

The Scriptural Use of the Terms “Ministry” and “Minister” As a Guide for Our Use of the Terms

With Reference to English, Finnish, and Swedish Translations

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What is the proper use of the terms “minister” and “ministry?” This has been quite a problem for English speakers because the popular use of the words “minister” and “ministry” has changed since the time of the King James Bible of 1611, which was the standard Bible in the English-speaking world for more than three centuries. The English word “minister” like its Latin parent was originally a synonym of the word “servant.” At the time of the King James translation, the word “minister” referred to servants of every sort. Gradually however, “minister” came to be used almost entirely as a technical term for two types of service. English dictionaries usually list “clergyman” or “pastor” as the number one meaning of “minister.” The other main meaning of “minister” is a government official like the Prime Minister of England.

In recent years, therefore, in everyday usage the English word “minister” has most often meant “pastor.” The English and Latin words “ministry” and “minister,” however, were originally used to translate the Greek words *diakoneo*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos*. In the Bible the use of these three words is not limited to the service rendered by men whose work corresponded to that of our pastors. The biblical words for minister and ministry also refer to other kinds of service, including waiting on tables. The King James Bible used some form of the word “minister” as the translation for most of the occurrences of *diakonia*, *diakoneo*, and *diakonos*. (The KJV translates *diakonos* “minister” twenty times and “servant” seven times. In the NIV *diakonos* is translated “minister” only four times.)

Similar problems of inconsistency in the rendering of the biblical words for “ministry” also occur in Swedish and Finnish Bible translations. Perhaps some of the difficulties in international discussions of the doctrine of the ministry in the Lutheran church today are due to inconsistencies in the pattern of the Bible translations in various languages. Another may be incongruities between the grammatical patterns of the languages, such as the importance of the articles in English and the lack of the articles in Finnish.

To establish guidelines for our use of the terms “minister” and “ministry” we now will examine all the uses of the terms *diakoneo*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos* in the New Testament and sort them into categories. Sometimes we will find that a given passage does not fit neatly into one category, but some basic categories nevertheless emerge. Note the variety and inconsistency of the translations of the *diakoneo* group of words in the English, Finnish, and Swedish translations. This obscures the fact that the Bible uses the same word group to describe a wide variety of kinds of service.

Basic Categories in the Biblical Usage of the Terms for Ministry: *diakoneo*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos*

Secular Service

Sometimes the biblical words for “ministry” refer to service that meets an earthly need, including even service performed unwillingly by a slave, servant, or employee.

Matthew 22:13 Then the king told the *attendants*, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Swedish: *tjänarna*; Finnish: *palvelijoille*)

John 2:5 His mother said to the *servants*, “Do whatever he tells you.” (Swedish: *tjänarna*; Finnish: *palvelajaille*)

Luke 17:8 Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and *wait on me* while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? (Swedish: *passar upp mig*; Finnish: *palvele*)

A special example of this secular usage of “ministry” is the application of the term “minister” to the government.

Romans 13:4 For he is God’s *servant* to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s *servant*, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. (Swedish: *tjänare*; Finnish: *palvelija*)

Many of the examples of the service or ministry performed by Christians also fall into this category of “table service.” These are discussed below.

Christian Ministry

The Ministry of Christ

Christ is called a minister, and his work is called ministry. His behavior as a minister is our model whether we are ministering as called public ministers of the Word or as members of the priesthood of believers.

Romans 15:8 For I tell you that Christ has become a *servant* of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs (Swedish: *tjänare*; Finnish: *palvelijaksi*)

Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45 the Son of Man did not come *to be served, but to serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Swedish: *inte bli tjänad; tjäna*; Finnish: *palveltavaksi, palvelemaan*)

John 12:26 Whoever *serves* me must follow me; and where I am, my *servant* also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (Swedish: *tjäna; tjänare*; Finnish: *palvelee, palvelijani, palvelee*)

Matthew 20:26; Mark 10:43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your *servant*.

Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be your *servant*.

Mark 9:35 Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the *servant* of all.” (Swedish: *tjänare*; Finnish: *palvelijanne; palvelija*)

Luke 22:26-27. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you. should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who *serves*. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who *serves*? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who *serves*. (Swedish: *tjänare; tjänar*; Finnish: *palvelee*)

The Ministry of Christians

General Statements

Many of the statements about Christian ministry are too general to be placed either into the category of ministry of the Word or of other kinds of ministry. The statements are inclusive of all kinds of ministry or service. The first two passages are especially striking because they explicitly state that there are different kinds of ministry.

1 Peter 4:10-11 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to *serve* others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone *serves*, he should do it with the strength God provides. (Swedish: *tjäna; har tjänst; tjäna*; Finnish: *Palvelkaa, palvelee, palvelkoon*)

1. Corinthians 12:5 There are different kinds of *service*, but the same Lord. (Swedish: olika slags tjänster; Finnish: 38: *seurakuntavirat*, 92: *palvelustehtävät*)
- Romans 12:7 If it is *serving*, let him *serve*; if it is teaching, let him teach. (Swedish: gävan att tjäna; Finnish: 38: *virka*, *virastaan*, 92: *Palvelutehtävän*, *palvelkoon*,)
- 1 Corinthians 16:15 The household of Stephanas...have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: palvelukseen)
- Ephesians 4:12 [Pastors and teachers] prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Swedish: utrusta de heliga till att utförd sill tjänst; Finnish: 38: *paimeniksi ja opettajiksi*, *tehdäkseen pyhät täysin valmiiksi palveluksen työhön*, *Kristuksen ruumiin rakentamiseen*, 92: *paimenet että opettajat*, *varustaakseen kaikki seurakunnan jäsenet palvelutyöhön*, *Kristuksen ruulniin rakentamiseen*.)
- Revelation 2:19 I know your deeds, your love and. faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. (Swedish.: ditt tjänande; Finnish: 38: *palvelukses*, 92: *palvelumielesi*)

The ministry of the angels also included both delivering the Word and other forms on helping.

- Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering (*leitourgika*) spirits sent to *serve* those who will inherit salvation? (Swedish: andar in helig tjänst, tjäna; Finnish: *palvelevia henkiä*, *palvelukseen*)
- Matthew 4:11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and *attended* him.
- Mark 1:13. He was with the wild animals, and angels *attended* him. (Swedish: tjänade., betjänade; Finnish: ja he *tekivät* hänelle *palvelusta*, 92: *pitivät* hänestä *huolta* in Mark)

Ministering with the Word

Ministry of the Word in the abstract

In 2 Corinthians the term “ministry” sometimes refers to the message which is given to the church, either to the law or the gospel.

- 2 Corinthians 3:7,8,9 Now if *the ministry that brought death*, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not *the ministry of the Spirit* be even more glorious? If *the ministry that condemns men* is glorious, how much more glorious is the *ministry that brings righteousness*! (Swedish: ämbete; Finnish: 38; *kuoleman virk*, 92: *tuomion julistamisen virkaa*; *Hengen virka*, 92: *vanhurskauden julistamisen virkaa*; *kadotustuomion virka*; *vanhurskauden virka*].)
- 2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have *this ministry*, we do not lose heart. (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: *tämä virkcz*, 92: *palvelusvirka*)
- 2 Corinthians 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us *the ministry of reconciliation*: (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: *sovituksen viran*)
- 2 Corinthians 6:3-4 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our *ministry* will not be discredited. Rather, as *servants* of God, we commend ourselves in every way. (Swedish: vår tjänst, tjänare; Finnish: *virkaamme*, *palvelijoiksi*)

In 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 5:18 ministry still seems to refer to the gospel, rather than to Paul's apostolic office. 2 Corinthians 4:1 refers to “*this ministry*,” that is, the one Paul was talking about in chapter 3. “The ministry of reconciliation” in chapter 5 seems to be synonymous with the “ministry that brings righteousness” in chapter 3. In 2 Corinthians 6:3 “ministry” may refer to the apostolic office and to Paul's stewardship of it, but

even here the Greek text refers to “the ministry,” not to “our ministry.” The usage of “ministry” to refer to an office held by a specific person as in 2 Corinthians 6:4 is exemplified by the next section.

By Public Ministers of the Word

The ministry of the word often refers to an office filled by specific men, but even then “ministry” is often an abstract term which refers more to an activity than to a specific office.

Acts 6:4 [We] will give our attention to prayer and *the ministry of the word*. (Swedish: ordets tjänst; Finnish: 38: *sanan palveluksessa*, 92: *sanan jakamiseen*)

At other times “ministry” refers to an office, a calling, even or a limited assignment given to a called minister of the Word.

The Ministry of the Apostles and Prophets

1 Peter 1:12 It was revealed to [the prophets] that they were not *serving* themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you. (Swedish: tjänade; Finnish: *palvelleet*)

Acts 1:17,25 [Judas] was one of our number and shared in this *ministry*. . . .this apostolic *ministry*, which Judas left to go where he belongs. [literally, “this ministry and apostleship] (Swedish: tjänst, apostoliska tjänst; Finnish: *viran*. . . *palveluksessa* ja apostolin *virassa*)

Romans 11:13 Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my *ministry*. (Swedish: ämbete; Finnish: 38 *virkaani*, 92: *minä ylistän tehtävääni* kansojen apostolina)

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the *task* the Lord Jesus has given me—[the *task*] of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. (Swedish: uppgift; Finnish: *viran*, 92: *palvelutehtävän*)

2 Corinthians 3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our *ministry*, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. [this is more properly “our ministering,” a participle describing an activity] (Swedish: som är ombesörjt av oss; Finnish: *palvelustyöllämme*)

Ephesians 3:7 I became a *servant* of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijaksi*)

Colossians 1:23 This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a *servant*. (Swedish: blivit satt att tjäna; Finnish: *palvelijaksi*)

Colossians 1:25 I have become its *servant* by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijaksi*)

2 Corinthians 11:8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to *serve* you. (Swedish: tjäna; Finnish: *palvellakseni*)

1 Timothy 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his *service*. (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: *palvelukseensa*)

In the next two passages ministry refers to a specific mission Paul had been given, in the first place to deliver the Word, in the second place to deliver money.

Acts 21:19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his *ministry*. (Swedish: tjänst ; Finnish: *palveluksensa*)

Acts 12:25 When Barnabas and Saul. had finished *their mission*, they returned from Jerusalem. (Swedish: uppdrag; Finnish: *avustustehtävän*)

The Ministry of the Apostles' Helpers

- 1 Corinthians 3:5,6 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only *servants*, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *Palvelijoita*)
- 2 Corinthians 3:6 He has made us competent as *ministers* of a new covenant. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijoita*)
- 2 Corinthians 6:4 Rather, as *servants* of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses. See above. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijoiksi*)
- Acts 19:22 He sent two of his *helpers*, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia. (the form here is a participle denoting an activity). (Swedish: medhjälpare; Finnish: 38 *apumiehistänsä*, 92: *apulaistaan*.)
- 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ [Variant *diakonos* not in NIV] (Swedish: not in FB; Finnish: *palvelijan*)
- 1 Timothy 4:6 If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good *minister* of Christ Jesus. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelija*)
- 2 Timothy 4:5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your *ministry*. (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: *viraksi*)
- Eph 6:21 Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful *servant* in the Lord, will tell you everything. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelija*)
- Colossians 4:7 Tychicus is a dear brother, a faithful *minister* and fellow servant (*sundoulos*) in the Lord. (Swedish: tjänare & medarbetare; Finnish: *palvelija*, *minun kanssapalvelijani*)
- Colossians 1:7 Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful *minister* of Christ (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelija*)
- Colossians 4:17 Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the *work* you have received in the Lord." (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: *virastas*, *tehtävä*)
- 2 Timothy 4:11 Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my *ministry*. (Swedish: tjänst; Finnish: *palvelukseen*)

Deacons

The ministry of the deacons falls into a special category because we do not know with certainty if their ministry was "waiting on tables" like the "deacons" in Acts 6 or assisting in the ministry of the Word. We also do not know if Phoebe was serving in a formal office or providing a service.

- Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants (*douloi*) of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and *deacons*: (Swedish: församlingsledarna & församlingstjänarna; Finnish: *seurakunnan kaitsijoille ja seurakuntapalvelijoille*)
- 1 Timothy 3:8,10,12,13 *Deacons*, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let *them serve as deacons*. 12 A *deacon* must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. 13 Those who have *served well* gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. (Swedish: församlingstjänarna; sköter sin tjänst; Finnish: *seurakuntapalvelijain palvelkoot*, *Seurakuntapalvelija palvelleet*)
- Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a *servant* of the church in Cenchrea. (Swedish: som sköter församlingen; Finnish: *palvelija*)

Ministry by Lay Christians

Ministering to physical needs

Matthew 8:15 The fever left her, and she got up and began to *wait on* him.

Mark 1:31 The fever left her and she began to *wait on* them.

Luke 4:39 She got up at once and began to *wait on* them. (Swedish: *betjänade*; Finnish: *palveli*)

Matthew 25:44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not *help* you?’ (Swedish: *tjänade*; Finnish: *sinua palvelleet*, 92: *emmekä auttaneet sinua*)

Luke 10:40 But Martha was distracted by all *the preparations* that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me *to do the work* by myself?”

John 12:2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha *served*. (Swedish: *med allt som skulles ställas in ordning; att sköta allting; passade upp*; Finnish: *palvelustoimissa palvelemaan; palveli*)

Acts 6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the *daily distribution* of food. [literally, “the daily ministry”] (Swedish: *dagliga utdelningen*; Finnish: *jokapäiväisessä avunannossa*)

Acts 6:2 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*.” (Swedish: *göra tjänst vid borden*; Finnish: *toimittaaksemme pöytäpalvelusta*)

Ministering with money

The collection and distribution of money to support the preaching of the gospel or to relieve the physical needs of the saints is called “ministry.”

Luke 8:3 These women were helping to *support them* out of their own means.

Matthew 27:55 Many women...had followed Jesus from Galilee to *care for his needs*.

Mark 15:41 In Galilee these women had followed him and *cared for his needs*. (Swedish: *tjänade, tjänat*; Finnish: *palvelivat*, 92: *avustivat; palvelleet häntä*)

Romans 15:25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the *service* of the saints there (Swedish: *med hjälpen* ; Finnish: *avustusta*)

2 Corinthians 8:19,20 What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we *administer* in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. 20 We want to avoid any criticism of the way we *administer* this liberal gift. (Swedish: *har hand om; tar hand om*; Finnish: *toimitettavanamme*)

Romans 15:31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my *service* in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there. (Swedish: *hjälp*; Finnish: *avustus*)

2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12,13 They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this *service* to the saints. / There is no need for me to write to you about this *service* to the saints. 12 This *service* that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. / Because of the *service* by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God. (Swedish: *hjelpen, tjänst, tjänst*; Finnish: *avustamiseen / avustamisesta / avustamispalvelus / palveluksestanne*)

Acts 11:29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to *provide help* for the brothers living in Judea. (Swedish: *hjälp* ; Finnish: *avustusta*)

Ironical Uses

Satan too has his ministers. Christ cannot be a minister of sin, but even when he returns in glory he will still minister to us by providing for all our needs.

2 Corinthians 11:15 It is not surprising, then, if [Satan's] *servants* masquerade as servants of righteousness. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: palvelijansakin)

2 Corinthians 11:23 Are [the false teachers] *servants* of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: palvelijoita)

Galatians 2:17 "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ *promotes* sin? Absolutely not! (lit. is Christ a minister of sin?). (Swedish: stå i tjänst; Finnish: *palvelija*)

Luke 12:37 It will be good for those servants (*douloi*) whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come *and wait on them*. (Swedish: betjäna; Finnish: *palvelee*)

Other Words for Ministry

We will briefly consider some of the other words that can be translated "minister" or "ministry." The listing of passages here will not necessarily be complete.

doulos

Doulos and its Hebrew equivalent *ebed* are the common words for "servant" or "slave" and are commonly so translated in modern English translations. These words, which are most often used for ordinary servants, can also be used for servants of the Word. These words place a greater emphasis on the duty or obligation of the servant to a master than the word *diakonos*, which simply stresses the activity of service. Nevertheless, a *doulos* did not necessarily have a lowly status since an important official of a king could be called his *doulos*.

Christ himself took on the form of a slave.

Philippians 2:7 [Christ] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a *servant*, being made in human likeness. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *orjan*)

The apostles and other inspired writers frequently identify themselves as slaves of God.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Jude 1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James

(Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelija*)

Doulos is a name for the servants of the Word in general.

2 Timothy 2:24 And the Lord's *servant* must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijan*)

Doulos is a name for Christians in general.

Acts 2:18 Even on my *servants*, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijaini* ja *palvelijattarieni*)

The minister of the Word, who is a servant of the Lord, is also a servant of the congregation.

2 Corinthians 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your *servants* for Jesus' sake. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijanne*)

Doulos, like *diakonos*, is a secular word for service which can be applied to the public ministers of the Word and to Christians in general. The NIV and FB do not distinguish these two words.

Leitourgos/leitourgia

Leitourgos is, in a sense, the most spiritual of the words for servant or minister, because it is used especially in connection with the temple service of the priests. For this reason it is the closest parallel to the common contemporary use of the word "minister." It is the source of the English word for the divine service, the liturgy. In secular Greek it was used to refer to forms of service other than that which was strictly religious, for example, donations for the public good.

The common usage in biblical Greek is of priestly service.

Hebrews 10:11 Day after day every priest stands and *performs his religious duties*; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (Swedish: *forrättar sin tjänst*; Finnish: *38 palvelustaan toimittamassa, 92: toimittamassa jumalanpalvelusta*)

It is used of the ministers of the Word. Perhaps the reason that this usage is rare is that New Testament ministers of the Word are not, strictly speaking, priests.

Romans 15:16 [Paul was] a *minister* of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty (*hierougeo*) of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Swedish: *tjänare i helig prästtjänst*; Finnish: *palvelija pakanain keskuudessa, papillisesti toimittaakseni (hierougeoo) Jumalan evankeliumin palvelusta*)

It is used of the service of believers, whether worship, charity, or other forms of service.

Acts 13:2 While they were *worshipping* the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul. (Swedish: *tjänade* ; Finnish: *toimittaessaan palvelusta*)

Romans 15:27 For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to *share with them* their material blessings. (Swedish: *tjäna*; Finnish: *auttamaan*)

2 Corinthians 9:12 This *service that you perform* (literally, "the ministry of the liturgy") is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ["The ministry of the liturgy" here refers to giving offerings.] (Swedish: *den tjänst ni utför*; Finnish: *avustamispalvelus*)

Philippians 2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and *service* coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (Swedish: *paraphrase-bar som offer*; Finnish: *palvelustoimitusta*)

Philippians 2:25,30 Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to *take care of* my needs. [He] almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the *help* you could not give me. (Swedish: *hjälp*; *hjälp*a; Finnish: *tarpeissani, palveluksen*)

"Liturgy" includes the work of the government.

Romans 13:6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's *servants*, who give their full time to governing. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: palvelusmiehiä)

"Liturgy" includes the work of the angels.

Hebrews 1:7,14 In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his *servants* flames of fire."... Are not all angels *ministering* spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Swedish: tjänare; i helig tjänst; Finnish: *palvelijansa, palvelevia* henkiä, palvelukseen)

Once again, we see that a word for ministry is used with a wide range of meanings. It is not limited to a special form of the ministry of the Word.

hyperetes

The *hyperetes* often served as a minor public official or policeman or as an assistant of any sort.

The term is used of ministers of the Word.

Luke 1:2 They were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijoita*)

Acts 26:16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you [Paul] as a *servant* and as a witness of what you have seen of me. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijakseni*)

1 Corinthians 4:1 So then, men ought to regard us as *servants* of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *käskyläisinä, 92: palvelijoina*)

This word is used of other kinds of service by Christians.

Acts 13:36 "For when David had *served* God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. (Swedish: tjänat; Finnish: *palvellut*)

Acts 24:23 He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to *take care* of his needs. (Swedish: vara honour till hjälp; Finnish: 38 *tekemästä hänelle palvelusta, 92: pitämästä hänestä huolta.*)

Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have *supplied* my own needs. (Swedish: sörjt för; Finnish: *työllänsä hankkineet, 92: käsilläni olen hankkinut itselleni*)

It is used of policemen.

John 7:32 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent *temple guards* to arrest him. (Swedish: tempelsvaktar; Finnish: *palvelijoita*)

John 19:6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijat*)

Once again the term is both secular and spiritual.

therapon

Therapon is used only once in the New Testament in reference to Moses as God's servant. The verb from this root often has the idea of serving the sick.

Hebrews 3:5 Moses was faithful as a *servant* in all God's house. (Swedish: tjänare Finnish: *palvelijana*)

latreuo

This verb is used especially of worship and is usually translated “serve” or “worship.” One time the NIV translates it “minister.”

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. (Swedish: tjäna; Finnish: *palvelkaamme*)

Hebrews 13:10 We have an altar from which those who *minister* at the tabernacle have no right to eat. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelevilla*)

sharat/avad

These two Hebrew verbs are used of ministry or service to God. The first is the more spiritual term, the second the more general term.

Sharat is often translated “minister” when it refers to service in the temple, but it often refers to some other kind of service and then is translated “serve” or “attend.” This word refers to the service of priests, Levites, government officials, and personal attendants.

Exodus 30:20 Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to *minister* by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire. (Swedish: göra tjänst; Finnish: *toimittamaan virkaansa*)

1 Chronicles 16:4 He appointed some of the Levites to *minister* before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel: (Swedish: tjänstgöra; Finnish: *palvelemaan*)

1 Kings 19:21 So Elisha...set out to follow Elijah and became his *attendant*. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palveli*)

Proverbs 29:12 If a ruler listens to lies, all his *officials* become wicked. (Swedish: tjänare; Finnish: *palvelijoikseen*)

1 Kings 1:4 The girl was very beautiful; she took care of the king and *waited on* him, but the king had no intimate relations with her. (Swedish: betjänade; Finnish: *palveli*)

Avad is used in reference to many kinds of service. When used of service to God, it is usually translated “serve” or “worship.” Strangely enough, it is translated “minister” only in reference to the ministers of Baal in 2 Kings 10.

The higher word *sharat* can also be used of more lowly forms of service, and the lower word *avad* can be used of the most noble service.

Summaries of the Usage of the English, Swedish, and Finnish Translations

English

The contemporary English translations and the NIV in particular are very inconsistent in their renderings of the terms for service and ministry. Although the same Hebrew and Greek terms are used for a wider variety of forms of service, the NIV tends to use “service” when they believe a more lowly form of service is indicated and “minister” only when a higher, more spiritual form of service is intended. Thus, many contemporary English translations introduce a distinction which is foreign to the biblical text.

Swedish

In older Swedish translations (Karl XII's *Church Bible* of 1703 and the *Church Bible* of 1917) the words *tjänst* och *ämbete* are used in a similar way as "service" and "ministry" are in English translations. The word "ministry" (*ämbete*) is used when they assume that the word *diakoneo* is referring to the mission of the apostles, to the mission to preach the word, or to the gospel itself. In the other cases they primarily use the words "serve", "service" and "servant" (*tjänst*). This is a reflection of older usage in the Swedish language where the words "ministry" and "minister" were used in regard to higher positions within the government or the state church in contrast to the more subordinate services or officials. In more recent translations of the New Testament the word "minister" is rare and the division mentioned above hardly exists. "Bibel 2000" is the most consistent. In "Svenska Folkbibeln" this division only exists in a few places. The Swedish FB generally uses words based on the root *tjäna* as the most common word for the biblical words for service/ministry. When these words refer to secular service, FB sometimes uses paraphrases like *passar upp*, *uppgift*, *uppdrag*, *hjälp*. In 2 Corinthians 3 and Romans 11:13 it uses *ämbete*.

Finnish

In passages pertaining to secular life the Finnish Bible translations (1776 Biblia, 1938 Bible and 1992 Bible) use the equivalents of "serve" and "servant" (*palvel--*) to translate the Greek original language words *diakoneo* and *diakonos*. According to the translations Christ is also a servant (*palvel--*) and serves (*palvel--*). Believers' activities are generally characterized with the word "service" (*palvel--*) and "to serve" (*palvel--*). However, the 1776 Biblia and the 1938 Bible use the word "ministry" (*virat*, *virka*) for *diakonia* in 1 Corinthians 12:5 and Romans 12:7. The 1992 Bible restores in these passages the connection with the basic meaning of the Greek words by translating "services." In the passages referring to work of the Law and the work of the Gospel in 2 Corinthians *diakonai* has been translated with certain variations of the word "ministry" (*virka*). These passages use the word *diakonia* in abstract meaning. The *diakonia* of the apostles and prophets was to preach the Law and the Gospel. In these passages 1776 Biblia and 1938 Bible waver between the words "ministry" and "service." The 1992 Bible uses the word "service." The apostles' helpers in these translations are "servants" and their work is "service". The ministry of the deacons is not connected with the word "ministry" but translations use the words "servant" (*palvel--*) and "to serve" (*palvel--*) and similar expressions. Members of the New Testament church do work and help in various ways. According to the translations they "serve" (*palvel--*).

The greatest discrepancy between the Greek words *diakoneo*, *diakonos* and *diakonia* and the Finnish Bible translations' equivalents is division into "ministry" and "service" when translating the single Greek word *diakonia*. *Diakonia* in the Bible means different kinds of service. We might understand the Greek New Testament expression here better, if we would compare the church to a service center where doctor, nurses and fellow patients serve patient, every one according to his or her authorization and qualification.

Conclusions

It is very clear that Scripture uses the words "minister" and "ministry" (*diakoneo*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos*) for many different kinds of service. This example gives us a pattern for the use of these words in the church.

In the wide sense, therefore, the words "minister" and "ministry" can refer to other forms of service in the church besides that of the pastor (such as the service provided by Christian teachers, missionaries, or deacons). The New Testament uses the same words to refer to waiting on tables, to the pastoral ministry, and to other forms of spiritual service. In fact, the specialized biblical use of the Greek word for "minister" (*diakonos*) is not for the men whom we would call pastors, but to those we call "deacons" (I Timothy 3:8).

A "minister" is "one who acts as the agent of another." In this sense everyone who is called by the church to carry out some service in the name of the church is a "minister." This is what we often call "public ministry" or "representative ministry."

We must be careful, however that we do not confuse the service which Christians do on their own initiative as part of the priesthood of all believers (private ministry) with the service which they carry out in

response to the church's call and in the name of the church (public ministry). We also must be careful that we do not diminish respect for the pastoral ministry, the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word. When the term "ministry" is used in a wider sense to refer to types of service other than the pastoral office, this should not be done without careful explanation, so that the distinction of the priesthood of all believers from the pastoral ministry and from other forms of public ministry is not blurred or confused.

If properly explained, all of the following uses of the terms "ministry" and "minister" agree with the usage of Scripture:

- 1) In its widest and most basic sense the term "the ministry" refers to the gospel ministry or the ministry of the Word established by Christ and given to the whole church. This usage is essentially the same as our usage when we speak of the "ministry of the keys." This one ministry of the Word is exercised in two ways, privately and publicly. This wide usage of the term "ministry" is present both in Scripture and the Confessions:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (2 Corinthians 3:7-9)

As we have seen above, in this passage "the ministry that brings death" is God's law. "The ministry that brings righteousness" is the gospel. Our Confessions, which refer to "the ministry of the Church" as "the Word preached and heard" (FC, Ep 12, Trig. 840), clearly say that this "ministry," that is, the Word, has been entrusted to the whole church:

Because the priesthood of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit¹ or an office (*Amt*) through which the Spirit works² as Paul teaches (2 Cor 3:6), it accordingly has but the one sacrifice of Christ, which is satisfactory and applied for the sins of others...The ministry of the Spirit is that through which the Holy Spirit is efficacious in hearts. AP24, Trig. 404.

That we might obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. AC5, Trig. 44.

Time does not permit full discussion of the view that the divine institution of the public ministry is the topic of Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession, other than to note that Article 14 of the Augsburg Confession is the specific locus dealing with the public ministry (church order). In spite of the appearance given by its title, Article 5 of the Augsburg Confession, really speaks about the New Testament ministry confessed in 2 Corinthians 3:6-9, that is, about the means of grace, rather than about the public ministry.

Luther also says that this ministry of the Word is given to every believer:

Since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word, it ceases to be a church. A Christian, thus, is born to the ministry of the Word in baptism (*zu dem Amt des Worts geboren ist*), and if papal bishops are unwilling to bestow the ministry of the Word except on such as destroy the Word of God and ruin the church, then it but remains either to let the church perish without the Word or to let those who come together cast their ballots and elect one or as many as

¹ According to the Latin.

² According to the German.

are needed from those who are capable. (“Concerning the Ministry,” LW 40, p37; SL X, 1592-1593)³

That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. This would be impossible if we were not all priests. (“To the Christian Nobility,” LW 44, p 128)

In the widest sense then “the ministry” is the right and duty to preach the gospel which is given to the whole church, that is, to all believers.

- 2) All Christians may exercise this ministry of the Word in their private dealings with others. They do this whenever they use God’s law to condemn sin and his gospel to proclaim forgiveness. The gospel entrusted to all believers is the same gospel as that entrusted to public ministers of the Word. We call this private use of the gospel “personal ministry” or “private ministry” so that it is not confused with the public ministry of the Word. Such ministry is apart of the exercise of the priesthood of all believers. Luther says:

Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever it is necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other. Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God’s Word and publicly to confess it. (“Psalm 110,” LW 13, p. 333)

- 3) Only Christians who are properly qualified and who are called by the church may exercise this ministry publicly, that is, in the name of the church. We call this “public ministry” or “representative ministry.” Luther says:

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....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 on someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests. (“Psalm 110,” LW 13, p. 332)

The pastoral ministry is the most comprehensive form of this public ministry of the Word, but it is not the only form. Sometimes when speaking of the pastoral ministry, we call it “the public ministry,” “the ministry of the Word,” or even “the ministry,” but we should remember that in such cases we are using these more inclusive names for one specific form of public ministry.

- 4) In the preceding sections we have been assuming that that we have been talking about ministry of the Word. Can areas of service in the church which do not deal directly with the Word be called “ministry”? Scripture uses the term “ministry” in this way. Although the area of service of the “deacons” in Acts 6 was distinguished from the ministry of the Word, their work too was called “ministry” (*diakonia*). Furthermore, they were called by the church to act as its representatives, and they were placed into office with the laying-on of hands. From this it is clear that they were exercising a public ministry or service for the church even though they were not pastors or ministers of the Word.

³ Luther quotations are from the American edition *Luther’s Works*. I have included titles of works to make it easier to find the quotes in other editions. In a few cases I have simplified the English or word order to make it easier to translate.

The text of Acts does not tell us whether the preaching which the deacons Stephan and Philip did in later years (Acts 7 and 8) was done as the private work of laymen or on the basis of a later expanded call from the church that is not mentioned in Acts. Luther was of the opinion that they did this preaching as laymen (LW 40:38; LW 39:309-310). Years later, Philip is called an evangelist (Acts 21:8).

Since “public” means “representative” and “ministry” means “service,” it would be legitimate to speak of a “public ministry” of the church that does not directly involve the Means of Grace. However, we in the WELS do not customarily use this term in this way, but we usually limit the term “public ministry” to the ministry of the Word. Scripture does, however, permit the wider use of the term.

- 5) We prefer not to use the term “lay ministry” without careful explanation. This term is often confusing because it does not distinguish clearly between service which lay people carry out privately as part of the priesthood of believers and that which they may carry out publicly as called representatives of the congregation or the church.

This practice of using the words for ministry to refer to a number of different kinds of service by Christians is an attempt to get closer to the usage of Scripture which uses the same words for many kinds of service, even some by non-Christians.