

What Is A Minister In The WELS?: Theology, Qualifications, History, And Current Practice

[WELS Nebraska District Convention : Waco, Nebraska : June 17-19, 1996]

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There are certain doctrinal issues that seem to come up repeatedly in the history of our synod. The doctrine of church fellowship was a defining issue during the first two decades of our synod's existence. One hundred years later faithfulness to the scriptural principles of church fellowship led our synod to end its long-cherished relationship with the Lutheran church—Missouri Synod and the synodical Conference.

The first few decades of the twentieth century saw the doctrine of the church and its ministry receiving a great deal of attention and discussion. The last two decades of the twentieth century have again seen an increased interest in the doctrine of the ministry. At the same time the role Scripture assigns to man and woman has become a focal point.

The doctrines of church fellowship, church and ministry, and the role of man and woman are inter-related. Although wise men do not make predictions about the future (history shows futurists almost always to be wrong), this writer is willing to suggest that church fellowship, church and ministry, and the role of man and woman will continue to be at issue at least for the immediate future.

There are a number of reasons why the doctrine of the ministry has been a continuing concern for Christians in America. Virtually every immigrant group coming from Europe has had to wrestle with this doctrine because of the religious freedom and religious pluralism in our country. In Europe the forms of the ministry were usually defined by the state in the state or territorial churches. In America the government does not determine the forms which the church or its ministry take.

Lutherans in America have had to confront both the hierarchical view of the ministry common to Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglicanism as well as the practice of the evangelicals who often seem to blend and confuse the universal priesthood and the public ministry. Terminology has not always been used in a clear and consistent way even among Lutherans.

The topic your district has assigned for study at this convention is therefore very appropriate. "What is a Minister in the WELS?: Theology, History, Qualifications, and Current Practice." With your permission we will rearrange the outline and consider the qualifications for the ministry before we look at this doctrine in history.

I. The Scriptural Doctrine of the Church and Ministry

The doctrine of the ministry cannot really be considered apart from the doctrine of the church. It is necessary to understand what the church is and what the church does before we can appreciate the blessing God intends for his people through the public ministry or recognize the responsibility and privilege that those who serve in the public ministry have.

- 1. The church consists of all those who have been called out of unbelief to faith in Jesus as their savior. Since the church consists only of believers, it is essentially invisible.***

In the New Testament the English word *church* is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. The basic meaning of *ekklesia* is assembly or congregation. The picture which the Greek word paints is that of "those who are called out." St. Peter uses that picture when he writes, "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 into his marvelous light" (1 Pt 2:9). Those who have been called out are believers. They have been called out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith. It is clear that St. Peter has this in mind because he addresses this epistle "to God's elect, strangers in the world . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1 Pt 1:1-2).

It is also clear that St. Paul has believers in mind when he uses the word church. We see that in the way he addresses his first letter to the Corinthians: “to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (1 Co 1:2).

We cannot look at anyone’s heart to see if he is a believer or not. That is why we say that the church is essentially invisible. God of course can see what is invisible to us. “The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sa 16:7). Human beings can only judge faith on the basis of the confession a person makes in word and actions. “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Ro 10:10).

The Bible has also given us some marks that indicate that the church is present.

2. The church is present wherever the gospel is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered.

How do we know that the church is present wherever the gospel is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered? We know that the church is present because it is through the word and sacraments (the means of grace), and these means alone, that the Holy Spirit brings sinners to faith. It is through these means that people become members of God’s church.

As St. Paul writes, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?... Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:13-14, 17). Salvation comes through faith alone. Faith comes only through the word of Christ. Therefore no one will be saved apart from the word of Christ, apart from the gospel.

Wherever the gospel is proclaimed the Holy Spirit will be at work bringing people to faith and preserving them in that faith. As the Lord assured his prophet Isaiah, “My word . . . will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11). That promise is so sure that St. Paul could declare, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Ro 1:16-17). The power of the gospel and the centrality of the means of grace to the life of the church was so clear to Luther that he declares,

And even if no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God’s Word cannot be without God’s people and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s Word.¹

The sacraments rightly administered are also marks of the church because of the gospel promises connected to them. On Pentecost Peter encouraged his hearers, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Ac 2:38-39). The Bible also informs us, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:4-5).

The same gospel promise is attached to the Lord’s Supper. “‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Mt 26:26-28).

A person cannot separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the means of grace. Since it is through God’s Word and the sacraments that the Holy Spirit creates and preserves faith, the church will and must be present wherever these means of grace are being used. The marks of the church (means of grace), however, do not make the invisible church visible. They merely indicate its presence.

When we say that the church is present wherever the gospel is *rightly* proclaimed and the sacraments are *rightly* administered, we are emphasizing the truth that the Holy Spirit does not work through false doctrine, but only through God's truth. As our *WELS Theses on Church and Ministry* explain:

We rejoice in the fact that God in his grace and mercy can and does awaken, sustain, and preserve believers also in the midst of erring congregations and church bodies. I Kings 19:18. We remember, however, that he does so not through the errors that are taught and condoned there, but only through the true Gospel message that is still heard in these erring churches.²

3. *God has assigned one task to the church: the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.*

During the forty days between our Savior's resurrection and his ascension into heaven he met with his disciples several times to demonstrate that he was alive and to give them further instruction. He gave a special commission to his followers (i.e., the church). This commission is found in several different places in the Scriptures. St. Matthew records, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:18-19). St. Mark reports these words of our Savior: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15-16). In Luke's Gospel our Savior says, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk 24:46-47). On the very day of his ascension Jesus told his followers, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8).

Jesus did not commission the church to overthrow the political establishment or to change the structures of society. It is not the church's role to wield the law as a curb in society or to use the power of the sword given to the government to spread the gospel or to enforce correct doctrine or "Christian" living. When Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36), he was rejecting the accusation that he had come into this world to establish a political kingdom or wield political power.

God has established the government as his agent of wrath to punish the evildoer, to provide law and order in society, and to provide for the physical and material safety of the inhabitants of this world (Ro 13:1-7). The government has responsibility over the physical requirements of human life. The church deals with spiritual matters. The church is the poorer when its public ministers forget the great commission of the Savior to meddle in the affairs of this world. The Augsburg Confession explains:

Therefore, since the power of the Church grants eternal things, and is exercised only by the ministry of the Word, it does not interfere with civil government; no more than the art of singing interferes with civil government. For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments, in order to preserve civil justice and peace.

Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the church has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth.³

Although the individual Christian as a citizen has the right and the duty to participate in civil government and work for just laws, the church (the gathering of believers) is not commissioned by God to rule or engage in political activism.

The church may carry out charitable work as the church in Jerusalem did (Acts 6). The church, however, will want to make sure that it always keeps the gospel ministry as its priority. We will want to make sure that we do not divorce charitable work from the proclamation of the gospel, but will look for the opportunities which charitable work provides for the preaching of the gospel.⁴

4. *Christ has given every Christian the ministry of the keys, the authority to proclaim his law and gospel and to administer the sacraments.*

The ministry of the keys is the authority to loose and bind sins, to proclaim the gospel (*Predigtamt* or *Predigtendienst*). The purpose of this office or authority or ministry is so that human beings can come to saving faith. As the Augsburg Confession explains,

That we may obtain this faith, the *Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted*. For through Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel.⁵

Was this authority given to the apostles alone? Or only to professional clergy? Or to every Christian? We need to examine the Scriptures.

When our savior walked this earth he created quite a stir. No one had ever seen anyone perform the kind of miracles he was able to perform. No one among their contemporaries spoke with authority as Jesus did. Many people had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a great prophet or perhaps one of the Old Testament prophets come back to life.

When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, Simon Peter answered for the group.

“You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:16-19).

Our Savior builds his church on the rock, the truth that he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven to all those to whom the Father has revealed that truth as he had to Peter. God’s forgiveness opens the gates of heaven. Believers have the authority to announce God’s forgiveness to their fellow sinners.

It is evident that this authority was not given to Peter alone because Jesus repeated this commission to all of the apostles when he appeared to them after his resurrection. He said to them, “‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’” (Jn 20:21-22). The apostles had the authority to speak in Jesus’ name to tell penitent sinners that their sins are forgiven and to tell the impenitent that their sins are not forgiven. Jesus died for the sins of all. All are forgiven. But the impenitent do not have God’s forgiveness because by their impenitence they have rejected his forgiveness.

The authority to forgive sins or preach the gospel was given not only to the apostles, but to all Christians of all times. That is clear from the wording of the great commission. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus’ promise to be with his disciples to the very end of the age (end of the world) demonstrates that his commission was meant not just for those who first heard it, but for all his followers until judgment day.

Some might still want to argue that the authority to forgive sins or proclaim the gospel is given only to those who serve in the public ministry. St. Peter, writing to the *elect* (believers) living throughout the region we know today as modern Turkey, declares, “But you are a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pt 2:9). To praise someone is to tell others the praiseworthy things he has done. To praise God means to tell others

that he sent his Son to be the sacrificial Lamb who lived and died to take away the sins of the world. To praise God is to tell the repentant sinner that although he deserves to be punished forever, God has forgiven his sins in Christ Jesus. That gospel message brings people into the kingdom of God. That message is the key that opens heaven.

Every Christian is a priest before God (universal priesthood of believers). Every Christian has the authority and the responsibility to seek the lost and the erring and to speak Christ's words of forgiveness. As our Lord tells us,

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established in the mouths of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Mt 18:15-18).

St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Galatia, encourages them, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch your self, or you also may be tempted. Carry each others burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ" (Ga 6:1-2).

Christians carry out this responsibility and privilege when they instruct and discipline their children, speak to those who have fallen into sin, or tell their neighbors, acquaintances, friends, and relatives about their Savior. They do these things privately as individual Christians concerned about the eternal welfare of others.

Although every Christian has the authority to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments, God has also instituted the public ministry of the gospel, a special way of practicing the one gospel ministry that belongs to every believer.

5. *The public ministry of the gospel is the administration of the means of grace in the name and on behalf of God's people. The Lord of the church has instituted the public ministry of the gospel for the sake of good order and the benefit of his people.*

The term *public ministry* is not found in the Bible. It is an ecclesiastical term. It is used to describe the special way of practicing the one ministry of the gospel that belongs to every Christian. When we use the term *public ministry* we do not mean public in the sense of in a crowd or in a public place. By *public* we mean, *representative*. The public ministry is representative ministry. A public minister is one who represents God's people. He serves in their name and at their request. As Prof. John Meyer explains,

The terms "public" and "private" must here be determined in relation to the church. Anything is to be considered as public as soon as the church is connected with it, while the same thing remains private if the church is not connected with it, no matter how public it may be in the ordinary sense of the word.

To illustrate: A Christian travels alone in some heathen country where Christ is altogether unknown. . . Being a Christian, he always acts like a Christian and also begins to speak about our Savior. This is news to the people. A great crowd gathers around him and listens to him while he is talking to them about salvation. According to the common use of the word, he would be speaking publicly since he is addressing a great number of people, and that quite openly. Yet in the sense of our Article (*Augsburg Confession*, Article XIV) he would be doing it privately because the church, as such, has nothing to do with it. He was not commissioned by any church, he was not sent by any church, nor did any church expect a report from him. He was traveling on private business, and as a private Christian he confessed his faith as the opportunity presented itself. . .

But let us assume that several Christian workmen employed on the same job sit down together for lunch and ask one in their midst to say grace for them all. The man then leading in prayer

does so publicly because he was appointed by his fellow Christians to act in their name. He represented them. There two or three came together in Jesus' name, and Jesus was with them. . . Now all men who preach or teach the gospel, not as private Christians, but because a group of Christians has appointed them to do so in their stead, do it *publicly*. They represent the church in their work.⁶

The public ministry of the gospel, however, did not simply evolve through human effort, nor is it merely a convenient human arrangement. God ordained it. We see that in the way he established qualifications for those who serve in the public ministry. His purpose in ordaining the public ministry was for the sake of good order in the church and for the spiritual benefit of his people.

All Christians are equal before God. But not every Christian is equally gifted to serve in the public ministry. Every Christian has the authority to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments. But if every Christian tried to exercise this authority in a gathering of Christians, there would be nothing but chaos. For the sake of good order some Christians are asked to serve in the name of the rest. As St. Paul had to remind the Corinthians, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace. . . Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Co 14:33, 40).

God ordained the public ministry also as a blessing beyond that of good order. Those who serve in the ministry carry out the work of admonition and instruction for the edification of God's people. Those who serve in the public ministry are gifts of God to his people. As St. Paul informs the Ephesians, "It was he (the ascended Savior) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13).

6. *A person enters the public ministry of the gospel through a divine call from Christ through his church. No one has the right to carry out the work of the public ministry unless he has been properly called. The call confers the office or the ministry and establishes the scope of the work an individual is asked to do.*

Since every Christian equally possesses the ministry of the gospel, no one has the right to arrogate to himself the responsibility to preach or administer the sacraments in the place of his fellow Christians. To serve in the public ministry an individual has to be called or asked by a group of Christians to carry out the gospel ministry in their name. No one has the right to assume the office of the ministry unless he has been called by God.

Scripture expresses this truth as an axiom. "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was" (Heb 5:4). St. Paul puts this truth in the form of a question which expects a negative answer: "How can they preach unless they are sent" (Ro 10:15). The Augsburg Confession declares, "No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."⁷

In biblical times God called some people directly into his service (an *immediate* call). Isaiah and Jeremiah were called directly by God (Isa 6:8-13, Jer 1:4-10). Jesus himself appointed the twelve to proclaim the message of the kingdom of heaven and promised them divine power and help (Mt 10:1-20). St. Paul was called in a most dramatic way on the road to Damascus as he was going to persecute God's people there (Ac 9:1-18). Paul was quick to point to his direct call when his authority was questioned. There were some among the Galatians who challenged his office. He appealed to his direct call from God in the very first verse of his letter to that congregation: "Paul, an apostle— not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead" (Gal 1:1; cf. 1:11-17).

Anyone claiming a direct call from God into the ministry today must be able to substantiate his claim by signs and miracles. Moses' direct call to lead the people of God was confirmed by miracles (Ex 4:1-9). Moses declared that the test to determine if a prophet was sent by God or not was whether his prophecies came true (Dt 18:21-22). At the same time the miracles of a prophet were to be judged as genuine or false by the prophet's

faithfulness to God's Word (Dt 13:15). The ability to perform miracles was the divine certification of the apostles' direct call from God. Paul writes, "The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance" (2 Co 12:12).

Today we may properly speak of an "inner" call only as the desire to serve. Paul writes, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer (Greek = *episcopos*), he desires a noble task" (1 Ti 3:1). The desire alone, however, does not confer the office. Because God's people possess the gospel ministry they have the right to choose those who will serve in their name.

The Bible does not command a specific calling procedure for God's people. At times men were appointed by the apostles to serve the needs of the church (Ac 14:23). Paul directed Timothy (2 Ti 2:2) and Titus (Tit 1:5) to appoint those who were qualified to serve. When the disciples decided to replace Judas, they nominated two candidates and cast lots to choose the replacement (Ac 1:15-26). In Christian freedom we can issue a call in a variety of ways so long as things are done in a fitting and orderly manner. We may issue a call through the vote of the voting members of the congregation or delegate that responsibility to the synod's assignment committee.

Those who have been called by Christians to serve in their name have been appointed by the Holy Spirit. As Paul encouraged the elders at Ephesus, "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Ac 20:28). Called workers are gifts given by God to his church (Eph 4:11ff). That is why the call into the public ministry of the gospel is termed a *divine* call. Since the call is a divine call we believe that the call seeks the man; the man does not seek the particular call.

The doctrine of the divine call gives us comfort as we carry out the work of the ministry. When we have accepted a call we can be certain that God himself has placed us into our office. He wants us to be in this particular place at this particular time. We take comfort in this fact when lack of visible results or other problems cause us to question our service or ability or role in his kingdom.

Through the divine call God's people delegate the work that belongs to all of them to an individual who acts in their name and on their behalf. The call, therefore, establishes what work is to be done in their name. In our circles the call of the parish pastor is the broadest in scope. The pastor is usually given oversight of virtually every aspect of the congregation's work. My call as a seminary professor is much narrower in scope. Our synod through the seminary board of control has called me to teach our future pastors in two specific subject areas and to serve as dean of students. We may call a person to serve as the principal of a Lutheran elementary school or to teach first and second grades. We may call someone to teach the seventh and eighth graders in Sunday school or district officials to oversee doctrine and practice within their district. In each case the call determines the scope of the work which is to be done. Understanding what is meant by the scope of the call will keep us from interfering in another person's area of responsibility.

We will not, however, hide behind the scope of our call when asked by the congregation to do something by saying, "That's not in my call!" Since by definition the ministry is *service* and a *privilege*, we will express a spirit of willing service in our relations with those who have called us.

When we speak of the scope of the call we are not implying a difference in rank among called workers. The idea of rank in the ministry is foreign to the very concept of ministry.⁸ Jesus warns against that spirit.

But you are not to be called "Rabbi," for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called "teacher," for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Mt 23:8-12).

Since a person enters the ministry through a divine call it follows that when a person resigns from a call or retires, he is no longer in the public ministry. We may, however, show our respect for those who have served long and well in the pastoral ministry by continuing to refer to them as pastor after they have retired, even though they are no longer in the public ministry.

A calling body may find it necessary to terminate a call if the reason for the call no longer exists. If a school's enrollment has dropped significantly with little hope of increasing, a congregation may find it necessary to reduce the number of teachers serving in its midst. The calling body will want to make every effort to see to it that the proper officials are informed so that the called worker might receive a call into another field of service. Every effort will be made to provide for the called worker in the interim. But the truth remains that if the reason for a call no longer exists, the call no longer exists.⁹

7. *Ordination and installation are not commanded in the Scriptures, but are ecclesiastical rites intended to be a public declaration that a person has been duly called and has the necessary qualifications for the particular office into which he has been called.*

A person enters the public ministry through the divine call. Scripture has not prescribed any particular rite or ceremony that must be used to signify that an individual is in the public ministry.

Scripture does describe in detail a ceremony in which Aaron and his sons were "ordained" to the priesthood (Ex 29, Lev 8-9). There were ceremonies in which priests and others were appointed to various tasks. In the New Testament Paul and Barnabas were set apart for their missionary journey in a ceremony that included the laying on of hands (Ac 13). The seven deacons were "installed" into office with the laying on of hands (Ac 6). But there is no "ordination" or "installation" ceremony prescribed in Scripture for the New Testament church. Nor has Scripture determined who should be ordained and who should not.¹⁰

Ordination and installation are therefore adiaphora (things neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture). The church has liberty to decide which ceremony it will use for which office. It has the liberty to determine what serves the best interests of Christ's church and his called servants. As in all matters of adiaphoron the church will have to use sanctified Christian judgment in making such decisions.

The church can choose to make use of such rites or choose not to use them. These rites, however, retain value for the church for a number of reasons. Our seminary's pastoral theology textbook explains:

Ordination thus is an adiaphoron. Nevertheless, because of the purpose it is to serve we can expect the Lord to bless it. Both Schaller and Walther list the following three purposes: public testimony of a pastor's fitness for office; public recognition of the call for the reassurance of both pastor and congregation; intercession by the entire congregation. Schaller adds a fourth: public confession to pure doctrine and a promise of faithfulness on the part of the pastor. Being an adiaphoron, ordination (installation) could be dispensed with without jeopardizing a man's position in the pastoral office. A call does not need such confirmation for its validity. To drop this church rite could, however, result in offense to the weak, might give evidence of an independent, haughty spirit which violates love, and would fail to recognize the value of a custom that goes back to the earliest history of the New Testament Church.¹¹

8. *God has not spelled out the form which the church must take. Every gathering of believers around the gospel or on behalf of it is church and has the authority to call people into the public ministry.*

Although the church is essentially invisible, it is not merely some platonic idea. It truly exists on this earth and can be found wherever the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered. The church is present in visible assemblies of people gathered around the gospel or on behalf of it.

Christians naturally gather with like-minded believers for worship, mutual admonition, growth in knowledge of the truth, encouragement and to carry out the work God has assigned to the church. It is God's will that we do so. The Holy Spirit says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). St. Paul tells us, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself or you also may be tempted. Carry each others burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:1-2). The writer to the Hebrews warns, "Let us not give up meeting together as some are

in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching” (Heb 10:25).

The Bible, however, does not prescribe the *form* that these gatherings are to take or how Christians are to organize. There is no ceremonial law in the New Testament. Wherever Christians gather together in response to the gospel or on behalf of it, there Christ is present with his blessings. Wherever Christians are gathered together around the gospel or on behalf of it, there the church is present. As our Savior assures us, “Again, I tell you if two or three of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I with them” (Mt 18:19-20).

Although the local congregation is the most basic form of the church as we view it on earth, any gathering of Christians has the right to call someone into the public ministry so long as everything is done in a fitting and orderly manner. Therefore Christians gathered together in a synod or denomination have the right to issue divine calls.

9. God has instituted the public ministry of the gospel, but he has not ordained specific forms of the ministry. The church has the freedom to establish forms of the ministry to meet its needs. Scripture uses the term ministry in a variety of ways.

It is evident from the pages of the New Testament that there was a variety of forms which the one ministry of the gospel took to meet the needs of the church. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11). To the Corinthians Paul writes, “And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Co 12:28).

Prof. Vogel explains, “Although a number of forms of the public ministry are mentioned, there is no attempt made anywhere in the New Testament to define or accurately to describe the functions of these various forms.”¹² It would be a mistake to equate any of these terms with specific offices in the church today. The forms of the public ministry of the gospel in our synod today have developed historically according to the needs of the church.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find a word of institution for a particular *form* of the ministry (with the possible exception of the apostolic office). In the listing in 1 Corinthians 12 priority is given to those offices which deal directly with the proclamation of the gospel because the proclamation of the gospel is indispensable to the life of the church.

Yet even those involved in the ministry of the word did not always perform every function which we usually associate with the office of pastor today. St. Paul did not normally baptize anyone. He writes, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Co 1:17). Not every office involved the regular administration of the means of grace. As Paul writes to Timothy, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Ti 5:17).

The church at Jerusalem found it necessary to relieve the apostles of some of the burden of their work by developing a form of the ministry that involved the oversight of the charitable work of the congregation.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Ac 6:1-6).

This particular office was established to meet a specific need. The scope of the office was defined. Qualifications for the office were established. Men were chosen by the congregation and installed into their office through a ceremony that involved the laying on of hands. But note that this office is distinguished from the ministry of the word. It was a supportive office.

The Greek word *diakonia* is the word we usually translate as *ministry*. Its basic meaning is *service*. *Diakoneoo* means to serve or minister. A *diakonos* is a servant or helper. These terms are used in a variety of ways in the New Testament.¹³ A *diakonos* can be a king's servant (Mt 22:13) or an apostle (Col 1:23). St. Paul also uses this term to describe representatives of civil government—they are God's servants or ministers (Ro 13:6). *Diakonia* can be the preparations necessary for a meal (Lk 10:40) or charitable work (Ac 6:1). The verb can mean to wait at tables (Ac 6:2). Scripture also speaks about the *ministry of the word* (Ac 6:2, 4) as opposed to the work of waiting on tables (Ac 6:2). Care must always be taken to examine the context when determining the meaning of a word. We will also want to distinguish carefully those things that Scripture distinguishes. The ministry of the word or the gospel ministry is the primary work of the church.

10. The office of the public ministry of the gospel involves awesome responsibility and glorious service. It is to be held in honor by all.

God has entrusted the public ministry of the gospel to sinful human beings. He uses people like us to rescue souls from hell. The work of the ministry therefore is not to be taken lightly. It involves the eternal welfare of souls for whom Jesus died. God emphasized the serious responsibility of this work when he commissioned the prophet Ezekiel.

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you will surely die," and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sins, but you will have saved yourself. (Eze 33:7-9).

Because of the serious nature of the responsibility of the public ministry St. James cautions, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (Jas 3:1).

Yet the office of the ministry involves such a glorious service that the holy angels might well be envious. When God commissioned Ezekiel he gave him not only a message of warning, but also a glorious proclamation of forgiveness.

Son of man, say to the house of Israel, "This is what you are saying: 'Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'" Say to them, "As I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Eze 33:10-11).

St. Paul calls ministers of the gospel *ambassadors* of Christ. They are called to be God's spokesmen to proclaim to the world the good news of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Co 5:18-21).

Though the world might heap scorn on those who proclaim the gospel, God honors them. Through the prophet Isaiah he declares, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who

proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isa 52:7)

C.F.W. Walther recognized the glorious privilege of the ministry. The words he addressed to the seminarians entrusted to his care are still applicable to those serving in the public ministry of the gospel today.

When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise. Do not the blessed angels descend from heaven with great joy whenever the Father in heaven sends them to minister to those who are heirs of salvation? Why, then, should we poor sinners be unwilling to hurry after them with great joy to any place where we can lead other men, our fellow-sinners to salvation?¹⁴

God’s people will also highly regard those who serve the Lord in the holy ministry. Paul writes, “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God” (1 Co 4:1). The writer to the Hebrews instructs us, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb 13:17). We are to honor those who have served in the public ministry of the gospel by remembering them and imitating their faith. “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7). Paul writes, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Ti 5:17). He encourages the Thessalonians, “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard because of their work” (1 Th 5:12-13).

Congregations and calling bodies honor God when they honor those whom God has given them. By honoring their called workers they are also encouraging young people to consider training for the public ministry. Honoring called workers includes providing for their material needs. “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? . . . the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Co 9:11, 14).

II. Qualifications for the Public Ministry

Every Christian is a priest and king before God. Every Christian possesses the authority to announce God’s forgiveness and administer the sacraments. But every Christian does not have the gifts or the training necessary to serve in the public ministry. God has established qualifications for those who are to serve as public ministers of the gospel.

Paul records a list of qualifications in his first letter to Timothy and in his letter to Titus. In First Timothy Paul speaks about qualifications for *overseers* and a *deacons*. In Titus he writes about the qualifications for *elders*. The terms elder and overseer seem to be used interchangeably in the New Testament.¹⁵ The elders and overseers seem to have had the general oversight of the Christian congregation in apostolic times. The office of overseer or elder would therefore be roughly equivalent to the office of pastor today. Deacons seem to have been the ones “who took care of collecting and dispersing the congregation’s finances, looking after widows and the sick, in general administering the affairs of the congregation.”¹⁶

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, 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 the church of God?) 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 Ti 3:2-7).

An elder 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 is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-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 (Tit 1:6-9). Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested, and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything (1 Ti 3:8-11).

It is worth noting that St. Peter's exhortation to the elders in his first letter corresponds very closely to the qualifications St. Paul lists. Peter writes,

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Pt 5:2-4).

There are many similarities between the qualifications for elder/overseer and deacon. It should be noted, however, that the qualifications also match the scope of the call for each office. Although the deacon “must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience,” there is no mention of being “able to teach” or the ability to “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” The work of the deacon evidently did not involve public teaching and preaching.

For the sake of order we might divide the characteristics which apply particularly to those who are involved in preaching, teaching, evangelism, and counseling into four categories: 1) spiritual characteristics which result in a good reputation inside and outside the church; 2) doctrinal soundness; 3) the ability to communicate God's truth; 4) the ability to maintain discipline.

Spiritual Characteristics Which Result in a Good Reputation

The elder/overseer is to be “above reproach” and “blameless” (the two Greek words are synonyms). The words do not mean sinless. Otherwise every human being would be disqualified from serving in the public ministry. The words refer rather to a character and consistency of Christian life that is not open to accusation of wrongdoing. In other words, a man has to have a good reputation based on his life as a Christian. Paul explains what this means. He says that the elder/overseer is to be “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable” (1 Ti 3:2), “not over-bearing, not quick-tempered, one who loves what is good” (Tit 1:7-8). Peter adds, “Not lording it over those entrusted to you” (1 Pt 5:3). In other words, the elder/overseer is to deal with people in a way that inspires confidence, and respect rather than resentment.

Above reproach also means that he is the husband of but one wife. He is not a bigamist. He is not a womanizer. He is not open to the charge of sexual impropriety. Rather he is devoted to his wife, “a one-woman man.”¹⁷ He treats “older women as mothers and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Ti 5:2). A public minister of the gospel who has fallen into adultery has disqualified himself from the public ministry. Although he can be assured of God's forgiveness, he will have to leave his office.

Above reproach also means that he is not a drunkard. Public drunkenness results in the loss of a good reputation. A violent person brings disgrace on the ministry. A person who serves God's people will not pursue dishonest gain. A thief or a cheat has no place in the public ministry. A person who is greedy is trying to serve God and money—an impossible task. Those in the ministry are ready to serve without regard for what might be in it for them. Paul writes, “I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; If not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me” (1 Co 9:16-17).

Some practical questions arise from these lists of qualifications. Can someone who has had a moral lapse ever be called into the public ministry of the gospel or back into that ministry? Is someone who has been guilty of any of the sins listed above permanently disqualified from serving?

God has made use of some as leaders of his people even though they had been guilty of gross public sin. Moses was a murderer. King David was a murderer and adulterer. Paul by his own admission had been “a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man” (1 Ti 1:13). Peter turned his back on his savior and fell from faith when he publicly and vehemently denied his Lord with curses and oaths. In each of these cases God himself made the decision to call the individual or to allow him to continue to serve. Moses, however, waited forty years before he served. St. Paul had to wait several years after his conversion before he gained a new reputation and God’s people were willing to accept him. Peter was restored publicly by Jesus himself. The consequences of David’s sins and his repentance were public. God’s forgiveness of this fallen sinner and his restoration have been a source of comfort for God’s people ever since.

In each of these cases God himself made the decision. We cannot expect his direct intervention today. How do we decide whether someone who has fallen into public sin can serve in the ministry? Two passages must be considered. Paul writes, “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s way, so that our ministry will not be discredited” (2 Co 6:3). Paul also directs Timothy to “set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Ti 4:12). If a person’s sin will be a stumbling block for others, he cannot serve. If the sin is far enough in the past that it is no longer a stumbling block, he could possibly serve again. If a man for a period of time has demonstrated his repentance by Christian living and *regained his reputation*, if he can once again “set an example for the believers,” it might be possible for him to be called. Sins committed in youth and immaturity (i.e., while in elementary school, high school, college) will probably be easier to put into the background than sins committed by a person while serving in the public ministry. Today there may also be legal ramifications in calling individuals who have been guilty of particular sins.

In our synod we have assigned the responsibility for making the decisions about who can serve to our ministerial education schools which certify students for assignment into the public ministry and to the district presidents who are responsible for doctrine and practice in their districts. The decision whether someone can serve or not is at times extremely difficult. It calls for sanctified wisdom and evangelical concern for the welfare of God’s people.

Doctrinal Soundness

“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught” (Tit 1:9). “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (Tit 2:1) God’s Word is the source of life for the church. It goes without saying that the public minister of the gospel will not distort God’s truth or substitute false doctrine for God’s truth. He trembles at the God’s Word and cherishes every syllable. He is above board in his proclamation of the gospel, following Paul’s example. “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Co 4:2). He heeds Paul’s advice,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of because you know those from whom you have learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of god may thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Ti 3:14-17).

The public minister of the gospel has the responsibility to recognize and correct error. As the Scriptures instruct,

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth

and turn aside to myths, But you keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Ti 4:2-5).

To carry out the work of the ministry of the gospel takes a thorough knowledge of Scripture. A thorough knowledge does not come overnight. It takes long years of study. That is one of the reasons why the Bible says that an overseer “must not be recent convert” (1 Ti 3:6). Recent converts cannot have the depth or the breadth of Christian knowledge required for the public ministry. Nor do they have the experience necessary to apply the truths of Scripture to the lives of God’s people. A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing and can lead to spiritual arrogance.

Christians are wise to require thorough doctrinal training for those who will serve them with word and sacraments. Although Scripture does not spell out how many years of training a pastor or teacher must have, we will want to devote the time and money necessary for a ministerial education system that gives thorough training to those who will one day serve in the public ministry of our synod.

The Ability to Communicate God’s Truth

The overseer must be “able to teach” (1 Ti 3:2) and able to “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Tit 1:9). This quality involves not only having the necessary knowledge and understanding, it also involves the ability to communicate that knowledge to others. Communication is not merely the ability to speak. Communication means that a person speaks in such a way that the other person understands what he wants him to understand.

Some people have natural gifts for communication. Everyone can improve communication skills through training and effort. Our future pastors and teachers put in long years of study and practice to polish these skills so that they can serve in the public ministry. The skills necessary to communicate well with pre-schoolers or first and second graders are not necessarily the same skills needed to communicate with adults or college or seminary students. God has given a variety of gifts to his people. Let’s be thankful for this diversity of gifts and use them appropriately in his service.

The Ability to Maintain Discipline

The congregation or church body which fails to exercise discipline will lose the gospel. If it does not make any difference what a person does or believes, who needs a Savior? Exercising moral and doctrinal discipline is part of the church’s work and a part of the ministry of the gospel. Discipline has as its goal bringing a person to repentance and leading him to Christian maturity. Discipline involves rebuking sin and proclaiming the Savior who lived and died to take all sin away.

The elder/overseer is to demonstrate the ability to maintain Christian discipline in his own family. “An elder must be . . . a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (Tit 1:6). “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?)” (1 Ti 3:4-5)

Being able to maintain discipline involves an understanding of human nature and human psychology. It involves recognizing the dual nature of the Christian, that he has both a sinful nature and a new man. In order to carry out Christian discipline a person has to understand the proper role of the law and the gospel in leading people to Christian maturity. He has to know how to apply both the law and the gospel correctly.

He cannot be like Eli who coddled his sons instead of punishing them for their wickedness and removing them from office (1 Sa 2:12-17, 22-25). Nor should he “exasperate” his children with unreasonable demands or treatment, “but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). He is to be a model parent who is careful to lead his family in home devotions and take the responsibility for the religious training of his children. Congregations and calling bodies need to recognize the responsibility that called workers have toward their families and not burden them with so much work that they neglect the discipline of those living under their own roof. Those who wish to serve in the public ministry will also want to choose their spouse carefully (1 Ti 3:11). A good spouse can be tremendous asset.

Other Scriptural Examples and Exhortations

The Bible also presents a number of examples and exhortations that shed light on qualities that are either necessary or useful for serving in the public ministry of the gospel.

A pastor or a teacher ought to have a clear understanding of the depths of his own sinfulness and an equally clear understanding of the magnitude of God's forgiving grace in Christ Jesus. St. Paul was such a man. He confesses,

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:7-8).

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Co 15:9-10)

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst (1 Ti 1:15).

No one deserves God's forgiveness. We all have fallen short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23) and even the good things we do are like filthy rags. (Isa 64:6) in the eyes of the God who demands perfection (Mt 5:48). God does not owe anyone eternal salvation. He owes us all eternal death because death is the wages of our sin (Ro 6:23).

Eternal life is the gift of God purchased and one by the perfect life and the innocent suffering and death of Jesus. He was our Substitute, the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

It is important for called workers to understand what they are by nature and the grace and forgiveness that God has showered on them. It is not that our understanding of our sinfulness and God's grace makes the Word we proclaim or the sacraments we administer more effective—they have an efficacy all their own. God can even use hypocrites to bring people to faith. But such an understanding fosters the humility and the other spiritual qualities that lead God's people to respect the ministers he has given them. Knowing that God uses sinful human beings like us to be his spokesmen to bring salvation to other sinful human beings will keep us from forgetting what a privilege God has given us. It keeps us focussed on the message we proclaim rather than on our own strengths and abilities. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Co 4:7). Understanding how much God has forgiven us will keep us from being legalistic in our dealings with our fellow sinners.

Serving in the public ministry of the gospel is not easy. It never has been. Paul knew the rigors of the ministry (cf. 2 Co 6:4-10) and therefore encouraged Timothy, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Ti 2:3). God has not promised us earthly honor, wealth, or numerical success in the ministry. Our sinful flesh longs for recognition and success. As good Americans we like to point to our accomplishments and measure the success or failure of our work by statistics and the bottom line. Using such standards we can become frustrated and filled with complaints. Frustration and complaining can easily lead to legalism or adopting manipulative methods which guarantee results or even seeking charismatic gifts and pentecostal powers instead of relying on the gospel, God's power for salvation.

Perseverance and patience come from understanding how the Holy Spirit operates. St. Paul reminded the Corinthians,

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but God who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building (1 Co 3:5-9).

The work of the ministry is God's work. He builds his kingdom according to his timetable, not ours. The Augsburg Confession puts it this way. "For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel."¹⁸ As God promised to Isaiah, "So is my word that goes out of my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

God requires faithfulness of those he calls into the gospel ministry. "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Co 4:12). God supplies the strength and power. "Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter that kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Co 3:5-6).

We can be confident in every situation because we know that our ascended savior has all power and authority and is ruling and directing all things for the benefit of his people.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the age to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:19-23)

St. Paul's words of encouragement to the Corinthians are particularly appropriate for those who service in the public ministry. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm, let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Co 15:58).

Women in the Public Ministry of the Gospel

Christian women are included in the universal priesthood. Women possess the keys of the kingdom just as certainly as men do. The Bible does not forbid women from being called into the public ministry of the gospel. The only restriction that Scripture places on women in the ministry is that they are not to exercise authority over men. "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over man she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Ti 2:11-13).

Women may serve in any capacity that does not include the exercise of authority over men. God is a God of order and has assigned complementary roles to men and women. The two sexes are not in competition with each other. They are mutually dependent (1 Co 11:11-12). The church will want to encourage Christian women to use in God's service the gifts that he has given them. The church will also be careful not to call women into any forms of the ministry that would involve them in exercising authority over men. Since God has not ordained any particular form of the ministry and since the Bible speaks in terms of general principles rather than specific applications, Christians will examine every form of the ministry they develop to see if women may serve. Using sanctified judgment, they will make their determination on the basis of the principles God has established.

Resignation from the Public ministry of the Gospel

A call into the public ministry of the gospel is not necessarily for life. A call may be terminated by acceptance of another call.

If persistent illness or the infirmities of old age make it difficult for a person to carry out the responsibilities of his call, he may find it necessary to resign or retire. The called worker will want to put the welfare of God's people first. The calling body will want to show love and consideration to the one who has been serving them. A reduction in the workload or additional help may solve the problem. The calling body will also want to see to it that the person who has to resign because of infirmities is not left financially destitute.

It goes without saying that a called worker whose doctrinal position has changed and no longer allows him to teach according to the confessional standards he was called to uphold will resign from his call. He cannot continue to serve that group with a clear conscience.

Removal from the Public Ministry

A calling body may terminate a call for persistence in false doctrine, public offence, unfaithfulness, legalism or lack of ability. In such circumstances the calling body will proceed in Christian love according to Matthew 18. In our synod the calling body will also want to seek advice and help from the proper district officials.

III. The Doctrine of the Ministry in the History of the Church

Before we can look at the ministry in the WELS today it is necessary to give a brief overview of the doctrine of the ministry in the history of the church. The scope of this paper does not allow an exhaustive study. In post-apostolic times the forms of the ministry gradually became fixed. The three forms that became most common were bishop, priest and deacon. The office of bishop became particularly prominent. The bishop at first served as the overseer of a group of Christians in a particular locality. As the number of congregations in a locality increased, one bishop might be asked to supervise several. Bishops in major centers of Christianity became especially prominent.

The development of the authority of the bishop was rather natural. It made organizational sense to have a single head of the church in a given locality. Such an arrangement allowed for efficient administration and followed the pattern of the Roman Empire. The bishop also took a lead in authoritative teaching and the combating of early heresies. Soon the bishop began to be seen as necessary for the existence of the church.¹⁹ Cyprian (d. 258) bishop of Carthage wrote, “Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop, and if there is anyone who is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church.”²⁰

It seems that for some time the authority to choose or call candidates for the ministry remained in the hands of the people.

The norm which was generally accepted in the fourth and fifth centuries and which was confirmed by the legislation of Justinian in 528, was to have three candidates nominated *by the clergy and people* of the vacant see, for election and consecration by the metropolitan and the bishops of the province. A reverse procedure—nomination of three candidates by the bishops, from which the people would choose one—was also considered acceptable.²¹

In the course of time more and more authority was placed in the hands of bishops and less and less in the hands of God’s people. The idea developed that those in the public ministry receive their authority not from God through his people, but from God through the bishops in apostolic succession. The Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans lay special emphasis on this hierarchical view of the ministry.

The Eastern Orthodox see the bishop as a monarch in his own diocese and the “fountain” of the sacraments. The sacraments are administered on his authority. He receives a *charisma* from the Holy Spirit that gives him teaching authority in connection with all of the other bishops.²² Only a bishop has the power to ordain. Ordination and the consent of the people are required for their “holy orders.”²³

The Council of Trent (1545-63) entrenched Rome’s hierarchical views of the ministry and denied the universal priesthood of believers. Rome claims that only properly ordained priests have the right to forgive and retain sins and administer the Lord’s Supper.

Whereas, therefore in the New Testament, the Catholic Church has received, from the institution of Christ, the holy visible sacrifice of the Eucharist; it must needs also be confessed, that there is, in that church, a new, visible, and external priesthood, into which the old has been translated. And the Sacred Scriptures show, and the tradition of the Catholic Church has always taught, that this priesthood was instituted by the same Lord and Savior, and that to the apostles, and their successors in the priesthood, was the power delivered of consecrating, offering, and of administering His Body and Blood, as also of forgiving and retaining sins.²⁴

Bishops administer ordination that imprints an indelible character on the priest. An ordained priest remains a priest for life.²⁵ For Roman Catholics ordination, not the call, conveys the ministry. The authority to ordain and place into office belongs to the hierarchy and not to the people.

Furthermore, the sacred and holy Synod teaches, that, in the ordination of bishops, priests, and of the other orders, neither the consent, nor vocation, nor authority, whether of the people, or of any

civil power or magistrate whatsoever, is required in such wise as that, without this, the ordination is invalid, yea rather doth it decree, that all those who, being only called and instituted by the people, or by the civil power and magistrate, ascend to the exercise of these ministrations, and those who of their own rashness assume them to themselves, are not ministers of the church, but are to be looked upon as thieves and robbers who have not entered through the door.²⁶

At the time of the Reformation Luther brought back to light the scriptural teaching of the universal priesthood of believers.

It is of the common rights of Christians that we have been speaking. . . There is no other Word of God than that which is given to all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted.

There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose. There is no other sacrifice than of the body of every Christian. No one but a Christian can pray. No one but a Christian may judge doctrine. These make the priestly and royal office.²⁷

Luther also understood the importance of the public ministry of the gospel. He recognized its divine institution and the blessings that it brings to the church. Luther was not one to confuse the universal priesthood and the public ministry.

This is the way it is in Christendom, too. Before anyone becomes a preacher or a bishop, he must first be a Christian, a born priest. No pope or any other man can make him a priest. But having been born a priest through Baptism, a man thereupon receives the office; and this is what makes a difference between him and other Christians. Out of the multitude of Christians some must be selected who shall lead others by virtue of the special gifts and aptitude which God has given them for the office. Thus St. Paul writes (Eph. 4:11, 12) "And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints" (this means those who are already Christians and baptized priests), "for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (that is, the Christian congregation or church).

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common priesthood. His office is conveyed to someone else, and he becomes a Christian like any other.

This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests.²⁸

At the time of the Reformation some of the radical reformers emphasized an inner call which they believed was divine authorization to preach. The Zwickau prophets were among those who believed in an immediate (direct, without the means of grace) working of the Holy Spirit. Without a mediate (external) call from God's people they invaded the Wittenberg area and caused much confusion and consternation. Luther and his colleagues were opposed not only to the teaching of an immediate working of the Holy Spirit to bring people to faith, they were also opposed to the arrogance of any who would presume to assume the office of the public ministry of the gospel without a call from God's people to do so. Article V of the Augsburg Confession rejects the former error. Article XIV rejects the latter.

John Calvin had a rather "high church" view of the public ministry. He saw some forms of the ministry mentioned in the New Testament as being temporary and some as permanent. Among the permanent were the offices of pastor/teacher, elder and deacon. The pastors "preside over the Church in that station . . . to instruct

the people in true piety . . . to administer the holy mysteries, to maintain and exercise proper discipline.”²⁹ Elders (presbyters) or the office of government constitute a “senate” or “council” who are “invested with that jurisdiction in the correction of vices.” According to Calvin this office is necessary in every age.³⁰ Deacons are assigned the task of caring for the poor and sick.³¹ Although Calvin acknowledged an inner call, he insisted on the necessity of an external call from God’s people in conjunction with other pastors.

We find, therefore, that it is a legitimate ministry according to the word of God, when those who appear suitable persons are appointed with the consent and approbation of the people; but that other pastors ought to preside over the election, to guard the multitude from falling into any improprieties, through inconstancy, intrigue, or confusion.³²

Calvin believed that the administration of the sacraments belonged to the clergy and that baptism performed by laymen even in an emergency could not be defended. The laity also should not officiate at the Lord’s Supper.³³ You will recall that Calvin tried to turn Geneva into a kind of theocracy presided over by pastors and elders.

In the late 17th century Lutheran Pietism in Germany sought to regain Luther’s emphasis on the universal priesthood of believers which they believed had been lost during the Post-Reformation period. Philipp Spener (1635-1705), usually considered the founder of German Lutheran Pietism, wanted to reform the Lutheran Church of his day. Part of his plan was to encourage private gatherings of the “better” members of his congregations for private Bible study. He hoped that these *collegia pietatis* (gatherings of the pious) around God’s Word would create pockets of God-fearing people in the state church congregations which would work as a leaven for improving conditions in the church.

Unfortunately, these little churches within the church often became divisive, setting the laity against their called pastors. Because of the overemphasis on the universal priesthood, the public ministry was often disparaged as congregational members challenged the authority of their pastors. Pharisaism developed and the spiritual arrogance of the pietists led to split after split in Lutheran congregations throughout the seventeenth century.³⁴ It was not Spener’s intent to turn people against their pastors. He was horrified at these developments. When he saw what happened, he “seriously questioned the value of introducing such meetings and consequently established no conventicles in his own ministry in either Dresden or Berlin.”³⁵

There are some similarities between the confusion of the universal priesthood and the public ministry that could be seen among some Lutheran pietists and the approach we see among many American Evangelicals. In an interview in *Christianity Today* Mary Kassian claims,

In the early church, ministry was something that belonged to everybody. *Everyone* was a minister. *Everyone* was commissioned and “called by God” to have a ministry. And so women were very involved. But as the church became more institutionalized, the “ministry” became owned by professionals—the clergy. So as we institutionalized the church we lost a lot.³⁶

Although Kassian’s statement that “everyone was a minister” can be understood correctly in the sense that every believer possessed the ministry of the keys, it is a confusing way to speak. Kassian seems to be setting the public ministry of the gospel at odds with the universal priesthood. She seems to ignore that the public ministry was instituted by God and was very clearly functioning in apostolic times. Although individual Christians were active in speaking to others about their Savior, the Council at Jerusalem (Ac 15) and the epistles give ample evidence of a public ministry of the gospel. Too often people seem to have an overly romantic notion of the conditions of the apostolic church. Although it is true that the congregation in Jerusalem after Pentecost was a model of Christian virtue (Ac 2:42-47), and that after the persecution following the stoning of Stephen Christians scattered and proclaimed the gospel wherever they went (Ac 8:4), there were also many problems. St. Paul gives many directives for the public ministry in his epistles, particularly to make order out of the ecclesiastical disorder in the Corinthian congregation.

Many today seem to see the pastor’s role as being primarily equipping the members of our congregation for their own ministries. In this scenario the pastor becomes primarily an enabler or coach, while all the members are ministers. D. James Kennedy writes, “The third principle, then, that we need to grasp as ministers

is to see ourselves not as the star performer or virtuoso but rather as the coach of a well-trained and well coordinated team.”³⁷ While it is true that a pastor is an equipper of the saints for their lives of sanctification whenever he preaches and teaches, and while it is true that he will take special care to train those who serve as elders, Sunday school teachers, or on evangelism committees, Scripture places primary emphasis on the role of shepherding.³⁸

Although it is true that the institutionalized church can become a bureaucracy which can have a deadening effect on the life of the individual Christian (e.g. the church in the Middle Ages), modern Americans do not always appreciate the orderliness that God wants among his people. Modern Evangelicals (particularly Baptists, Kassian’s denomination) place a special emphasis on the inner call and downplay the importance of other qualifications and preparations for the public ministry. This can be seen in another of Kassian’s comments.

The whole “women’s question” is not a women’s question at all. It’s a question of how we *do church*—how we view ministry and the Spirit’s gifting. I have a problem with “ordination,” because I think that it is God and the Spirit who ordain people. But we will not “recognize” it unless someone has an M.Div. or has gone through Bible school. So engineers who might also be evangelists or intercessors aren’t ordained. Well why not? God’s calling is on their lives. Why aren’t we laying hands on them and recognizing God’s call?³⁹

Evangelical dogmatics textbooks don’t usually spend too much time in discussing the doctrine of the ministry. If they speak of a call, they usually give the inner call prominence. Evangelical theologian Donald Bloesch writes, “Our position is that the pastor is an authority figure and a servant figure at the same time. He has been placed in his role by Christ himself through the *inward* calling of the Holy spirit, though the congregation must recognize and ratify what Christ has done (emphasis mine).⁴⁰

Because of this emphasis on the inner or immediate call the practice of “candidating” for a position and sending out search committees are common practices. The process usually includes interviews and trial sermons. Congregations become employers and the called workers employees. The congregation hires and fires just like any secular business would do. As the pastor of a “Bible Church” writes,

In candidating for my first pastorate, I learned the previous pastor had been fired. The board had told him after a morning service that they didn’t want him back in the church, period. I discovered the previous pastor’s style had been authoritarian and abrasive. The infamous Sunday he’d been fired, he’d preached on how that church was a disgrace to the community.⁴¹

Although Scripture forbids “lording it over” God’s people, one cannot help wondering if public ministers of the gospel in this call scenario are not more than a little tempted to tell people what their itching ears want to hear instead of proclaiming God’s truth. An employer/employee mentality that allows “hiring and firing” does not show respect for the public ministry or the divinity of the call.

In 19th century Germany two opposing view of the ministry among Lutherans came to the fore.⁴² Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872) of Neuendettelsau was a very able pastor, administrator and mission recruiter. Through his efforts literally scores of Lutheran pastors and candidates for the pastoral ministry came to this country. But Loehe held what might be called a “Romanizing” view of the church and ministry. He tended to look at the church as a visible organization. He did not believe that every Christian possessed all the rights and privileges of the ministry of the keys. He believed that ordination was more than a ceremony. He taught that it establishes the call, confers the office, and imparts a “grace” of office and other spiritual gifts.⁴³

Loehe disapproved of “the strong intermixing of democratic, independent, and congregational principles” in the constitution of the American Lutheran Churches. He was fearful that the laity was receiving too large a share in the government of the churches.⁴⁴

Johann Hoefling (1802-1853), a conservative Lutheran professor at Erlangen, wrote much which is of value, but erred in the opposite direction of Loehe. He traced the origins of the public ministry not to divine institution but to mere expediency.

As far as the ordaining of presbyters which was carried out or initiated by the apostles is concerned, it was nothing more than the fulfillment of a natural need for a leader, which becomes an imperative necessity not only for every fellowship but also for every kind of association.⁴⁵

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod theologians often tend to equate the Wisconsin Synod doctrine of the public ministry with Hoefling's or at least see our doctrine originating in his work or having been influenced by him.⁴⁶

From the colonial period on Lutheran groups in America, having usually come out of state or territorial churches in Europe, have had to wrestle with the doctrine of the ministry and determine what training was necessary to serve in the office of pastor. In the 19th century there developed some striking conflicts over the church and ministry among confessional (conservative) Lutherans.

Because of the effects of rationalism and the unionism of the Prussia Union (the forced union between the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Prussia) many Lutherans in Germany began to be conscious of the necessity of maintaining a staunchly confessional Lutheranism. Among these was a group in Saxony gathered around Pastor Martin Stephan (1777-1846). Stephan had a reputation for being a truly evangelical preacher with a gift for providing appropriate gospel counsel to troubled consciences. He organized an emigration to Missouri. Included in the group were several pastors and professional people, most of whom looked to Stephan as their spiritual father. The group elected Stephan bishop and pledged their obedience to him *in all things*.⁴⁷

The immigrants were soon to be disappointed in their leader. Not only was he dictatorial, he also was accused by two women (without each other's knowledge) of sexual impropriety. Stephan was deposed and escorted out of the settlement. Stephan's fall resulted in spiritual turmoil among the immigrants. Was the church still present among them? Had their pastors committed grave sin by resigning legitimate calls in Germany to come to this country? Were their calls in America legitimate?

C.F.W. Walther (along with others) approached these questions by means of a thorough study of Scripture and the writings of Luther. In the famous Altenburg Debate of 1841 Walther contended that the church was still present in their midst and that they therefore had all the rights and authority of the church. They could call pastors and administer the sacraments.⁴⁸ After the debate Walther emerged as the theological leader of the group. In 1847 he was elected the first president of the Missouri Synod.

John Grabau (1804-1879) led a group of immigrants from Prussia to America. These confessional Lutherans settled in the area of Buffalo, NY, and Milwaukee, WI. Grabau had suffered much at the hands of government officials who were trying to force participation in the Prussian Union. He was jailed twice. His health was broken.

In this country Grabau's "Romanizing" views of the church and ministry became evident. He quickly came into conflict with the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri who had just emerged from the problems with Stephan and his hierarchical views. Grabau rejected the truth that the church is to be found wherever the fundamental teachings of Christ are retained. He said the Holy Christian Church was a visible organization and virtually identified it with the orthodox Lutheran Church. A congregation could not call a pastor on its own but had to follow the advice of an ordained minister. The sacraments and the rite of absolving from sin were valid only if administered by properly ordained ministers, except in emergencies. The congregation owed its obedience to its minister in all things not contrary to the Word of God.⁴⁹ Grabau considered ordination with the laying on of hands essential for a "regular", call.⁵⁰ The Missouri and Wisconsin Synods both rejected Grabau's extreme views of the church and ministry.

The doctrine of the ministry began to be discussed in our synod⁵¹ in the 1870s because of the increasing number of teachers serving in our congregations. It seems that most people in our synod at that time held that there was one divinely appointed form of the public ministry, the pastoral office. Questions naturally arose. Where do teachers fit in? Do teachers have a divine call? Some saw the office of teacher as derived from the call of the pastor. Others saw it as dependent on parents who delegated their educational responsibilities to teachers. The latter opinion called into question the divinity of the teacher's call. These questions came under discussion at teachers conferences in the 1870s and pastoral conferences in the mid 1880s.

J. P. Koehler seems to have been the first to challenge the prevailing understanding. He argued that the teacher's calling had a divinely instituted character in its own right. Prof. Hoenecke on at least two occasions suggested that Koehler's approach merited further discussion.

The so-called "Cincinnati Case" served to raise and crystallize the church and ministry issues that had been under discussion in the Wisconsin Synod for some time.

A member of a Missouri synod congregation in Cincinnati just before the turn of the century was brought under discipline because he sent his son to a public school instead of the local Lutheran elementary school. He wanted his son to have the benefit of better English instruction so that he would be better prepared to function in this country. Eventually the man was excommunicated. When he appealed the excommunication, the district officials decided that the discipline had been improper. The two pastors and their congregation were suspended when they refused to abide by the decision of the district officials. The congregation and their pastors then applied for membership in the Wisconsin synod.⁵²

Because of the ramifications of the Cincinnati case the members of the Synodical Conference had to wrestle with the doctrine of the church and ministry. Several questions had to be examined. What was the relationship between congregation and synod? What was the relationship between synodical suspension and excommunication? Was a synod "church?" Are district and synodical officials part of the public ministry of the gospel?

The Wisconsin Synod theologians addressed the issues by returning to a thorough study of Scripture. Koehler pioneered the exegetical work. August Pieper provided the majority of the writing that came from the Wauwatosa faculty. John Schaller also contributed to the study, as did later professors, especially John Meyer.

From their study of Scripture these men came to the conviction that God has not prescribed the forms which the church is to take. The church is present wherever and whenever Christians gather around the gospel or on behalf of it. God has not divinely instituted the local congregation as opposed to a synod or any other grouping of Christians. Wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, the church is present. In the same way, God has instituted the public ministry of the gospel, but he has not instituted any specific form (e.g., pastor as opposed to teacher). The church in Christian freedom has the right to establish forms of the ministry to meet its needs. Discussions and study continued for some time before our synod became united in this understanding.

Some Missouri Synod theologians took exception to Wisconsin's teaching, most notably Franz Pieper, the brother of Wisconsin's August Pieper. Franz Pieper saw the local congregation as being divinely instituted, but not synods or other groupings of Christians.

The formation of Christian congregations, and membership in them, is not a human, but a divine mandate. . . . On the other hand, the union of congregations into larger church bodies, such as conferences, synods, etc. has not been ordained by God.⁵³

Franz Pieper also taught that "only a congregation can establish the public ministry," and equated the public ministry with the office of elder or bishop. He believed that the office of pastor corresponds with elder/bishop and is the divinely ordained form of the public ministry.⁵⁴

A series of meetings between Wisconsin and Missouri Synod theologians attempted to resolve the church and ministry differences between the two synods. In 1932 the "Thiensville Theses" were produced. These theses did not settle the differences, but only stated the degree of agreement which was reached at the time.⁵⁵ The Synodical Conference appointed a committee to investigate the doctrine of the church, ministry and call, with the aim of achieving unity. Although the committee worked for some time, the controversy was not settled. Prof. Fredrich explains,

The best that the Interim Committee could do for the 1952 St. Paul Synodical Conference convention was to recommend the adoption of the Thiensville Theses by the Synodical Conference convention. Church-ministry questions that still remained should be submitted to the faculty of the theological seminaries within the Synodical conference, acting jointly.⁵⁶

The Missouri Synod, however, was never totally united in their understanding of church and ministry. Today it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly what is being taught concerning the public ministry in the Missouri Synod. The basic differences between the Wisconsin and Missouri doctrine of the ministry, however, still seem to remain (although in sometimes slightly altered form). The LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations report limits the office of the public ministry to the pastoral ministry,⁵⁷ although it includes professors who prepare pastors, college deans or chaplains, and military chaplains in the pastoral ministry.⁵⁸

Eugene Klug, a professor at Concordia Seminary in Ft. Wayne, identifies the public ministry of the gospel with the pastoral office. He writes,

When Christian congregations call pastors into their service they are not exercising an option which has desirable advantages for their work but they are proceeding in accord with God's express command. The necessity of the pastoral office, or the holy ministry, is a divine necessity tied to God's holy will for His church on earth.⁵⁹

Prof. Kurt Marquart seems to see the origins of the public ministry in the work of the apostolate—and as a continuation of the apostolate.⁶⁰ He excludes school teachers who teach mainly secular subjects from the public ministry. He writes, “The church has no ‘cultural mandate’ to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic.”⁶¹ He sees in our Wisconsin Synod statements “the virtual identification of priesthood and ministry and the apparent failure to distinguish the one Gospel ministry from auxiliary offices.”⁶²

Some Lutheran voices in Australia disagree with the truth that the ministry comes from Christ through the church. John Kleinig sees apostolic origins and a kind of apostolic succession, He writes,

When Christ instituted the ministry of word and sacrament, he entrusted it to his apostles as his representatives and leaders in his church. They, in turn, conferred that ministry on those whom they had instructed, and appointed them as leaders in the congregations which they established (Acts 14:23; 20:17-21,27; 2 Ti 2:1-2; Tit 1:5-9). Through the apostles and their successors in the apostolic ministry, God the Father (1 Co 12:28), the Son (Eph 4:11), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) gave the church its pastor-teachers. The public ministry of the church is therefore not derived from the priesthood of believers in the congregation. If that were so, all of the baptized would be eligible for it.⁶³

III. The Ministry in WELS Today

The decade of the 1990s has seen a renewed interest in the doctrine of the ministry in our synod. A WELS Ministry Symposium was held in Watertown, WI, in 1992. The *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* has been running a series of articles on the subject for the past few years. A number of conference and district essays on the ministry have been assigned during this period of time.

Why is there so much interest? There seem to be several reasons. The study of Scripture's teaching on the role of man and woman during the last two decades has implications for the public ministry. The decision to ordain male teachers occasioned a re-study of ministry issues. In recent decades there has been a conscious effort in our circles to involve more laymen in the work of the ministry on the congregational and on the synodical level. The development of “staff” ministry in our synod has raised some questions. Many are concerned about the influence of evangelicals and the church growth movement in our country and warn about adopting the terminology and practices associated with these groups. Many have noted that pastors and parochial school teachers are not held in the respect that they once were. Several publications on doctrine of the church and ministry by Lutherans outside our circles have raised questions that need to be addressed.

Every generation has to make the truths of Scripture its own by careful study of the Scripture and to fight old doctrinal battles that appear in new settings and new garb. Our generation is no exception. We will want to steer a clear, scriptural course between hierarchical views of the ministry on the one hand, and the blurring of distinctions between the universal priesthood and public ministry and the emphasis on the inner call on the other hand.

Much of the debate today seems to center on the English words *minister* and *ministry*. The English word *minister* can have a variety of meanings. The word originally meant servant. It can mean a government official such as a Prime Minister. A minister can be a person who acts for another. The most common meaning in America today is clergyman or pastor. "In recent years there has not been a clear and consistent use of terms for ministry in American Lutheranism."⁶⁴ The same can probably be said for our synod. Sometimes we have followed the use of Scripture in speaking of ministry in the church apart from the gospel ministry. Definition of terms and consistency in their use will help prevent misunderstandings.

The terms *laity* or *layman* have also been used with different shades of meaning. "Layman" can mean one who is not ordained, or one who is not in the public ministry, or one who has no formal training. What do we mean when we speak of lay ministry or a lay evangelist or a lay worker? We need to define these terms as well.

An attempt to clarify terminology was made in a report entitled, "Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry," in the 1991 WELS *Book of Reports and Memorials*. The report made these suggestions:

Conventional usage of such terms as ministry, public ministry and lay ministry have not always served to distinguish what Scripture teaches.

There is only one ministry Christ established - service for him centered in the gospel. That one ministry is expressed in two ways. Personal ministry is that which every Christian has as a member of the Universal Priesthood of Believers. It is his or her life of sanctification, stewardship and witness. . . in home, work and community. . . service to brothers and sisters in Christ as well as to those as yet without faith in Christ. Public ministry or representative ministry is that which is done in the name of and at the call of the church. According to spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity, in answer to needs and opportunities, the church elects or appoints from its midst those who will carry out aspects of its ministry in its behalf.

Within public ministry two categories can be identified. Member Ministry is volunteer in nature and typically limited as to scope and time. The church calls members, whether by election or appointment, to serve in its name as Sunday school teachers, evangelists, elders, officers and any number of other ministry roles and tasks. The local congregation assures (informally "certifies") that the people it calls to these forms of ministry are qualified to serve.

Offices of Ministry are typically a person's (primary) vocation and are therefore compensated. The scope of the office is determined by the congregation's call, from the broad and general responsibilities of the pastor to specific responsibilities identified as to nature (e.g., third grade, youth, families, the institutionalized, singles, women). Such "offices of the ministry" are normally certified by the synod, which assures that candidates for these offices of ministry are qualified for the work to which they are called.⁶⁵

Although the suggested terminology does help to clarify distinctions in the gospel ministry and avoids confusing terms like lay ministry, it defines one term a bit too broadly. The one gospel ministry is divided into personal (private) ministry and public or representative ministry. Included in personal ministry is the believer's life of sanctification. Although it is true that our Savior tells us, "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven" (Mt 5:16), it seems that it is stretching the term to include everything we do as Christians under gospel ministry. While it is true that everything I do in Christian sanctification is service (ministry) to my Savior, not everything I do in sanctification is the gospel ministry (ministry of the keys) assigned to the church as we have seen Scripture define it.

As the report defines "member" ministry it accurately places this work within the scope of the public ministry of the gospel. If we are going to encourage more participation in "member" ministry by members of our congregations, we have to realize that they must meet qualifications for serving in the public ministry. If we are going to ask people to make evangelism calls, delinquent calls, teach Sunday school or Bible class, we will have to choose them carefully and give them appropriate training. We have to be careful not to ask people to do

things for which they are not qualified. The Bible study series entitled *Training Christians for Ministry* is an attempt to provide some necessary training.

The church has the right to establish new forms of the public ministry of the gospel to meet its needs. When we are developing new forms, the questions to be asked are these: Is this form beneficial for the church? Does the church desire it? Is the church being careful to recognize the qualifications and training necessary for this new form? Is the scope of the call carefully defined so that there will not be confusion in the church or so that one called worker will not be interfering in the ministry of another?

The committees which have studied staff ministry seem to have spent a lot of time addressing the issue of qualifications, setting up the curriculum for training, and defining the scope of service staff ministers will be asked to do. Only the future will be able to tell whether the congregations of our synod will see a need for this form of the ministry and will call numbers of graduates from this program. The ordination of male teachers was a synodical decision that the majority of the delegates to the 1991 synod convention believed to be in the best interests of our synod. The delegates realized that this was an issue of adiaphoron. The majority believed that the value of ordaining male teachers in order to “eliminate the difficulties in communicating to civil authorities the nature of our teaching ministry”⁶⁶ outweighed any possible confusion that might result concerning different forms of the ministry.

Generally speaking, in our synod we have tried to distinguish between the public ministry of the gospel and other forms of support service (ministry) to the church by calling people to serve in the former and hiring people to perform the latter. We have usually called those who are directly involved with administering the means of grace (e.g., pastors, missionaries, teachers of religion and theological professors, etc.), those who supervise that work (district presidents, synodical administrators, executive secretaries, mission counselors, editors of church periodicals, editors at the publishing house, etc.), and those who educate the youth of our church (also teachers of secular subjects at Lutheran schools who are expected to teach their subjects consciously in the light of God’s Word). We generally hire those who perform other areas of service (office secretaries, accountants, maintenance personnel). For instance, at our ministerial education schools all the professors and instructors are called, but the business managers and their staffs are hired, even though we place much responsibility into their hands. Although it is not specifically stated, it seems that the suggestion that we hire rather than call the “director of support services” proposed by the Synodical Restructuring committee ⁶⁷ is a conscious effort to maintain the practice outlined above. We have not been and probably cannot be absolutely consistent in determining whom we call and whom we don’t call, but we will want to try to be as consistent as possible to avoid confusion.

Perhaps a suggestion worth considering would be to use the article whenever we are speaking about *the* ministry of the keys which belongs to every Christian and *the* public ministry of the gospel. My ears hear a distinction between saying “I am training for ministry,” and “I am training for *the* ministry.” The former sounds like some generic form of service. The latter indicates a special service, the proclamation of the gospel.

When considering the terminology we use in the church we will want to heed two cautions. First of all, we will want to choose our words with great care to make sure that they accurately reflect and communicate scriptural truth clearly. Words convey meaning. Sometimes borrowed terms come with unwanted baggage because of the ways the terms are used in other circles. Adopting faulty terminology can lead to adopting false theology. Secondly, we will be careful not to jump to conclusions that someone is teaching false doctrine when he uses a new or unfamiliar term. We will want to put the best construction on our brother’s actions and try to understand him in the way he intends to be understood. If correction is necessary we will correct gently out of concern for the individual and the church at large.

Finally, history shows that problems arise whenever the universal priesthood is denigrated or the public ministry disparaged. We will want to do everything we can to encourage our members to take up the privileges God has assigned to them as his priests. We will encourage them to pray regularly, to conduct family devotions, to admonish each other and announce God’s forgiveness, and to speak with their relatives, friends and acquaintances about their Savior. We will also try to foster an understanding of and a respect for the public

ministry of the gospel. God's servants in the public ministry of the gospel deserve honor and their duties are not to be usurped by others.⁶⁸

May God give us a clear understanding so that everything we do redounds to his glory and serves the best interests of his kingdom.

Endnotes:

1 *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol 41, p. 150.

2 *Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, (Milwaukee: Commission on Inter-Church Relations, 1970), p. 8-9.

3 *Augsburg Confession*, Article XXVIII, par. 10-13, Triglotta.

4 Armin Schuetze, "The Church's Social Concerns—Scriptural Imperatives and Limitations," *Our Great Heritage*, edited by Lyle Lange. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) vol III, p. 404-423.

5 *Augsburg Confession*, Art.V, par. 1, Triglotta.

6 John P. Meyer, *Studies in the Augsburg Confession*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995) 182-183.

7 *Augsburg Confession*, Art. XIV, Triglotta.

8 Erwin Scharf, "The Call to the Use of the Keys," *Our Great Heritage*, Lyle Lange, ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) vol III, 504-505.

9 Richard E. Lauersdorf, "The Doctrine of the call with Special Reference to the Question of Permanence under Changed Circumstances," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 86, #4, (Fall 1989) 265-281.

10 For a more detailed discussion confer John F. Brug, "Ordination and Installation in the Scriptures," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. vol 92, #4 (Fall 1995), 263-270.

11 Armin W. Schuetze & Irwin J. Habeck, *The Shepherd under Christ*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1974) 50.

12 Heinrich Vogel, "The Doctrine of the Church and Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 73, #1 (January 1976) 19.

13 For a more detailed discussion see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed., translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964) vol II, 84-93.

14 C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, trans. by W.H.T. Dau, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) 207-208.

15 In Acts 20 Luke records that Paul sent to Ephesus for the *elders* of the church (vs 17). When Paul addresses them he calls them *overseers* (vs 28). Paul also uses the terms interchangeably in his letter to Titus. In verses 5-6 he speaks of *elders*. In verse 7 he switches to *overseer*. It has been suggested that the term *elder* is a term of honor describing their status. The term *overseer* describes their responsibilities. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol II, 616.

16 Armin W. Schuetze, *The People's Bible—I Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) 55-56. See also *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol II, 90.

17 Schuetze, *People's Bible*, 50.

18 *Augsburg Confession*, Art. V, 2. Triglotta.

19 For clear and brief description of the development of the episcopal office see *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Everett Ferguson, ed., (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990) 150-154.

20 "Cyprian to Florentius Puppian," *Saint Cyprian—Letters*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, Roy Joseph Deferrari, ed., (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964) vol 51, letter #66, par. 8, p. 229.

21 John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, (Crestwood, NY: St.Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989) 44.

22 Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 249.

- 23 *Ibid.*, 290-291.
- 24 *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent*, translated by J. Waterworth, (Chicago: The Christian Symbolic Publication Soc.), Session 23, Chapter I, p.171.
- 25 Council of Trent, Session 23, chapter IV.
- 26 Session 23, chapter IV.
- 27 *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol 40, 34-35.
- 28 *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol 13, 332.
- 29 John Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion*. translated by John Allen, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936) Book IV, chapter III, paragraph VI.
- 30 *Institutes*, Book IV, III, VIII.
- 31 *Institutes*, Book IV, III, IX.
- 32 *Institutes*, Book IV, III, XV.
- 33 *Institutes*, Book IV, XV, XX.
- 34 Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, translated by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) vol II, 246.
- 35 Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978) 62.
- 36 "Ministering Women," *Christianity Today*, April 8, 1996, p. 14.
- 37 D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1971) p. 6. Quoted by Armin Schuetze, "A Shepherd or a Coach?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 74, #1 (January 1977) p. 5.
- 38 Schuetze, "Shepherd or Coach?" p. 6-7. Please read the entire article to see the proper balance.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 40 Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) vol II, 122.
- 41 Kenneth Quick, "Candid Candidating," *Leadership*, Fall 1990, p. 72.
- 42 For a brief summary of this period see Edward C. Fredrich II, "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry," WELS Ministry Symposium, December 29-30, 1992, p 7-9.
- 43 Erich H. Heintzen, *Love Leaves Home*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973) 64. Walter Baepler, *A Century of Grace: Missouri Synod 1847-1947*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947) 144-145.
- 44 W. G. Polack, *The Building of a Great Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941) 105.
- 45 Hoefling, *Grundsätze*, p. 220f, quoted in *Dogmatic Notes*, 1985 revision, (Mequon: Seminary Mimeographing Co.) vol II, p. 158.
- 46 Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, (Ft. Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990) 220.
- 47 Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953) 278-304.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 507-534.
- 49 Carl Mauelshagen, *American Lutheranism Surrenders to Forces of Conservatism*. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Division of Publications, 1936) 141-144.
- 50 *The Lutherans in North America*, E. Clifford Nelson, ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 176.
- 51 The account of the historical debate over the doctrine of the ministry in our synod is given by J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co., for the Protes'tant Conference, 1970) 230-239. Prof. Fredrich offers a detailed summary of the historical development in. "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of the WELS Doctrine of Ministry," p. 9-17.
- 52 Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992) 107-110. John P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, printed for the Protes'tant Conference, (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co.) 233ff.
- 53 Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953) Vol. III, 421.
- 54 *Ibid.*, Vol. III, 439, 443-449.
- 55 Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 183-184.

- 56 Fredrich, "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry." 20. See the entire section, p. 17-21.
- 57 LCMS—CTCR, *The Ministry, Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, 1981, p. 12.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 59 Eugene F.A. Klug, *Church and Ministry—The Role of Church, Pastor, and people from Luther to Walther*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993) 155.
- 60 Marquart, *op. cit.*, 129, 135.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 220.
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- 64 John F. Brug, "Current Debate concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. vol. 91, #1, (Winter 1994) p. 31. See the entire section, p. 30-33.
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- 67 WELS *Report to the Twelve Districts*, June 1996, p. 155, 196.
- 68 Please confer John F. Brug, "The Priesthood of all Believers and the ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* vol 91, #2 (Spring 1994) 117-125.