands within the Bible. The rite of laying on of hands was practiced in the Old Testament as a visual aid for the focal point of transmittal, such as the blessing of Jacob upon Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:14), and the consecration of the burnt offering to be the substitute for sin in atonement (Lev 1:4). You also see the visual employed as a means of public affirmation of a person’s appointment to a position, such as Joshua commissioned by Moses (Num 27:18-20). The touch did not physically act as a conveying vehicle, but was used as a symbol of the blessing. For instance, the people respond to the events of John the Baptists’ birth: ““What then is this child going to be?’ For the Lord’s hand was with him” (Luke 1:66).

Jesus himself was very personal at times in his ministry to others and commonly practiced a “hands-on” ministry to assist the person in focusing on the gift which was being given, or to assist in bringing the reality of

⁶⁰ *Proceedings of the 1991 WELS Convention*, pp. 50,51.

⁶¹ *Proceedings of the 1993 WELS Convention*, p. 57.

a spiritual blessing to bear upon an earth-bound creature; (e.g., blessing the children, Mk 10:16; spitting on a blind man's eyes and laying his hands upon him, Mk 8:23; putting his fingers in the ears and touching the tongue of a deaf-mute, Mk 7:33; laying his hands upon a leper and upon various kinds of illness, Lk 5:13, 11).

The New Testament Church continued the custom in a variety of ways, both as a visual aid in transmittal of a blessing (Acts 8:17-19), and as tool for public ratification of installation into an office (Acts 6:5-6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). Of special interest to the reader in light of this paper would be its apparent use in the rite of public installation, such as in Acts 6:5,6 with the Seven "Table-Servers" in Jerusalem. Professor Richard Balge of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is both clear and concise:

The laying on of hands and prayer was to signify that these men had been elected for a specific responsibility and to ask God's blessing on their efforts. It was Jewish custom and it is a custom which is followed today when church officers are installed. It is a fitting rite but not a divinely instituted ceremony.⁶²

The use of the hands is still quite often used by ministers today in different ways to add the personal "touch" to the sick and dying, the baptismal recipient, the confirmand before the altar of the Lord, the wedding couple, or even to visually communicate with outstretched hands the actual conveyance of the Lord's spiritual blessing at the close of service. We even see the custom still practiced in the rite of ordination or installation, although it is not as commonly practiced as it was but only a generation ago. As one who was privileged to have hands laid upon him in his own ordination, I speak well of the custom, as it effectively served to blot out worldly thoughts and bring my mind and heart to bear upon the import of the blessed act which was taking place. It may not serve all the same way, and, as is the case with all customs, it is in need of continual review and education to thwart any superstition.

Conclusions

As a result of this study I offer several summary conclusions:

1. The term *Public Ministry* is a man-made term, (such as Sacrament, Triune, Original Sin, Natural Knowledge, etc.) used to communicate a Biblical doctrine. As a man-made term its definition has evolved in the WELS. It was once understood in restricted sense to the divinely mandated office of the Public Ministry of the Word. In controversy with those claiming that only the *pfarrmt* (preaching/teaching office of a local pastorate) was divinely ordained, the term was correctly expanded to encompass any representational work done on behalf of the church with direct use of the means of grace. By progression of thought the term came to include anyone performing service with the means of grace directly or indirectly, such as supportive roles in training of workers and administration. The latest stage of definition presently among us includes any individual asked to perform any form of service representational of the congregation.
2. Applying today's expanded definition to older confessional statements is at times like comparing apples and oranges. It meant different things and was used to emphasis specific points in the controversy of each specific age. What was once a marked distinction between the mandated office of the Public Ministry of the Word and other holy, sanctified service has now become blurred by definition so that the overlap of the two leads to a confusion of our holy service to God and our fellow man (sanctification), and that gracious service of God to us through the means of grace (justification).
3. By today's WELS definition of Public Ministry you first determine the needs of the people, (real or perceived), then construct forms of service to meet those needs. This can be good, in the realm of sanctified service to our fellow man, but caution is needed in adapting the Office of the Public Ministry. The form of the holy office can change to meet circumstances, but if the change leads to restructuring the mandated function of

⁶² Richard Balge, *The People's Bible: Acts*, Milwaukee: NPH, 1988, p. 69.

the Public Ministry of the Word, then it has gone awry. God has given us his means of grace. Discharge their duties to meet the one, clear need of all people of all ages, namely the distinct and pointed proclamation of Law and Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

4. In ascertaining what God wants and what God commands for his church and his gift of Public Ministry of the Word, consider the following: Of all areas of service possibly offered, there is only one commanded by Christ, the administration of his grace in Word and Sacrament. This do! It is His Ministry of the Word! If a church offered every conceivable service imaginable to its community, but did not have the Ministry of the Word, it would have nothing. Yet, if it had nothing to offer in specific services to the whole community, except the Ministry of the Word, it would have everything it needed to function as Christ's Church.

5. Lastly, in light of what appears to be a current trend within the WELS regarding ministry, it would not be deemed prudent to follow our current course. The confusion involved threatens to bend or break the Gimbals of the Gospel, the Public Ministry of the Word. (A gimbal is a contrivance that permits an object such as a compass to suspend freely in any direction on a level plain, which is essential for the accurate function of the compass).

Metaphorically, the Church can be likened to a ship with Christ himself the Captain who points us towards our blessed harbor of heaven. The ship and crew consists of many mates, each with functions as diverse as the redeemed souls which Christ has called to faith. No one is better than another as all serve the common good. The holy Word of Christ is the compass that gives us our direction and defines our purpose in the voyage through life, but this compass needs to be kept prominent and level, especially in the balance of Law and Gospel. For this very purpose the Lord has blessed his Church with the gimbals of the Gospel, the Holy Office of the Public Ministry of the Word. The Gospel and its gimbals must be honored in their distinct function if we are going to stay on the course our Lord has charted. To him we raise our hearts in prayer, not only in thankfulness for the gift he has given us, but in earnest request that he guard and protect this precious gift among us all.

In closing then, I will not dare claim that this paper is the definitive statement of all doctrinal truths regarding Church and Ministry. I simply pray that if this paper does not provide all the answers, it will help us all at least understand the questions.

May the Lord so bless us all!
Rev. Edward G. Zell

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