

Practicing the Priesthood of All Believers According to Ephesians 4:11-16

By Norman W. Berg

[Essay for the Nebraska-Colorado Missionaries' Conference, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Stockton, Kansas, November 11-12, 1975]

At first glance the theme assigned me reminds me of the letters I frequently get from sixth graders asking me, "Please tell me all you know about Home Missions—it is our mission theme for this month." To tackle the subject of the universal priesthood of believers as a member of the denomination in which this doctrine was resurrected by its revered founder after being buried for centuries, is indeed an awesome one. But a deliberate failure to ask the committee exactly what it had in mind enables me to pick my own direction in a vast, vast field. The direction I have chosen was arrived at in part by the process of elimination. This will not be a study of the term itself or of the question of the existence of the priesthood of all believers, since in our church body it can be stipulated from the beginning that it exists and that we are commonly agreed on its meaning on the basis of passages such as Rev. 1:5-6; 1 Peter 2:5 and 4:10; John 20:3; Matthew 28:20; and even the wish of Moses in Numbers 11:29—"Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets."

We do not plan on going into the full scope of the privileges, responsibilities, authority, nor duties as implied by the many rich terms used in Scripture to describe them, such as: stewards (I Pet. 4:10)—laborers (Matt. 20:1-6)—salt (Matt. 5:13)—light (Matt. 5:14)—witnesses (Acts 1:8)—soldiers of Jesus (II Tim. 2:3)—disciples (John 8:31)—ambassadors (II Cor. 5:20). We shall follow the theme and study the responsibilities as outlined in *Eph. 4:11-16*.

We also do not plan to go into the distinction between the divinely instituted public ministry and the priesthood of all believers, but rather the relationship in practice as indicated in *Eph. 4:11-16*.

This section of Ephesians 4 has an interesting history as far as application is concerned, especially regarding v. 12, sometimes referred to as "The Case of the Misplaced Comma." In time there has been a swing from the KJV implication that the "professionals" of v. 11 have almost exclusive claim on all three functions of perfecting the saints, of doing the work of the public ministry, and of edifying the body of Christ by their professional ministrations,—a swing to the other extreme amounting to a "lazy" pastor's cop-out implying that his *only* task is to train the laity to do the work of the ministry while he sits back in headquarters directing the program.

In a similar way verses 12 and 13 have been used both by unionists and schismatics to support propositions regarding the *Una Sancta* and fellowship which are diametrically opposed to each other. The one points to the "oneness" as the only goal of the ministry of the saints, the other points to the avoidance of wandering from his particular viewpoint as being the primary task of the church.

It would appear essential, then, in order to have a solid basis from which to approach the practical problems and opportunities for practicing the priesthood of all believers according to Ephesians 4:11-16, to make a careful exegetical study of this portion. It would also appear that the agenda allows time for such a study. This study will have to be somewhat in the form of a workshop, with complete cooperation by you since my days of the wonderful "Winkel-konferenze" have been cut off and the hours of exegetical study for sermonizing have given way to study of the latest mission statistics and stories to include in my Mission Festival "sermons." Please bear with me and help me in what follows.

For our mutual convenience we have included the Greek text as an addendum. The printed translation after the text is the NIV. The exegesis with my attempt at a fairly literal translation follows:

v. 11 & 12—And it was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as shepherds and teachers for the equipping of the saints (God’s people) for the work of service for the building up of the body of Christ,...

Here we refer back to v. 7 where Paul emphasizes that “to each one of us” grace has been given as a gift from Christ. Now the particulars of this gift are spelled out, the gift needed by the Ephesians at this time. This gift consists of the special workers in the Word which God gave to the church. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, nor above all is it to indicate either rank or specific divinely ordained organization. Here a ministry of function is stressed rather than that of office. If any leadership echelon is implied it is only because of the spiritual function indicated. Four types of “professional” gifts are listed:

- Apostles: the charter witnesses, the foundation-layers—the inner circle of those personally chosen by the Lord and personal witnesses of His glory—revealers of God’s Word, especially of Jesus Christ.
- Prophets: proclaimers of God’s Word received from the apostles—occasional recipients of a special message (Agabus, Acts 11:28)—we note that at this time there appears to be no formally structured clergy other than the general designation of the “elders”—“prophecy” is not a restricted activity, in fact Paul in I Cor. 14:1 indicates it is a gift to be desired by all.
- Evangelists: most likely and most frequently interpreted to mean traveling witnesses. Philip, Acts 21:8, Timothy II Tim. 4:5
- Shepherds and Teachers: because of the grammatical construction it is commonly held that this is one class, the pastoral office which in its very nature includes teaching, perhaps to be equated with “elders”, Acts 20:17 & 28.

These GIFTS are given for the *καταρτισμὸν*, the thorough equipping of the saints. This word has a root meaning which with *κατα-* means the thorough preparation, restoration, and even coordination of someone or something. In Matt. 4:21 it refers to the preparation or mending of nets. In Heb. 10:5 it refers to the body God prepared for His Son. Obviously thorough equipping or preparation for an important task is indicated by the word. The KJV translation of “perfecting” the saints is subject to misunderstanding in today’s thought patterns. The saints are not to be perfected, but to be equipped to reach the objective of the Body of Christ. Equipping as stated above implies a purpose, or else why equip?

And here is where the “misplaced comma” comes in. As ably pointed out by a variety of commentators, both the shift from *πρὸς* to *εἰς* for the next two phrases, plus the incompleting thought in the word “equip”, (namely, for what?) clearly indicate that the second phrase depends on the first and the third on the second. A logical sequence results, the leaders equip the saints (all of them as indicated in v.7) for the work of service which results in the prime objective of building up the body of Christ. No commas appear indicated. It is not the leadership which alone is to do the “work of the ministry” as indicated by the punctuation in the KJV. Of the translations studied by me only the RSV strangely follows the old punctuation of the KJV.

Those to be equipped are the “saints”, all those of the *Una Sancta*, all of God’s people. No exception is allowed by the term and especially not in light of the terms “each” and “all” which occur again and again in these verses. These are those of faith, called to faith, and thus saints in His eyes. Indeed a precious group is involved here, one not to be neglected by God’s Gifts to the church, his chosen leaders.

The purpose for which these saints are to be equipped is for the work of service. Note the absence of articles for either *ἔργον* or *διακονία*. This is the generic work of service, not the specific public Christian ministry. This is a service to benefit others, and in the context especially the Body of Christ and its members, a service in which all saints are to be involved.

This service in turn is not aimless, but it is for the “building up” of “the body of the Christ.” Paul here does not stress as much the nature of this body of Christ as he does in I Cor. 12, but the fact that each part contributes to the upbuilding of this body. It is important to note that here Paul is speaking of the entire body of

Christ, the *Una Sancta*, and is stating that the preparation of the saints is for the true upbuilding of the entire body of Christ. It also appears that here Paul is stressing the spiritual strengthening of the body more than numerical growth. The desire and responsibility of every saint of God for numerical growth of the church is amply emphasized by Paul and Christ elsewhere. Evangelism among the unchurched is not the particular stress here. Here it is being underlined that spiritual work for fellow members is the role of every priest of God.

v. 13—Until we all attain to the oneness of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a man full grown (maturity) to the measure of age of the fullness of Christ;...

μέχρι —“until” indicates a goal for the work of service. The objective of the upbuilding of the body of Christ is to be reached in one respect by the attaining of the oneness of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God which brings us to a maturity, to reach the measure of the fullness of Christ.

Let us state from the outset that this *καταντήσωμεν*, reaching one’s destination, coming completely, attaining, is the result of the upbuilding through the Word, a maturing in faith and knowledge, not the attaining of perfection.

But it is important to note that Paul makes one of the primary goals for this upbuilding attaining *ένότητα*, oneness, unity. This of course takes us right back to vv. 3-6 of this chapter. We might say that in the earlier verses Paul admonishes us to strive to reach that subjective (individual) oneness (v. 3) on the one objective basis (vv. 4-6). Concern for the *Una Sancta* and for oneness in faith and knowledge must always be in the forefront for the Christian. We cannot merely give lip service to “true ecumenicity. It is part and parcel of the Christian heart to grieve over family division.

The oneness which is to result from the work of service for the upbuilding of the body of Christ is to be a oneness of the faith *τῆς πίστεως*, the faith into which we have been called by the Holy Spirit, that trust in the Lord Jesus as our only Savior and all that that implies and all that is connected with that fact. It is also to be a oneness of knowledge *τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως*, the specific (*επι*) knowledge of the Son of God. This is a heart knowledge which cannot stand apart from faith, but as faith lives, breathes, and hears, it results in an ever deeper knowledge which in turn reveals to faith the Son of God in ever greater clarity and glory.

Since this oneness is one which can be created alone by the Holy Spirit through the Word, whether we speak of oneness of faith or of knowledge, we come back to the importance of the GIFTS of God (v.11) through whom the Word of God is ours. Again we are impressed with the importance of the Word in the equipping of the saints for the work of service.

Lack of oneness with the faith, the true faith, and lack of oneness in the true knowledge of the Son of God is a mark of immaturity as the next phrase implies. There is much that is faulty with faith and certainty as well as knowledge for the beginning saint and often for the “older” saint. Here is an area for earnest service by all, for Christ wants mature men, men full grown *εις ἄνδρα τέλειον*. A variety of translations have been made here which permit a hint of perfectionism to creep in regarding the goal of the church for men while here on earth. KJV—“unto a perfect man”; Jerusalem Bible—“become the perfect Man, fully mature”; NIV—“become mature, attaining the full measure of *perfection* found in Christ.”; and on the other hand, strangely, the Modern Language Bible—“completeness of personality”. Once again we reiterate that the perfectionism of man is not the goal, but the maturity of action possible for the child of God while 100% saint and 100% sinner in the Church Militant.

This maturity in faith and knowledge enables one to attain “to the measure of age of the fullness of Christ.” Again we are speaking of the maturity which, as Paul says in chapter 3:19, *knows* the love of Christ which passes *knowledge* (strange as that sounds, except to the ear of faith!) and then is filled with the fullness of Christ. This maturity shares in the fullness of His grace, His love, His patience, and the like. This in turn serves the body of Christ through the exercise of these virtues, and thus the whole body matures more and more.

v.14—So that no longer we are infants tossed about as in a storm at sea and whirled about by every wind of doctrine in the trickery (gambling) of men in the craftiness in accord with their scheming of deceit;...

ἵνα —a result of becoming mature is the following. The construction indicated that this is not the prime purpose of the GIFTS and the upbuilding, but is a resulting benefit essential to continued health of the members of the body. The contrast of νήπιοι—infants—to mature men of v. 13, indicates once again how vital it is that we serve one another in becoming one in faith and knowledge. Paul was acutely and personally aware of the danger of being κλυδωνιζόμενοι tossed about as in a storm (Acts 27:27). He knew the fatal force of the wind whirling one about so that a ship might founder on the rocks and shoals. The vagrant winds that Paul refers to are clearly defined: erroneous teaching, which deceitful men, gambling with spiritual lives, craftily scheme to use to lead men astray. Error always operates with tricky expertness born of the deceit of man's corrupted mind, using the Bible itself, human logic and reasoning with no concern for the Una Sancta and its members to mislead men.

How can we permit “saints” to remain helpless infants in the face of sure attack by the Evil One? Sometimes saints appear to wish to remain infants. Some, seem afraid of growing up, lest too much responsibility may be theirs. Some, though infants, think themselves to be grown up. All such are a concern, not merely of the pastors, but of all the saints who are to be equipped for work of service for the body of Christ.

That men are tossed about by error or attacks of Satan is a fact well known to each of us as we have to do battle with our own ideas and with temptations to sin. Even mighty Peter is a good example of being tossed to and fro. His courageous walk on the water was followed by his pitiful cry, Save me! (Matt. 14:28 & 30) His glorious confession of Christ as the Son of God was immediately followed by his rebuke of the Lord who was setting out on His way of salvation. (Matt. 16 & 22) His bold promise to lay down his life for the Lord was followed by abject denial. (John 13:3 & 18:17). And who has not shared Peter's infantile zig-zag course!

v. 15-16—but speaking the truth in love we grow up in every respect to Him Who is the Head, Christ, from Whom all the body harmoniously fitted together by every ligament supplied, working according to the capability of each individual part, produces the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Error is not overcome by merely trying to avoid it. The members of the body in their work of service are admonished to speak the truth with love. ἀληθεύοντες has a broader implication than just being sure that what we say is the truth. It carries with it the thought of doing and maintaining the truth. It is truth of idea and thought, of sincerity and reality. It does not merely mean acting in faithfulness, as though sincerity of intent as to what we say or do is enough. Truth includes all teaching, all confession, the whole counsel of God.

This speaking in truth is to flow from the one and only proper motive in our relationship with others of the body of Christ, namely ἐν ἀγάπῃ from the love of understanding and good will in the deepest sense. Paul of course could be thinking of the fact that many within the church speak even a measure of truth but with the wrong motive, even preaching Christ but with envy, strife and contention (Phil. 1:15-18). This is a sure sign of the immaturity which does not lead to oneness nor to upbuilding in the church. Only when the truth is spoken in love is it fully effective in bringing members to oneness within the church. We note once again that it appears that in this context Paul is referring to speaking truth within the Una Sancta.

Once again the purpose of this proclaiming of the truth is that we all, speaker and hearer alike “grow up in every respect to Him who is the Head, Christ.” Again maturity in faith and knowledge is the goal, this time with the standard of Christ. This growing up to Christ cannot mean an identity with Him during this life, but does mean an intimacy with Him, a likeness to Him in thought word, and deed. Growing up to Christ means in part what St. Paul said in Phil. 1:21, “For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

When Paul continues by stating that “from Him” all the various members of the body are joined together and work together in such a fashion that the body grows and is built up in love, he underscores the fact that the church is a living organism which strangely gets all of its life from its Head. Christ is not merely the ruling Head, but above all the organic Head of His body. And there is none that is not completely dependent on Him, *πᾶν τὸ σῶμα*, the entire body, every member is fitted in and enabled to work together because of Christ.

The complete interdependence of the members of the body is underlined by the words *συναρμολογούμενον*, harmoniously fitted together like stones in a building, and *συμβιβάζόμενον*, joined together tightly. In our emphasis on the fact that we are brought into the church one by one and that no one is saved by another’s faith, we tend to underplay the essential unity of the body, the complete dependence of one member upon another. Paul does not countenance such thinking or neglect as we find by even a cursory study of I Corinthians 12. Have we perhaps brought much trouble in the form of lack of cooperation and disharmony within congregations by a lack of emphasis of this clear teaching of Scripture regarding the health of the Body and of its members?

The body works according to the energy of every part, which energy, as we know from all of Scripture, comes from the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments. But this energy flows only when the body is tightly joined together. The “measure” of the various parts will differ in terms of talent, but as I Cor. 12 states, each part is needed. This is the key to the growth of the body, a process which Paul says is for its own benefit, “for the upbuilding of itself.” And what is the motivating environment within which alone all of this will happen? Once again *ἐν ἀγάπῃ*—in love. Love is not the object of our work of service as though we want to build up love in the body. The object is the upbuilding of the body and this is done with loving hearts.

One added thought, a bit disturbing to those of us who heed carefully the many serious warnings of Scripture regarding concern for the truth and true fellowship—Paul is here speaking of the *Una Sancta*, not just WELS or any other visible organization in fellowship with us. The entire matter of fellowship is touched on here but is not the main burden of this text nor essay. Paul’s words indicate that no part of the body is to be neglected, no member of the *Una Sancta* is unimportant in the entire scheme of things. But I have a duty to begin where I am, with those whom I can clearly identify as one with me in faith. Right here I have a great task to perform, in equipping the saints as a pastor, doing the work of service as all members of the body must do. I begin with my family, with my congregation, with my Synod, but also must be acutely conscious of the members of the body I know exist elsewhere on earth within other visible church organizations. They too must be my concern in prayer, thought, word, and deed. Let us work for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. This St. Paul urges.

And now we finally come to the theme of the essay—and they say theologians are lengthy!!! Add to that executive secretaries, especially when they get out of their field.

I. Awareness of the Priesthood of All Believers by All Concerned By the Clergy

Despite our universal belief in the priesthood of all believers in our Synod, observation would indicate that we have poor memories on occasion, or at least that emphasis on this belief gets lost in our efforts “to get things done.” Perhaps we should begin with a clear understanding of our role in the church as clergymen. WE have indeed been divinely called to a unique service within the church, to be stewards of the mysteries of God, overseers of the flock entrusted to our care. Nonetheless we are called *servants* of all, servants with the service, according to St. Paul, of leading and equipping others for the major task, not given to us alone, but to the priesthood of all believers.

We must be fully aware of whom we have been charged to lead and to equip, “saints of God.” These are the chosen priests of God and thus we must approach them with all due respect. This dare not only be theory or doctrine (pure at that) but also practice. These are not “my” people (as in, “My people would object to this or that.”), but these are *God’s* people to be equipped for His work, not my program. We need give them the honor due priests made such by God (Rev. 1:6). Oh yes, they are imperfect and subject to much criticism, especially

as we view their activity as “priests”, or lack of it. But cannot the same criticism be levelled (and sometimes is) at our fellow clergymen? Let us recognize all the saints for what they are, priests of God in need of further equipping by the Gifts of God, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastoral teachers (or teaching pastors?).

The “saints” referring to members of the church, have just as acute a need of greater awareness of the universal priesthood. In our clergy-dominated church organization and with our Nordic leader-dominated approach to functions and programs we need not remind our members too often that there is such a thing as a divinely ordained ministerium, despite individual rebellions against the idea, usually with due cause. Many of the “priests” are very content to depend almost solely on the “professionals” doing all the “work of the ministry”. What is needed is an awareness of how highly the Lord holds the position of the “holy priesthood” of all the saints. The position begins with honor, not with duty. It is a gift of God’s love, not a demand of His law. It brings with it authority, not only responsibility. It results in blessing for all, not labor for a few. Who would not have been proud to have been a High Priest at the dedication of Solomon’s temple? Each priest of God has the honor of dedicating another lively stone for the Temple of God when he brings the word of salvation to another soul!

The awareness of the fact of the universal priesthood is dimmed, if we do not realize that its state while we are still in the Church Militant does not change its nature. It is far from perfect, its members are in varying stages of maturity. Together, leaders and equippers, we must face the necessity of all of us serving one another in the most vital responsibility of keepers of each other’s souls.

With this in mind we will also be aware that we have a mutual concern in matter of the practice of the universal priesthood. When viewing our own local congregation we will see it made up of a divinely ordained training and serving corps and of a group of priests in various stages of training, ordained of God to serve one another and thereby to build up the body of Christ. What a vision to behold! Unrealistic? Perhaps, but without sharpening our awareness of what the priesthood of all believers means in the context of our congregation, it is a totally impossible dream. Only study of it will make us sufficiently aware of the honor and strength we all have in the Lord as His priests.

II. Practicing the Priesthood of All Believers in Establishing Our Purposes, Objectives and Goals as a Gathering of Christians

If we are aware of our *role* as priests of God, we should be able to proceed with our *work* as priests of God—*IF* we know what our purpose as a gathering of Christians really is. It is a rare group of Christians in a visible organization which has set down on paper its prime, never-changing purpose, and also its objectives as an organization. The Synod did so a few years ago in an attempt to use its resources as effectively as humanly possible under God’s hand. It would appear to me that an awareness of our roles as priests of God would help us clarify our purpose and objectives from the right viewpoint.

If we as clergymen are aware of our role according to Eph. 4:11-16 as equippers of the saints, we above all would want to sharpen our knowledge of our purpose and objectives as members of the body of Christ, and more particularly as members of our particular segment of the church, our congregation first of all, and our Synod. We should want to study ways of clarifying for our members this purpose and these objectives so that their essential role of priests of God may be approached intelligently. May it be that lack of cooperation and of action by some of our members may be because of fuzzy idea as to what the church really wants to do?

If we believe in the universal priesthood and of the essential role of service of each member to the other as priests of God, is it not essential that the total membership be fully aware of all the objectives of this “sub-body” (if you will) called the congregation and perhaps even have a part in establishing the objectives and the goals to attain these objectives?

A constitutional statement of purpose as is now included in the “model” constitution of our Synod is an improvement over earlier versions of congregation constitutions which almost all lacked such a statement.

Nevertheless the signing of such a constitution assures nothing more than that the member can vote unless further and repeated study of the objectives underlines their importance to the individual. Ways of making such objectives meaningful will be part of a later study.

The primary purpose of the church can be stated in many ways. But in every case, I believe the work of the individual priest of God will have to be stated or clearly implied. We could agree that the purpose of the church is to glorify our Savior God by our willing obedience to Him in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all men. Implied is the fact that every priest of God has this obligation. Any other proper statement of the church's purpose would imply the same.

The objectives of the church, especially as found in a congregation or synod, would include a number of most essential ones. The one stressed by St. Paul in Eph. 4:11-16 is that of the edifying of the body of Christ, of fellow-believers, in our roles as priests of God. And in our considerations today I feel we do best to stay with this particular objective regarding the practice of our priesthood. But I do believe that we ought to state this objective in relevant clear words within our congregation. Only with a clear objective in mind can we expect to equip our priests for their task. Let us zero in on the objective of each saint being responsible for the edifying of the other for the upbuilding of the whole church of God.

Given the objective of enabling individual Christians to strengthen each other in personal faith and knowledge, we are in position to set up goals and methods for attaining this objective. Here above all the input of all the priests of God is important. We pastors do not always know our people as well as we think, nor always what is "best for them." A program which could develop, for instance as it did in one congregation is that of cottage Bible study sessions four times a year on specific topics relating to the health of congregational life. This program really began with the pastor and council looking at the objective of having priests of God share spiritual insights with each other and then establishing the goal of giving every Christian in the congregation the opportunity to do so without scaring him off due to his self-confessed Bible ignorance. The program suggestion came from a man who had had a good experience with a Bible study cell program in another denomination prior to his conversion to Lutheranism.

An awareness that each individual is a priest of God, needing equipping, but also needing opportunity to serve, will also lead to a careful review of old programs and traditional ways of doing things. Individuals are not the same, nor are the times the same. The safest way to approach a review is not necessarily looking for successes and failures since, although this can be helpful, it can fool one into rejecting a good approach because of a minor failure or failure of personnel. Here we advocate strongly going back to well thought out objectives and the vital goals they may generate and then to do the painful thing of asking, do the present activities, organizations, and the-like reflect what we as priests of God want to do? Where does the annual Men's Club beer and brat festival fit in? Where does the stewardship program developed and run by the pastor fit in? Where does church discipline conducted solely by the pastor fit in? Where does the custom of starting a meeting without prayer, if the pastor is absent, fit in? and so on? Objectives which reflect God's will for the church and goals carefully designed to help attain those objectives should help determine programs and organizational activities, not the other way around.

III. Practicing the Priesthood of All Believers in the Conduct of Church Programs

Perhaps we should have begun a bit earlier with our next point. According to Eph. 4:11-16 it is essential that the GIFTS of God in the called servants of the Word equip the saints for the work of service. St. Paul trained and equipped Aquila and Priscilla, who in turn equipped Apollos, who in turn ministered to the Jews. If the called servants equip others, they are multiplied in the saints who are equipped to train others.

What are the tools for such equipping? Are we as seminary-trained pastors capable of truly equipping that vast number of saints in our congregations? It is interesting to note that the one thing the men mentioned in v. 11 have in common is that they all proclaim the Word of God. That is the one prime tool for equipping the saints, the Word of God. It is not in technique, philosophy, program, "encounters", etc. that we will find the tool

for training. We must communicate *the Word*. But never forget that communication is a two-way street when we speak of it between Christians. It must be proclaimed in a manner that does not dim its light, lessen its strength. It must be received in a situation which will not garble its message. The prime consideration is that a maximum exposure of our saints to the Word occurs.

Techniques and approaches can and must vary and they are available. Just a few brief notes will be given here, with again more to follow from you at a later point in this presentation. We wish to note several things about our preaching, the one prime technique of proclaiming the Word. Let us be sure we follow Luther's advice and have our sermons be "Zeitgemaess." We all are affected by the world about us and the Word of God must work in today's environment. Apply it accordingly. Let us avoid archaisms, with the use of language that does not penetrate today's mindset. KJV may be familiar and a message full of "Thees" and "Thous" and "Saiths" may be comforting (altho maybe also soporific), but we are to rouse our saints to be able and willing to minister, to serve people, in *today's* world. Let us not fall into stereotypes, without speaking of real people and problems. These are individuals to whom we are preaching, and thus let us not cast them into one mold on Sunday morning, resulting in a proclamation to plastic people in padded pews, with little relationship to the real people they are during the week. Let us not let our own idiosyncracies and pet peeves dominate what we proclaim. We are here to equip the saints for work of service. They need the Word not only in purity but also in clarity and for today.

Obviously in teaching situations we above all have opportunity to equip the saints. But what a neglected area this is! I suppose you can say that it is neglected first of all by the saints as evidenced by their lack of attendance at Bible class on Wednesday night or Sunday morning. And yet we will all have to admit that perhaps we have neglected this area as well. Maybe the day of Bible classes is over as a way of equipping the saints, but if the Word is the great tool, teaching it in a forum where questions can be asked, comments can be made, would still appear to be a good approach.—Permit an aside here. We marvel at the man who is able to get 25% of his adult membership in some kind of a Bible study group. And yet if our saints are going to be equipped to serve one another, can we be satisfied until we can in one way or another reach every member of the church with special study of the Word, whether by us and through other saints?

Perhaps in this area, that of Bible study, is where an avowed Bible-teaching Bible-believing church (without Bibles in the pew) must put forth 100% more effort than at present. Perhaps we need be more innovative. Surely the educational approach has changed drastically in the past two generations, some for good, some for bad, but nonetheless it has changed also within our own Christian full-time educational agencies. This reflects not only the wild ideas of some far-out educators, but also a change in our environment and times. We disregard such outward changes at the peril of the effectiveness of our teaching experiences. As an example we perhaps could cite the change from pupils sitting passively by, being spoon-fed, to that of pupils participating actively in the learning process. Is this reflected in our Bible Class approaches? To what degree? In light of the change of the status of women from uneducated keepers of the home, to women, well educated, and of necessity often in the business world, has a forum for free expression been provided which enables uninhibited participation by our female saints to as high a degree as Priscilla and Miriam evidently enjoyed?

Is it time to explore more fully different "saint-equipping" programs of Bible study such as Bible study cells—week-end institutes—intensified training in the conduct of family devotions—quarterly Spiritual Growth programs through group meetings in homes? I do not know, but I do know that we cannot be satisfied with the present level of Bible study and resultant limited knowledge, if we take seriously the priesthood of all believers and our responsibility as pastors to equip that priesthood, *all* of it.

Nor can we neglect the fellowship aspect of the life of the church. Opportunity for saints to edify one another in keeping with Paul's proposal can come in one to one encounters, and these obviously are excellent, if they are taken. But works of service performed jointly within the framework of church organizations also serves to the unifying of the body in faith and knowledge. Fellowship has a place in the life of the congregation when it is connected with service to the other saints of God, when it furthers the objective of strengthening the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Preparation of the saints for their role through the Word is paramount for proper practice of the priesthood of all believers. But the structure within which this is practiced and the opportunities to practice it also are critical. The very structure of a congregation and above all its programs must be studied to see whether they promote the idea of service by all. The program of the voters assembly of most congregations reveals a lack of awareness of the priesthood of all believers. The reports and resolutions for the most part deal with crises in financial and material matters. Primary effort is expended by the leadership to put out fires. A realization that we have the full membership with which to work, if trained, would give the leaders the confidence and time to plan together with the membership the best use of the resources God has made available, first of all in manpower, and then in money.

Another practical area which would be affected by full practice of the priesthood of all believers, is that of getting jobs done. If all are priests of God and are honored as such, maybe, just maybe, we pastors and old time lay leaders will get over the reluctance to delegate not only responsibility, but also authority to others. Moses is a Biblical example of the value of such delegation. Moses' experience of course will not help you at all if you are committed to the three "P" school of parish administration:

- the *Papal* attitude which says: "*I* decide all!"
- the *Paternal* attitude which says, "*I do* all!"
- the *Plaintive* attitude which says, "I endure *all*—gladly?"

And often all three are practiced by the same leader. If our saints come to a realization of the honor of the priesthood, the usual reason given for not delegating will be gone, namely, no one will accept a job. Maybe that is the trouble, ourselves considering it to be a "job", one we usually give without accompanying authority.

Whatever involvement we have in mind for our priests, it must be meaningful at a spiritual level. Perhaps we should make our main emphasis on recruitment for service in the spiritual training arena. Here we have various circles in which our saints can and should be active, each according to the measure of the gifts God has given:

- Within the *Family Circle*: Here above all the family altar comes into consideration. This is the first level at which the priests can serve one another for the upbuilding of the body of Christ. Growth in spiritual sharing, can be found at the family altar. Should we be doing much much more in training our families for such meaningful service?
- Within the *Congregational Circle*: This is the second arena in which our priests ought be active, again in a broader way helping build up the body. Once again we emphasize those activities centering on the Word. Several have been mentioned earlier. Here we suggest the participation of the priests in the preparation for Bible study, so that they actually can share insights for mutual strengthening. We might be surprised at what prior preparation we would get, if we prepared proper study material for home work. More meaningful orders of service in which we support each other in joint song and prayer also would heighten our sense of interdependence.
- Within the *Synodical Circle*: The bond of common faith with those around the world cannot be emphasized too often nor too strongly. This feeling of unity can be heightened by cooperative ventures at an inter-congregational level (group canvassing, area associations, circuit meetings which are meaningful and promote fellowship consciously)—district activity publicized consciously and regularly—synodical awareness through vigorous subscription drive for NWL, reminder regarding Soul Conservation program, etc.
- Within the *Una Sancta Circle*: How we tend to shy away from this arena and for good and sufficient reason! Could it be that we do not quite know what to do with this holy of holies, the inner sanctum, of people's individual faith? We realize that the wrong emphasis here can result in a confusion of the Church with our earthly church organizations. And yet we dare not in effect deny the existence of the

Una Sancta by acting as though it does not exist. It is our one hope. Therefore I timidly make some suggestions as to how we as members of the universal priesthood, the whole number of saints, can serve in this sacred circle. Perhaps we first of all as clergymen need ever be careful that we are not merely polemical, but truly ecumenical in our concerns, our comments, and in our prayers, remembering all members of the body of Christ in our petitions to our Lord. We need remind ourselves and our fellow-priests to be on the guard against self-righteousness as we view the comparative doctrinal calm and unanimity in our ranks, and rather penitently acknowledge His unfathomable grace as we view our lack of concern for study of His Word. We need at all times stress the clarity of our confession of faith and at the same time the value of clarity of confession by means of positive statements rather than negative ones, without neglecting necessary antithetical statements. But let us be known first for what we are for, rather than for what we are against. Let us not make shibboleths and barriers out of adiaphora and tradition as we come into contact with other individual Christians (such as translations, vestments, etc.) and unnecessarily turn them off and away. In this area of the Una Sancta Circle, let us not fear to be aware of the sanctity of the faith and membership in the Una Sancta which is a product of the Gospel; for to be aware of God's goodness and grace evidenced here is to be ever more aware of the need for the purity of the teaching of that Gospel by his priests.

The priesthood of all believers is a most practical doctrine. It is true because God called every saint to be a priest. It is most strengthening because it assures us of the mighty effort of every member of Christ's body supporting every other member for the upbuilding of the whole body. It is workable and working for in its many priests it multiplies the gifts of God given in the form of his ordained servants from the apostles to the pastor of today for the proclamation of the Gospel for the strengthening of the body of Christ and the salvation of many souls. Let us not only be aware of but also practice this universal priesthood.

Bibliography of Books with Practical Suggestions

Helping Families Through the Church—O. E. Feucht—Concordia, Rev. 1971
Organized for Action—Guido Merkens—Concordia, 1959
The Pastor and the People—Lyle Schaller—Abingdon, 1973
The Radical Nature of Christianity—Waldo Werning—W. J. Werning, 1975

Addendum

11 καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, **12** πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, **13** μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, **14** ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης, **15** ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, **16** ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.