

The Pastoral Ministry As A Distinct Form Of The Public Ministry

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“In many Lutheran confessional churches the impression has arisen that the WELS holds in low esteem the pastoral ministry (*Hirtenamt*) which God has established and commanded.” This statement was received in 1991 by our WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CI-CR) as part of a communication from the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELF) in East Germany. Obviously there are some Lutherans who feel that we in the Wisconsin Synod have too low a view of the pastoral ministry.

We all know that in recent years there has been action taken among us which has highlighted other forms of the public ministry and which may give the impression to outsiders that we are lowering our view of the pastoral ministry. In 1991 our convention authorized the staff ministry program. There is continuing discussion about the possible ordination of male teachers. In 1993, our convention approved the amalgamation of our two worker training colleges, so that the pastoral track will no longer have its own separate college.

Perhaps it is time to make clear for ourselves and others what our view of the pastoral ministry is. That will be the intent of this essay. What is the pastoral ministry? How is it distinct from other forms of the public ministry? How important is the pastoral ministry among us in the WELS?

The Pastoral Ministry in the New Testament

A. Bible Basics on the ministry

The New Testament indicates that the ministry of the keys is given to all Christians. All Christians have the commission to share the gospel with other people (1 Pe 2:9).

It is also clear in God’s Word that God wants a “public ministry” as well. God wants there to be leaders who use the keys on behalf of other Christians. When Christ picked the apostles, he showed his desire for a “public ministry” (Tractate, 10, German text). Ephesians 4 says that Christ gave apostles and other leaders to the church. When the New Testament gives qualifications for elders and deacons, it shows that God wants a public ministry.

B. The functions of the public ministry

The functions of the public ministry can be said to be twofold: feeding and leading. Public ministers are to edify and to oversee, to proclaim and to rule, to teach and to guide.

Some passages which speak of the work of feeding with the Word and sacraments are: John 21:15-17, Ephesians 3:8, 1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 4:13.

Some passages which speak of the work of leading and overseeing are: Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:5, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Hebrews 13:17.

As part of their work, public ministers will also equip other Christians for Christian service. Ephesians 4:11-12 says: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and 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.”

C. Shepherd or coach?

Sometimes it is debated: Should a public minister be a shepherd or a coach? Should a public minister do the ministry or train others for the ministry? Is the church a hospital or a gymnasium?

The Bible indicates that both are true. Public ministers are to feed and protect the flock. Public ministers are also to equip and train.

The emphasis in the Bible, however, is on shepherding.¹ Usually in the Bible public ministers are told to minister—to feed, evangelize, warn, rebuke, teach, rule, exhort, and apply the Word.

If a public minister viewed his chief work as equipping, his ministry could be a ministry that would improperly highlight sanctification over justification.

D. The forms of the public ministry

A wide variety of terms are used in the New Testament for public ministers.

The three most commonly used terms, apart from the extraordinary offices of apostle and prophet, are “overseer” (*episcopos*), “elder” (*presbyteros*), and “deacon” (*diaconos*). When the word “elder” is used as a title for a church office, it seems to be synonymous with “overseer” (Ac 20:17,28; Tit 1:6,7). The word “elder” comes from the Jewish world of thought and stresses the dignity of the office. The word “overseer” comes from the Greek world of thought and stresses the function.

It seems that at the beginning the leadership of local congregations was in the hands of several people. Perhaps the earliest congregations were patterned after Jewish synagogues in their organizational structure, with a council or senate of teaching and ruling elders. In some places there seems to have been a two-fold division of public ministry into the offices of elder/overseer and deacon (Php 1:1; 1 Ti 3:1-13).

The New Testament is not concerned, however, to give job descriptions for the various forms of public ministry. In general we assume that the deacons were called more for charitable service and the management of finances. The elders were called more for teaching. Yet some elders evidently did not preach and teach (1 Ti 5:17). Some of the first deacons were busy preaching (Ac 6-8).

The New Testament also does not demand that any particular form of public ministry be established in every congregation. New Testament Christians have the freedom to structure and arrange the public ministry in the way that seems best.

In this regard the Bible’s view of the public ministry is similar to that of secular government. God wants there to be secular government. God is responsible for establishing whatever government there is. Yet God does not demand that there must be a monarchy, a democracy, a republic or any other particular form. In the same way the public ministry is divinely instituted and God places individuals into the public ministry through the church. But the concern of the New Testament is that the work of sharing the gospel go on and that those who carry on the work publicly have the proper qualifications. The New Testament is not concerned about establishing one particular organizational structure. The gospel creates its own forms.

E. The term “pastor” in the Bible

Our English word “pastor,” of course, is a word that means “shepherd.” The Latin verb *pascere* means to feed, defend, or shepherd. The Latin noun *pastor* (for *pasctor*) means a feeder,

keeper, or shepherd. According to the dictionary, the word “pastor” came into the English language by way of the French language.

The word “pastor” generally is used in English New Testaments only at Ephesians 4:11. The NIV reads: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be *pastors* and teachers.” The Greek word is *poimen*, which is the common word for “shepherd.” Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the New Testament where this noun occurs referring to public ministers in the church. The Vulgate translated “*pastores*.” Luther translated “*Hirten*.”

This passage gives no information about the precise role or function of these pastors. There is no indication how this form of ministry differed from others. Some assume that these pastors were men who were placed over a certain flockⁱⁱ and were similar to our pastors today.ⁱⁱⁱ But since we know so little about these pastors, it would be a mistake to say that they were exactly the same as what we call pastors today. Many assume that these pastors were the same group of men referred to as elders or overseers in other places. Some suspect that the word in Ephesians 4:11 may not yet have been an established title.^{iv}

The verb *poimaino* (to shepherd) and the nouns *poimne/poimnion* (flock) are also used in connection with public ministers. Here are some verses: John 21:16 -- Feed my sheep. Acts 20:28 -- Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God. 1 Peter 5:1-3 - To the elders among you, I appeal ...Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. In these verses we see the imagery of shepherding associated with the apostles and with the elders and overseers.

Of course, shepherding as an image for those who lead God’s people, has its roots in the Old Testament. The Lord said to David, “You will shepherd my people Israel” (2 Samuel 5:2). The Lord promised through Jeremiah, “I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15). Ezekiel 34 speaks of Israel’s wicked leaders as “shepherds who only take care of themselves.”

In conclusion we can say that shepherding is said to be the work of elders and overseers. In one passage the noun “shepherds” or “pastors” is used as a word for some public ministers. The precise nature of their work is not spelled out.

We can also say, given what we know about the public ministry, that the word “shepherd” or “pastor” is a particularly apt title for people in the public ministry. The public ministry is designed by God to feed and to lead. Both of these concepts are richly illustrated in the image of a shepherd.

I’m sure that all of us who by God’s grace carry the title “pastor,” carry it with a feeling of privilege and honor. Many of us prefer this title to any other, because it beautifully captures the essence of our work. We are called to feed and lead like shepherds. It is an image which still is understood and appreciated by modern people in our urbanized society.

The Pastoral Ministry in Church History

A. General overview

Throughout the history of the church God has raised up public ministers in every generation. This is stating the obvious. There have always been people in positions of preaching, worship leading, and oversight in the church.

The public ministry, however, has been constantly changing in the history of the church. There has been no static structure. There has been a wide variety of titles used for workers in the church. Roles have shifted. There have been different emphases in different times and places.

The diaconate is one example. It is commonly noted that this office has varied greatly over time. Sometimes deacons have taken care of the church's finances. Sometimes they have administered the church's charity. Sometimes they have served as assistant pastors in worship leading and preaching. Sometimes the diaconate has been a steppingstone to the priesthood.

John Schaller wrote in his *Pastorale*: "The concept of the pastoral ministry (or the pastorate) is in history a changing quantity."^v

J. P. Koehler wrote: "The office of the parish ministry which ascribes to the individual pastor all pastoral functions within a geographically or personally defined area originated only in the Germanic church, and in the Reformation, and there only gradually until it was fully established in our church here in America."^{vi}

B. Peculiarities of the public ministry in the early church

One change that took place very early in the church was the establishment of a three-fold ministry. Already in the second century the term "bishop" emerged as a title for a regional supervisor. The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (@ 215 A.D.) provided for three separate ordinations, that of deacons, presbyters, and bishops.

Another change was the gradual introduction of the word "priest." Some claim that the first person to call a clergyman a priest was Polycrates of Ephesus (@ 190 A.D.).^{vii} The use of the term obviously accompanied the church's change in the understanding of the Lord's Supper. When notions of sacrifice became prominent in the understanding of the Lord's Supper, the term "priest" became common and the ministry thereby was redefined.

Other peculiarities of public ministry in the early church would be these: Judging cases was a major part of public ministry. Public ministers were often expected to levy a penance. Public ministers often had to oversee the distribution of food. Gradually there was the expectation that they be single. There was often a great reluctance on the part of people to enter the public ministry. Forced ordinations were not uncommon.

Eventually, of course, the Roman Catholic Church codified its ministry into seven orders. The Roman Catholic Church had three major orders: priests (which included bishops), deacons, and subdeacons. The minor orders were: acolytes, exorcists, lectors, and doorkeepers. Bishops, priests, and deacons were all officially ordained, but they were not ordained for the same functions.

C. Modern day emphases

We all know that the public ministry is being pulled into many different directions in our modern world.

Some stress that the pastor should be like a chief executive officer who broadcasts the vision and manages the laypeople who do the actual ministry. Some look upon the pastor as a social director and program promoter. Some look upon the pastor as a political activist. Some look upon the pastor as the cheapest psychologist in town.

There are many different "models of ministry." It is certain that the public ministry has seen changing emphases over the years.

D. The use of the term “pastor” in church history

The word “pastor” has always been in circulation at least to a degree in the Western Church due to the Vulgate translation of Ephesians 4:11. References to the term “pastor” can be found in Ignatius (Rom. IX:1) and Clement of Alexandria (Paid. VI).^{viii} When Gregory the Great wrote his monumental volume for the “secular” (i.e. non-monastic) clergy of his day, he entitled it *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, or *Book of Pastoral Rule* (commonly called *Pastoral Care* in English).

Obviously the title “pastor,” however, did not surface as the most common title in the Catholic Church for the leader of the Christian community. As the three-fold ministry became established, the most common terms were “bishop,” “presbyter”/ “priest,” and “deacon.”

Pragman gives Pietism the credit for making “pastor” the most commonly used title among Lutherans today. He says, “The title ‘pastor’ is itself a legacy of the Pietist contribution to the Lutheran theological tradition. Earlier developers of this tradition usually spoke of the congregation’s minister as the *Prediger* or the *Pfarrer* or even as the *Priester*. But the title of ‘pastor’ as the designation of the congregation’s minister came into general use during the 18th century as a result of the influence of Pietism.”^{ix}

The Pastoral Ministry in the Lutheran Reformation

A. Teaching function of the public ministry reemphasized

The main change which the Lutheran Reformation brought into the public ministry of the church is commonly recognized to be this: The Lutheran Reformation reemphasized the teaching function of the public ministry.

In Roman Catholicism the summit of a priest’s work was to consecrate and elevate the elements in the Mass. From the time of Luther on, the sermon was given the place of prominence among Lutherans. The minister was now a preacher rather than a priest. As Elert says, “The pastoral profession (*Pfarrerstand*) was made the ‘teaching profession’ (*Lehrstand*).”^x

It is interesting to note that Hoenecke in his *Dogmatik* entitled his section on the public ministry “*Das Lehramt*” (“The Teaching Ministry”).

B. The Lutheran Confessions on the ministry

The Confessions present the Lutheran emphasis on teaching. The *Apology* says: “*Praecipuus cultus Dei est docere evangelium*”—“The chief service of God is to teach the Gospel” (XV,42).

When summarizing the work of public ministers, the Confessions commonly speak of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments (*Apology*, XIII,9). Often added is the work of remitting and retaining sins (*Augsburg Confession*, XXVIII,5; *Apology*:XXVIII,13). The *Tractate* says: “The Gospel assigns to those who preside over churches the command to teach the Gospel, to remit sins, to administer the Sacraments, and besides jurisdiction, namely, the command to excommunicate those whose crimes are known, and again to absolve those who repent” (60).

The Confessions are quick to limit the authority of public ministers. Public ministers do not have temporal authority by divine right. Also in the church they have no authority by divine right beyond the right to “forgive sins, to judge doctrine, to reject doctrines contrary to the Gospel, and to exclude from the communion of the Church wicked men.” (*Augsburg Confession*:

XXVIII,21). If bishops introduce ceremonies, these ceremonies must not violate the Gospel and they must not be presented as necessary for salvation (Augsburg Confession: XXVIII,30ff).

The Confessions certainly look upon the public ministry as a divine institution. The Apology says: “The ministry of the Word has God’s command and glorious promises” (XIII,11). “The church has the command to appoint ministers” (XIII,12).

The Confessions also give to the church the right to call people into the public ministry which God has established. The church has this right because all Christians have been given the keys and the priesthood (Tractate, 69). No one should enter into public ministry without a call (Augsburg Confession,XIV).

Yet the Confessions do not get hung up on specific forms for the public ministry. The Tractate agrees with Jerome that “it is by human authority that the grades of bishop and elder or pastor are distinct” (63). Numerous titles are used in the Tractate when speaking of public ministers: *Kirchendiener, Bischof, Pfarrherr, Pastor, Prediger*. Fagerberg concludes: “The Confessions show a conspicuous lack of interest in the Biblical names given to those who hold ecclesiastical office.”^{xi} Kolb says: “By comparison with other confessional traditions, Lutherans have been notoriously indifferent to matters of church polity.”^{xii}

The Confessions also attribute relatively minor importance to ordination. Actually, according to historians the Lutherans in Wittenberg only began ordaining their ministers in 1535 upon the insistence of the Elector. The Tractate (written in 1537) interestingly assumes that people in a variety of offices will be ordained. The Tractate says that it is valid “*wenn ein Pfarrherr in seiner kirche etliche tuechtige Personen zu den Kirचनाemtern ordnet*”—“if a pastor in his church ordains certain suitable persons to the church ministries” (65).

In summary, this writer sees in the Lutheran Confessions the same content as in the New Testament. God wants leaders to feed and oversee. The work is what is important, not the form of the office. A variety of offices are possible. From the Lutheran Confessions we can learn about the work of public ministry. We do not find a church constitution which tells us what is to be distinct about the office of pastor in contrast with other offices.

C. St. Mary’s Church in Wittenberg

It is interesting to see how the Lutheran doctrine of the public ministry was put into practice in the city church at Wittenberg at the time of Luther. The Wittenberg church order of 1533 has been published.^{xiii}

St. Mary’s Church had one pastor (*Pfarrer*), Johannes Bugenhagen. He obviously had a strong “head pastor” role. He was involved in the selection of deacons and schoolmasters. The schoolmasters were responsible to him.

There were four deacons who were also referred to as priests or chaplains. They were really “assistant pastors” in our terms. They helped deliver the some 500 sermons which were delivered annually in the city church and the surrounding villages. They helped listen to confessions and administer the sacraments.

There was one school master for the “Latin school.” There was one school master for the “girls’ school.” There was a sexton.

The church order says nothing about who was ordained and who wasn’t. But one must remember that ordination did not begin among the Lutherans until 1535.

What is most interesting is simply to notice the sizeable and well organized public ministry which existed in Wittenberg, and the variety of different offices. It reminds me a little of the congregation I presently serve which has 3 pastors, and 12 Christian day school teachers,

plus secretaries and janitors. Yet the terms are different. In Wittenberg the head pastor was the only worker called pastor. The assistant pastors were called deacons.

D. Various opinions which have surfaced among Lutherans

It is fair to say that there has been widespread agreement among Lutherans over the years on the main features of the doctrine of the public ministry, due in large part to the Lutheran Confessions. There is general agreement that there is both a universal priesthood and a special public ministry established by God. It is recognized that preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments is the main work of public ministers.

Yet there have been many difficulties and many diverging paths. Listed now are a few notions which have surfaced among Lutherans and which are rejected as un-Scriptural by the Wisconsin Synod.

1. Ordination makes a pastor

There have been those (Stahl, Loehe, Vilmar, Grabau) who have said that ordination is absolutely necessary to serve in the public ministry. Some have gone so far as to say that if an unordained person were to preside at the Lord's Supper, he would only serve bread and wine.

This strikes us as a return to Catholicism. We find no command in the Bible for ordination. It is contrary to the doctrine and practice of the early Lutherans.

2. Exaggerated authority given to pastors

There have been those who have said that pastors have the authority to excommunicate without the approval of the congregation. Some have said that congregations must be obedient to their pastors in all demands not contrary to the Word of God (Grabau).

C. F. W. Walther presented the correct understanding on this point in his ninth thesis on the Holy Ministry: "To the ministry there is due respect as well as unconditional obedience when the pastor uses God's Word. The minister must not tyrannize the church. He has no authority to introduce new laws or arbitrarily to establish adiaphora or ceremonies. The minister has no right to inflict and carry out excommunication without his having first informed the whole congregation."^{xiv}

3. The public ministry is not divinely instituted

Hoefling is commonly said to have taught that the public ministry arose out of human expediency and was not divinely instituted. Some, however, say that Hoefling did view the public ministry as divinely instituted. The whole topic could use more study among us.

Let it simply be reaffirmed that the Wisconsin Synod teaches that the public ministry is divinely instituted. Our doctrinal statement says: "It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency."^{xv}

4. The pastoral ministry is the only divinely instituted form

There have been those who have said that pastoral office is the only form of public ministry which is established by God. Other offices which the church may establish are auxiliary offices to help the pastor and are not established by God (LCR, some in LC-MS).

We find no Scriptural support for this position. We see a variety of forms exhibited in the Bible and in the Lutheran Confessions, without any exclusive claims given to one form.

5. Pastors have all the functions of the public ministry

There have been those who have said that pastors are unique in that they carry out all the functions of the public ministry.

We see no demand in the Bible for an office which necessarily must include all the functions of the ministry. On the contrary, there are a variety of offices without precise job descriptions. Jesus and Paul themselves did not baptize (Jn 4:2; 1 Co 1:17).

Certainly a congregation could assign one person with all the tasks of the public ministry which it wants carried out in its midst, if there was a person who had the proper gifts and the congregation didn't have greater needs. But would such a person still be carrying out all the functions of the public ministry in general? What about world mission work? What about the training of future pastors?

C. F. W. Walther said about the public ministry in a sermon preached at the installation of two college professors, "This office accordingly has such a sphere of duties and tasks of such a diverse variety, and calls for so many different outstanding gifts, that no man is in the position, even in a small sphere, to fulfill all its tasks."^{xvi}

6. The pastoral ministry is not optional

There have been those who have said that each congregation is obligated to establish the office of pastor. They say that a group of Christians is not officially constituted as a church until they have a pastor.

Here one needs to be careful. We would say that every gathering of Christians should have a public ministry. One or more should be chosen to feed and lead. But we see no demand in the Bible that one specific form is required. It is theoretically possible for a congregation to be led by a council of elders who take turns preaching and who divide up the work of shepherding. There does not have to be one person in charge. There does not need to be someone called "pastor." The work of shepherding must be done. But the office of pastor as we know it is not essential. The work could be delegated and accomplished in another way.

7. The pastoral office is a direct continuation of the apostolic office

There have been those who have said that the pastoral ministry is identical to the Biblical office of apostle without the gift of special inspiration (Stahl). They say that the apostles picked pastors to succeed them, and pastors have continued to pick successors throughout history. The pastoral office they say is a direct continuation of the apostolic office.

Here again one needs to be careful. Certainly the work and the teaching of the apostles has been continued by their successors in the public ministry in every generation. But where in the Bible is there clear proof that one particular form of public ministry continues the office of the apostolate in contrast to other forms? This is an assumption without clear Bible support.

The pastoral ministry as we have designed it may more closely resemble the office of apostle than any of the other forms of public ministry among us, since we make the pastoral ministry the most comprehensive form and give it the work of general oversight.

Yet the apostles undoubtedly placed people into a variety of church offices in order to continue their work. There is no hint in the Bible that one form of public ministry was intended by them to continue their office in contrast to other forms.

8. Women may be pastors

It is no secret that the ELCA and many other Lutheran churches worldwide have opened the door for women to serve in the pastoral ministry.

This is a staggering innovation in the church about which much could be said. We will be content here to say that the WELS finds this practice contrary to clear Scripture passages (1 Ti 2:12; 1 Co 14:33-35; 1 Co 11:3).

The Pastoral Ministry In The WELS—General Background

A. One form of the public ministry

All of what has preceded in this paper will now guide us as we consider the position of pastor in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

Quite simply, we view the pastoral ministry as one form of the public ministry. It is a “species” of the “genus.” God wants there to be a public ministry, but he has not specified the outward forms. The pastoral office is one form, but by no means the only form.

B. The substance, not the form, is divinely instituted

Has God instituted the pastoral office? We would say that the work of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments by public ministers is divinely commanded. But not the outward form of the office.

Prof. Lawrenz wrote: “It would be false, of course, to declare the species parish pastorate (*Pfarramt*) to be a mere human arrangement. Human concerning every species of the public ministry is only the form. The substance of every species of the public ministry, the commission and authority given to capable men by the church to preach the gospel for its edification, to administer the means of grace, is in every case divine.”^{xvii}

C. We have freedom to structure the form as we want

Because God has not spelled out the details, we have the freedom to structure our pastoral ministry in the way that we want. As Schaller says, “The pastoral ministry as such is not a Biblical, but rather in each individual case a historically developed concept. That means the pastoral ministry is for each time and in each place, what the *church* so says.”^{xviii}

At different places and at different times in the history of the church, the outward form of the pastoral ministry has shown substantial differences. For example, the pastors in our sister Lutheran church in Norway and Sweden by and large have full-time secular jobs and do their pastoral work on a part-time basis. Gerberding’s *The Lutheran Pastor* of 1902 gives a suggested daily schedule for a city pastor. He should study for 5 hours in the morning, make 10 or more house calls in the afternoon, and enjoy the evening with his family.^{xix} Which city pastor among us today has a schedule anything like that?

Consequently, when we talk about the pastoral ministry in the WELS, one can only discuss how it is generally perceived and practiced among us today.

It may change. We cannot demand that our present way of arranging the ministry is necessary or commanded by God.

D. Pastors are shepherds or overseers of congregations

Without a doubt, pastors in the WELS are generally recognized to be those public ministers who are shepherds or overseers of congregations. They are trained to be “general

practitioners,” who will be able to cover all the bases in the feeding and leading of congregations.

Statements like these are common in the WELS: “The primary form which the ministry will usually take is that of the congregational pastorate.”^{xx} “The pastoral office is one form of this public ministry of the gospel, no doubt the most comprehensive one.”^{xxi} “By common agreement we train pastoral ministers for the broadest scope of ministry and for theological leadership.”^{xxii}

If a congregation among us will only have one public minister, it will be a pastor. All the other public ministries among us are more specialized in their training. In short, pastors are the primary shepherds of congregations.

E. Use of the term “pastor” for men in other positions

A purist might argue that the word “pastor” should only be used for a man who has been called to shepherd a congregation. This is the way many have used the word in the past. When C. F. W. Walther preached at the installation of two men who left the oversight of congregations in order to be college professors, he spoke of them leaving the pastoral ministry.^{xxiii}

Yet it must be admitted that the word “pastor” definitely is being used in our circles also for men who serve in other ministries if they have had the training to be parish pastors. In our Synod Yearbook there are three categories of public ministers: Pastors, Teachers, and Staff Ministers. In the listing of pastors are men who are currently serving as administrators, professors, teachers, counselors, institutional chaplains, and so on. The Statistical Report of 1992 counts some 435 ordained pastors who are not serving as parish pastors. This listing includes retired pastors.

In a recent doctrinal paper, the pastoral ministry was defined as “the office of ministry carried out by one who has received a full theological training, e.g. a graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.”^{xxiv} We seem to go by training. If one has been trained to serve as a parish pastor, he tends to keep the title.

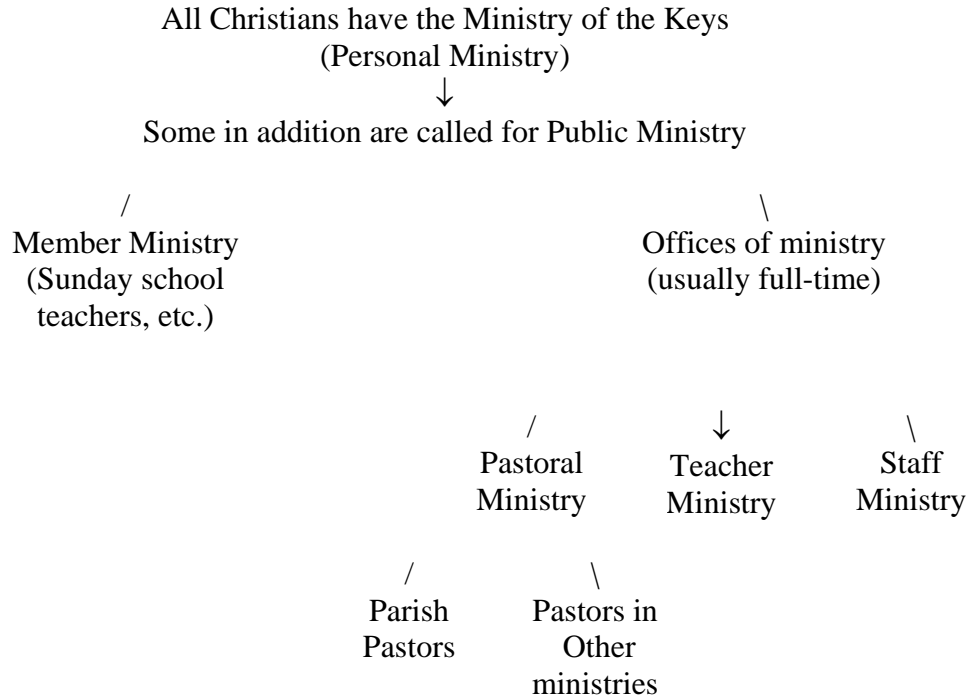
Perhaps there is some usefulness for retaining the title “pastor” when men serve in other ministries. These men will usually continue to function as preachers and worship leaders with limited calls as they fill in at congregations. Retaining the title “pastor” makes it clear that they are available for such service. Retaining the title “pastor” makes it clear that they are eligible to be called to serve as parish pastors. Retaining the title also tells others that these persons have received a “full theological training.”

At any rate, since the terms we use are not commanded by God, there is nothing Scriptural at stake. Consequently, this author has no strong opinion on the point.

It does seem sensible, however, that we not broaden the term “pastor” any farther. Many of us have seen the word “minister” broaden out in common usage. Years ago, “minister” for most people was a synonym for “pastor.” Now we use the title “minister” for many public workers in the church who are not pastors. We stress that all Christians are “ministers.” If the same phenomenon would happen with the word “pastor,” we would soon find ourselves without any word to refer to this distinctive form of public ministry. We are wise not to talk about teachers being the “pastors” of the students in their rooms, for example. Let’s retain the word “pastor” for those trained to be overseers of congregations.

F. Summary

Our thoughts on the ministry could be illustrated by the diagram on the following sheet.



V. How Is The Pastoral Ministry Different From Other Forms In The WELS?

A. *The Question*

With the coming of staff ministers into our midst, the question may well be raised: What is to be distinctive about the pastoral office among us? Are there some functions of the public ministry which only pastors should be doing? What does it mean to be a pastor?

B. *Many tasks of the pastoral ministry could be done by others*

First, as was said before, the pastor is the “general practitioner.” If a congregation has only one public minister, it will be a pastor and not any other form of specialized ministry.

Yet it must be said that many functions of the public ministry which are commonly done by pastors could certainly be done by staff ministers or others.

For example, pastors often make evangelism calls and train laypeople for visitation. But a Minister of Evangelism could do this work. Pastors often make hospital calls and delinquent calls. But these could be done by elders, deacons, or deaconesses. Pastors often oversee the church office. This could be done by a Minister of Administration. Pastors often guide the youth group. This could be done by a layperson or a Minister of Youth.

C. *There are four functions not generally shared with others*

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

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

In other words, it is not the goal of a parish pastor to work himself out of a job by equipping others to do all the functions of the public ministry in the congregation. Just as “we would not expect a layman to perform brain surgery or to pilot our jet across the Pacific,” so “there are areas of pastoral responsibility that simply cannot be delegated to one who has not been thoroughly trained to ‘rightly divide the Word of Truth’.”^{xxv}

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

Let’s look at each of these four.

1. Formal preaching in public worship services

Lay preaching is a phenomenon which has occurred repeatedly in church history. Among the Norwegian Lutherans in the United States there was a lay preaching controversy in the 1850’s and 1860’s.

It is interesting to take note of the theses adopted by the Norwegian Synod in 1862.^{xxvi}

The Norwegian Synod concluded that only those who are officially called should preach, unless there was some special “need.” A “need” would exist if no pastor could be secured or if the pastor who was at hand was teaching false doctrine.

This Norwegian Synod was the church body which became a part of the Synodical Conference when it began in 1872. We would agree with their conclusions. If there are pastors at hand who have been trained and called to preach, they should preach. If there is an emergency, others may have to step forward. But ordinarily preaching is not given to those who have not been trained for it.

Why is this a good policy? Koren of the Norwegian Synod was quick to say that God can do his work through lay preachers. Koren in some respects admired the lay preacher, Hauge. But when Koren analyzed the preaching of Hauge and Eielsen, he noticed that it lacked a clear distinction between law and gospel. It did not present justification clearly.^{xxvii}

It is the observation also of this author that distinguishing law and gospel clearly and highlighting justification is not something that comes intuitively to Christians. Unless a person is properly trained, he very likely will not distinguish law and gospel clearly. He very likely will not highlight justification as a Lutheran preacher should in his public proclamation.

In this most important of all tasks, public preaching, there is every reason to reserve it for those who have received the training for it.

Also in the history of the church, it is hard to find a church which has continued with strength, vitality, and correct doctrine over a period of time which relied upon lay preachers.

2. General doctrinal and spiritual oversight

There is a very clear consensus in our church body that the general doctrinal and spiritual oversight of congregations should remain with the pastoral ministry.

In the 1991 report which recommended the adoption of a staff ministry program, it says that staff ministers “would serve congregations in public ministry under the spiritual direction of the pastor.”^{xxviii} “Congregations will ask ministers with pastoral training and experience to lead their staff.”^{xxix} Prof. Valleskey writes: “Those called to staff ministry positions are not called to supplant the pastor, to whom a congregation assigns oversight of the entire ministry of the gospel. Rather, working hand in hand with the pastor and under his leadership, those serving in staff ministry positions will see themselves as assisting the pastor in the congregation’s ministry.”^{xxx}

Examples of such doctrinal and spiritual oversight would be as follows: Pastors generally are responsible for the doctrinal purity of all preaching and teaching in the congregation. Pastors generally are responsible for determining eligibility for membership and the reception of the Lord's Supper. Pastors generally are responsible for church discipline and the admonition of those caught in sin.

Our pastoral theology textbook, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, also gives pastors a general supervision over the Christian day school, when it exists. It says: "The pastor by his call has the role of 'overseeing' the total program of the school while recognizing the specific roles assigned to the teachers and the principal through their calls."^{xxxii} "The ultimate responsibility for the supervision of the school remains his."^{xxxiii}

Needless to say, all Christians still have the responsibility to judge the doctrine which is preached and taught in their congregations. If a pastor should teach false doctrine, the members of the church should detect it and admonish him.

Also it can be said that a Christ-like pastor should not exercise his oversight in a domineering way. Peter tells overseers to be "eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you" (1 Pe 5:2-3). This is important to remember, because as has commonly been said, "*In jedem Pfarrlein steckt ein Pfafflein!*" (There is a little pope in every pastor).

Yet there is good reason for giving pastors the general doctrinal and spiritual oversight of congregations. The pastor has been trained to be the "resident theologian."

3. Administration of the sacraments

It is a Lutheran commonplace that a lay Christian could administer baptism in the case of an emergency. He could do this because all Christians have the ministry of the keys.

However, Lutheran teachers have debated throughout the years whether or not a layperson should ever consecrate and administer the Lord's Supper. The orthodox dogmatists generally said that even in the case of emergency it should not be done. Baier wrote: "When there is a lack of ordinary ministers, and a faithful man anxiously desires this sacrament, it is better for him to be persuaded that spiritual eating is sufficient and to show the danger of other temptations which could arise if the sacrament were administered by another without a legitimate call and therefore with a dubious mind and result."^{xxxiii}

In the WELS I assume we follow the line of thinking of Prof. Habeck in his article, "Who May Officiate at the Lord's Supper?"^{xxxiv} He says that if there are Christians in genuine isolation, far removed from a church or pastor of their confession, a "guarded yes" could be given to them to celebrate the Lord's Supper, assuming they know what is proper. WELS soldiers in World War II were sometimes instructed on how they could celebrate communion in the war zones.

Still, as a general practice the administration of the sacraments in our congregations is entrusted to those in the pastoral ministry. Certainly others may be asked to help distribute the Lord's Supper. But pastors are asked to oversee and preside. I know of no one advocating that this responsibility be given to others.

This work fits well with the role of the pastor as the spiritual overseer. The administration of the Lord's Supper, for example, often involves spiritual judgment. Decisions commonly need to be made by the administrant about who is properly prepared to receive the sacrament, both in the public worship services and in the visitation of shut-ins. This requires a knowledge of the sheep, and is definitely the work of spiritual oversight.

Entrusting this work to the pastor also preserves good order in the congregation. I'm sure none of us are overjoyed when a couple says that they have gone ahead and baptized their baby

on their own without any emergency. This can only raise doubts on the part of people. Can we be sure it was done? Can we be sure it was done properly?

In general we call pastors to distribute the treasures of salvation on behalf of the congregation. Administering the sacraments fits naturally with this assignment.

4. Worship leading

Since pastors are asked to preach and to administer the sacraments, it follows naturally that they also be the worship leaders.

Certainly a congregation could ask a lay person to read lessons, if there is a reason for this and it is done in an orderly way without offense. Certainly a congregation could ask a lay person to conduct a service in the absence of the pastor.

But worship leading is generally assumed among us to be part of the work of the called pastor. He is the one who has been trained for it. It fits with his calling as the preacher and overseer of the entire flock.

D. What about teaching adults?

As the “resident theologian” with the most thorough theological training, the pastor will also be the primary teacher of adults in the congregation. As the doctrinal overseer of the congregation, he will be responsible for all teaching in the congregation.

Yet teaching adults is a task which could be shared with others if they are adequately trained. *Shepherd Under Christ* says, “If laymen can be found who are ‘apt to teach’ and who are willing to give the necessary time to preparation, the pastor may extend his Bible class effort by including in it the training of these lay teachers.”^{xxxv}

E. Why reserve these four functions only for pastors?

Certainly a natural question now is: Why should these four functions (preaching, general oversight, administration of sacraments, worship leading) be reserved for pastors? Why couldn’t some of these functions be shared with other public ministers?

We would say that theoretically they could be shared with others. We have complete freedom in the New Testament Church to structure the public ministry in the way that seems best. As Schaller said, “Among us it (the congregation) usually delegates to a single individual the responsibility to do the formal, solemn preaching on a regular basis, to conduct the public worship services, and in addition to serve the individual members of the congregation with the Word according to their needs. These things could also be arranged in an entirely different way since the pastorate in the form which is customary among us was very likely totally unknown in apostolic times.”^{xxxvi}

Yet I would like to suggest that there are two great blessings which the church enjoys by entrusting these four functions generally to a well-trained pastorate. The blessings are: 1) orderliness and 2) purity of doctrine. It’s not that these blessings come automatically with pastors. But having a well-trained pastorate carrying out the above-mentioned functions can more easily bring these blessings than other arrangements.

1. Orderliness

In 1 Corinthians 14 in a section talking about public worship, Paul wrote: “God is not a God of disorder but of peace ...Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” When

Christians gather for worship, God does not want quarreling and confusion. He wants the means of grace to be distributed in an orderly way.

On the basis of this this passage, Luther argued in favor of having one well-trained pastor preach at every service, rather than having a variety of speakers from the floor. He wrote, “I would not be in favor of ...doing away with the pulpit. Rather I would oppose it, for the people are at present too untamed and forward... It is better to retain the pulpit, for then at least things are done decently and in order.”^{xxxvii}

We have reason to feel the same as Luther. Picking one man to preach allows for our services to be done decently and in order.

I suspect that a person could walk into any WELS church in our country on a given weekend and find an orderly distribution of the means of grace, without confusion. Think about it: How has this come to be? This is not to be taken for granted, given the nature of people to be contentious and self-assertive. In large part it happens because the distribution of the means of grace by common agreement has been entrusted to pastors who are trained to do it.

We must not close our eyes to the blessing of orderliness which comes through our present arrangement.

2. Purity of doctrine

A second blessing which God can give through our present arrangement is purity in doctrine.

Now obviously just by having pastors who feed and lead, the church is not guaranteed to remain doctrinally pure. We all know of churches which have been misled by pastors.

Yet this arrangement offers the greatest possibility for purity in doctrine. If each congregation has an overseer who has been thoroughly trained in the truth, false teaching will not be preached publicly and false teaching can be more easily checked in the membership.

Once again think of our WELS situation. On a given weekend I assume that a person could walk into any WELS worship service in the country and hear the same, true doctrine of God’s Word. How has this marvel come to be? Certainly the exercise of careful church discipline is a part of it. But who can deny that it is primarily due to the training of our pastors with thoroughness at a common school.

In this regard I think of what Missionary Cox has said about the church scene in Zambia. He has reported that there are some 6,000 different sects. Why? In large part because there is no theologically trained leadership. Everyone is going off in his own direction.

The best arrangement for public preaching is not to pick the person who has the most pleasant personality and the most self-confidence and ask him to tell his story. Especially this is true if a church is concerned, as ours is, to be a confessional church which holds to a set doctrinal position.

Rather, the best arrangement in order to preserve doctrinal purity is to train competent men thoroughly in the Word of God who can preach and oversee.

The WELS Has a High Opinion of the Pastoral Ministry

A. The high opinion in the past

This brings us to the question with which the paper started. Has the WELS held the pastoral ministry “in low esteem?”

It would be fair to say that much of what has been written in our Synod's history on the doctrine of the ministry has stressed that the pastoral ministry is not the only divinely instituted form of the public ministry. This point often needed to be defended.

Yet there are statements which indicate that the Synod has always had a high opinion of the pastoral ministry as we have devised it. There has been a high opinion because of the important, God-ordained functions which are entrusted to it and because of its proven effectiveness in the past.

Listen to the words of August Pieper: "Could the church or a congregation do away with the present congregational pastorate and introduce a Quaker type of proclaiming the Word?...To give up the glorious divine gift of the congregational pastorate, similar to the episcopate of the middle apostolic age, though not identical, without offering something better and of equal value in its place, would mean despising God's gift for the edification of his kingdom of grace and would be hindering the same...It would therefore be an outrageous despising of Christ, of his kingdom and of his gospel, yes of grace itself, if the church would not in all places fill the public ministry commanded and given to it with the best gifts bestowed upon it by the Holy Spirit. It would indeed be an outrageous despising of Christ and his gospel if in fleshly arbitrariness the church would abolish the pastors and teachers whom God has made proficient for her in the administration of Word and sacrament and would go over to having inadequate lay preachers take turns preaching."^{xxxviii}

One could also argue that the practice of our church body has consistently shown a high opinion of the pastorate. In years past churches were often recognized by the name of the pastor (e.g. "This is Haase's church"). If a WELS baby was to be baptized in Italy, the military pastor from Germany was sent to do it. And think of the effort expended on the training of pastors. Our synod has always given its best to maintain a thorough pastor training program.

Truthfully, I suspect that in the past there more commonly was the fear that the WELS had too high a view of the pastorate rather than too low a view. August Pieper himself warned against "a wrong monarchical, monopolistic view of the office, according to which the pastor concentrates all church offices, even the purely external ones, from preacher to janitor, in his own person."^{xxxix}

Without a doubt it is always a struggle to keep things in balance. It is a struggle to keep a balance between the twin doctrines of the universal priesthood and the public ministry. It is a struggle to keep a balance so that the pastoral ministry is highly respected but not glorified in an exaggerated way.

It will suffice for this paper to say that in the writings and the practice of the WELS there has consistently been a high view of the pastoral ministry.

B. Fears that this high opinion could be lessening

It is honest to say also that there are some in our church body who fear that this high opinion may be lessening.

Some are worried that the possible ordination of male teachers could have as by-product a lower view of pastors. Some fear that pastors would no longer be looked upon having a unique calling. They could more easily be expendable and replaceable.

Some are fearful about the inroads of "church growth" thinking, which can downplay the role of public ministers in an unwholesome way. Pastors in this school of thought simply become enablers who help everyone else to do the ministry.

Some are fearful about possible implications for our pastor-training program with the upcoming amalgamation of colleges. Some have felt that the distinctive work of the pastoral office among us properly called for a separate college for the specialized training. Some fear that the amalgamation may lead to a decline in the thoroughness of training for our pastors.

It is my own personal opinion that some publications in our circles seem to say less than they could in a good way about the pastoral ministry and its importance among us.

C. Encouragement to keep a high opinion of the pastoral ministry

Here is the final encouragement: I hope that all of us continue to have a high opinion of the pastoral ministry.

It's not that the pastoral ministry among us has some divine authorization in contrast to other forms of ministry absolutely essential in the form in which we have it.

Yet we in Christian freedom have entrusted very important, God-ordained work to the pastoral ministry. The pastoral ministry in the past has served the church well in bringing orderliness and doctrinal purity.

We do well to continue to treasure our pastoral ministry. We do well to encourage the brightest and best of God's gifted young men to study for this office. As there may be an influx, God be praised, of new offices in the staff ministry category, we do well not to downplay, de-emphasize or push into a corner the importance of the work of pastors.

As Luther said in his "Sermon on Keeping Children in School," "There is no dearer treasure, no nobler thing on earth or in this life than a good and faithful pastor and preacher."¹

D. Encouragement to continue the thorough training of pastors

Coupled with the last encouragement, is the encouragement that we continue to train pastors in the thorough way in which we have.

As I understand it, the curriculum for the new college at this moment is completely up in the air. The convention said nothing about what would or would not be the curriculum. The new board of control will decide.

I hope that there will be no intention to water down the pastor training curriculum in the new college.

One needs to remember that the public ministry in the Lutheran Church based on the Bible is first and foremost a *teaching* ministry. It is teaching the full Word of God with a proper distinction between law and gospel and a proper emphasis on the doctrine of justification through faith in Christ.

In church bodies which do not emphasize the teaching nature of the public ministry, it may be enough for a pastor to have an exemplary Christian life, an outgoing personality, and personal dedication.

In our church body, thorough training in God's Word is the most important thing. Certainly God can make ample use of personality gifts in the public ministry. But if a person has outstanding personality gifts but a faulty or unclear understanding of God's Word, he will not be a benefit to the church, rather a considerable danger.

One is reminded of the thoughts of E. E. Kowalke: "The ministry, as we have conceived and practiced it in the Wisconsin Synod, is one of teaching and preaching. We want our pastors to be theologians, not social workers. We want them to preach Biblically, exegetically, with an authority of interpretation and application based in independent study of the Scriptures, in the original whenever necessary. We should not want a ministry that is dependent on what it copies

from others, that is uncertain, wavering, unable to make up its mind because it lacks the ability to find out for itself what the Scriptures say. It is not possible to acquire that ability except through a knowledge of the original language of Scripture. We can't afford to slight the languages."^{xli}

It is interesting to note in the history of our Synod that there was a resolution in the early 1900's to establish a "practical seminary" which would have had lower academic standards. In 1903 our Seminary faculty gave this opinion: "In the age in which we are now living (1903), we need more than ever before to insist on sound and thorough education and indoctrination of our pastors."^{xlii} If that was true in 1903, how much more isn't it true today?

My experience is that it takes time for the gospel with all of its implications to sink into a student. My experience is that training received in our pastor training schools was outstanding and not overdone. It is my hope that it will continue.

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