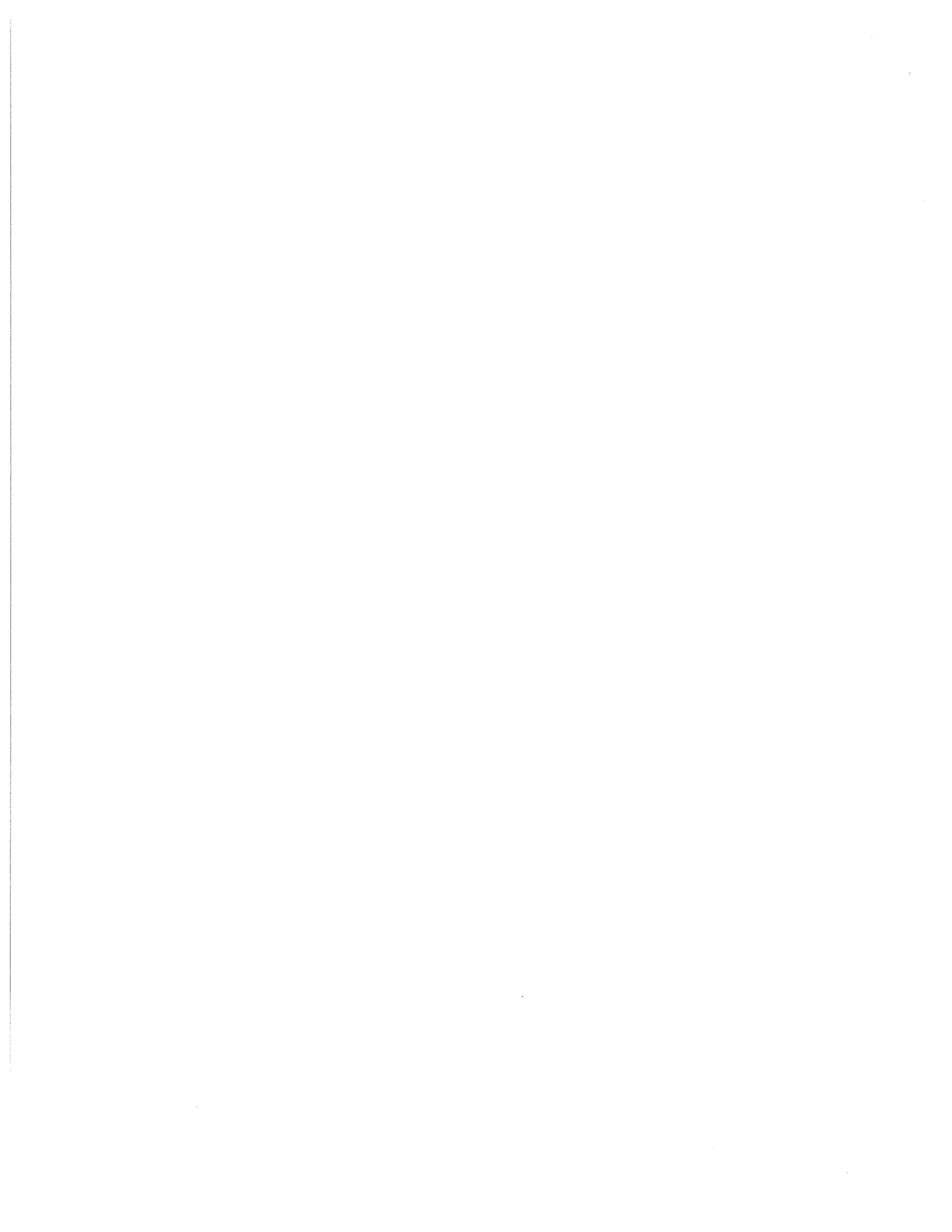


THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY  
IN THE  
WELS AND LC-MS

Metro North Pastoral Conference  
September 17, 1990  
Grafton, Wisconsin  
Delivered by Daniel W. Simons



1           In the ten years I have been in the parish ministry I have  
2 been asked many times, "Just what is the difference between the  
3 Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod?" There are answers to  
4 that question that are short, but not especially helpful. For  
5 instance, you could say that WELS is conservative in doctrine and  
6 practice while LCMS is more liberal...but those are relative  
7 terms and do not really help to define the differences. It could  
8 also be said that WELS is consistent in its doctrine and practice  
9 while LCMS permits greater diversity. And while that may also be  
10 true in broad strokes, it does not help anyone understand the  
11 real differences between the two church bodies.

12           Just what is the difference between the Wisconsin  
13 Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Lutheran Church-Missouri  
14 Synod? When I have answered that question by saying that the two  
15 church bodies are, among other things, divided over the doctrine  
16 of church and ministry, lay people frequently continue to look  
17 puzzled. On the surface, I suppose, such an answer sounds like  
18 the two church bodies are splitting theological hairs. The  
19 inquiring person may very well not understand why disagreement in  
20 this particular doctrine is a big enough deal to separate two  
21 Lutheran church bodies. At first blush it doesn't seem like a  
22 terribly practical kind of thing.

23           I'm sure I'm not telling you anything you don't already know  
24 when I say that this disagreement over the doctrine of church and  
25 ministry is not theological hair-splitting. And I'm sure it's no  
26 news to you that this subject touches on some very practical

1 questions for the church and those who minister in it:

2 --What do we mean by the word church?

3 --Who has authority to supervise doctrine and practice in the  
4 church?

5 --Is a synod truly church? Are its member congregations to be  
6 confessionally one in both doctrine and practice? Or is a  
7 synod merely a federation of human design which has no true  
8 character as church in the same way as a local congregation?

9 --To whom did Jesus give the use of the Keys?

10 --Is the pastoral office of the public ministry the only truly  
11 divinely instituted form of the office of the public ministry,  
12 while all other forms are only auxiliary to it and derived from  
13 it?

14 --Is the New Testament church free to establish other forms of  
15 public ministry and to organize itself in whatever ways will  
16 best enable it in any given time and circumstance to carry out  
17 the work Christ has given his church? Or has Christ instituted  
18 both the pastoral ministry and the local congregation, thus  
19 making other forms of ministry and gatherings of churches  
20 purely human inventions and arrangements?

21 On the one hand, this writer arrives on the scene too late  
22 to fight the battles and work through the controversies that  
23 together were the crucible in which our WELS understanding of the  
24 doctrine of church and ministry was refined. But because all of  
25 this took place in the past, I was able to make use of much  
26 material on this subject written by men more gifted than I.

1           On the other hand, I know that there are battles yet to be  
2 fought on this ground. Satan will certainly not be content to  
3 allow us to retain our doctrine of church and ministry without a  
4 fight. After all, he understands very well, I'm sure, that  
5 confusing the church about its nature, mission, and ministry is  
6 one of the best ways to take it out of action. We need, then, to  
7 review for ourselves both the Biblical doctrine of the church and  
8 ministry, and see more clearly where WELS and LCMS stand divided  
9 over it. That will be the purpose of this paper.

10           To give us a sense of direction in this paper, I suggest  
11 the following outline:

12           **THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN**  
13   **WELS AND LCMS**

14           **I. THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY**

15           **II. CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN LCMS**

16           **III. CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN WELS**

17           **IV. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WELS AND LCMS**

18           **I. THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY**

19           God's Word is quite explicit in pointing out that the church  
20 is, properly speaking, the communion of saints or the entire  
21 number of those whom the Holy Spirit has brought to faith in  
22 Christ. By bringing people to faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit  
23 brings them into an intimate bond with their Savior, a bond that  
24 also exists with all other believers. This is precisely what

1 Paul speaks of when he says:

2       *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow*  
3       *citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the*  
4       *foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the*  
5       *chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and*  
6       *rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being*  
7       *built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

8       *(Ephesians 2:19-22)*

9 Here Paul uses some graphic illustrations to picture this bond  
10 and its intimate nature. But he implies something here that is  
11 quite explicitly stated elsewhere. Paul is careful to point out  
12 that this work of building is not a work of man, but rather of  
13 God. He says:

14       *...those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

15       *(Romans 8:14)*

16 This statement certainly does not militate against all the places  
17 in Scripture where we are instructed to share the message of the  
18 gospel with all men and in so doing bring souls into a bond of  
19 faith with Christ their Savior. Rather, Paul makes it quite  
20 clear that while we are indeed given the task of disseminating  
21 the Good News to the world, it is still the Holy Ghost working  
22 through the gospel who calls, gathers, enlighten, and sanctifies  
23 the whole Christian church on earth, and preserves it in the one  
24 true faith in Christ Jesus. This power of the Word is spoken of  
25 many, many times in Scripture. One picture Scripture uses to  
26 refer to this is found in I Peter 1:23-25:

1 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of  
2 imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

3 "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers  
4 of the field: the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the  
5 word of the Lord stands forever."

6 It is quite evident, then, that membership in the church in its  
7 proper sense is determined by faith in Christ---faith worked by  
8 the Holy Spirit through the gospel. It is this that makes us  
9 members of God's family (Galatians 3:26).

10 In light of this, it becomes very clear that the church in  
11 its proper sense is invisible to all except God, who alone  
12 searches the heart. It cannot be equated with any outward  
13 organization, and to do so flies in the face of what Scripture  
14 says about the church. This invisible nature of the church could  
15 lead some to conclude that the church is merely some theoretical  
16 gathering. Such is not the case. The church as the communion of  
17 saints definitely exists. Ephesians 1:19-22 cited above makes  
18 this obvious, for there Paul speaks not of some theoretical  
19 supposition, but rather he speaks to real people about a very  
20 real thing.

21 Our Lutheran confessions state these truths quite briefly  
22 and clearly in the Augsburg Confession. In Article VIII we read:

23 ...the Church properly is the congregation of saints and  
24 true believers.

25 And again in Article VII:

26 Also they (we) teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The

1 Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly  
2 taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.

3 So then, since the Christian church in the proper sense is  
4 invisible and cannot be equated with any outward form or  
5 organization or denomination, how can the believer know where it  
6 exists? The quote from the Augsburg Confession above speaks of  
7 the marks of the church, namely the Word rightly taught and the  
8 sacraments rightly administered. These are the means which the  
9 Holy Spirit uses to bring sinners into the church. We know from  
10 the clear Word of God also that these means are effective, i.e.  
11 they actually do what God says they do. Hence wherever we find  
12 the marks of the church we most certainly can expect to find  
13 members of the church.

14 Furthermore, wherever the church exists, so also its members  
15 are given the authority of the Keys:

16 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

17 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not

18 forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:22-23)

19 Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles (Of the Power and Primacy  
20 of the Pope):

21 It is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to the person  
22 of one particular man, but to the church, as many clear and firm  
23 arguments testify. For Christ, speaking concerning the keys, Mt 18:19,  
24 adds, "If two or three of you shall agree on earth" etc. Therefore he  
25 grants the keys principally and immediately to the church, just as also  
26 for this reason the church has principally the right of calling (those



1           *who exercise the office of the keys)...*

2           If the Christian wants to know where the church is he need  
3 only look to where the gospel is taught correctly and the  
4 sacraments are administered as Christ intended them. And while  
5 we as believers may not know for certain who else is a member of  
6 that church with us (since faith is invisible), we can recognize  
7 a fellow Christian by his confession. Every believer, by nature,  
8 is a confessor. This principle is stated by Christ himself when  
9 in rebuking the Pharisees he said:

10           *...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*

11           *(Matthew 12:34)*

12 We consider those to be believers who gather around the means of  
13 grace and confess their faith in Christ. And so we see that the  
14 invisible church, the church proper, becomes discernable by its  
15 use of the means of grace.

16           A great deal could be said about the organization of church,  
17 of those gathered around the means of grace. Let a few  
18 observations suffice. Christians, wherever they exist, to whom  
19 have been given the ministry of the keys and the responsibility  
20 of working in the Lord's kingdom, will naturally band together.  
21 This is done not only for mutual edification, but also that they  
22 may work more efficiently. While Scripture clearly speaks of  
23 local congregations (Acts 8:1, Romans 16:16, I Corinthians 1:2,  
24 etc.), individuals given authority by such congregations (Acts  
25 6:3-6, Acts 15:2, 27, II Corinthians 8:18-19), and larger groups  
26 or gatherings in the name of Jesus (Matthew 18:19-20, Acts 20:28,

1 I Timothy 3:5), care must be taken not to draw invalid  
2 conclusions. We certainly know from Scripture that such  
3 gatherings of Christians around the means of grace are both God's  
4 will and pleasing to him. Yet nowhere does God prescribe or  
5 divinely institute any particular form that the gathering of  
6 Christians is to take. The church, then, may exist in various  
7 forms depending on the work at hand and the circumstances. For  
8 example, for local proclamation of the gospel and use of the keys  
9 a local congregation may work nicely. But vigorous mission  
10 outreach to the world may well necessitate the church banding  
11 together in a larger group so that the work may be done in  
12 concert, effectively and efficiently. Whether we call it a  
13 congregation, a district, or a synod, the gathering of believers  
14 around the means of grace to do the work of proclaiming the  
15 gospel is still church. Believers do not lose their status as  
16 members of the church when they gather in a congregation, and  
17 congregations do not lose their churchly character when they  
18 gather into larger groupings. One will look in vain in the  
19 Scriptures for statements to the contrary.

20 This naturally brings us to the matter of ministry. Just as  
21 there is one church (regardless of how its member believers  
22 organize themselves) so there is but one office instituted by  
23 Christ in his church: the ministerial office, the ministry of  
24 the Gospel. The one task Jesus gave his church is to preach the  
25 gospel (in Word as well as sacrament, of course). This work is  
26 properly called a service or ministry, for it is done both in

1 service to Christ and in service to his world...both those  
2 already gathered around the gospel who need to be nurtured and  
3 those who have yet to be gathered.

4 This office has not been given to any one group in the  
5 church, but to the whole church, that is, to every believer. The  
6 Scriptures are clear:

7 *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people*  
8 *belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called*  
9 *you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (I Peter 2:9)*

10 This universal service of priesthood has been given to every  
11 individual believer, not just in theory but to be practically  
12 carried out. Luther's rediscovery of this truth during the  
13 Reformation did not so much mean the abolition of clergy as a  
14 special class, but rather it meant that there was no laity...all  
15 believers have been placed into the ministry!

16 But at the same time it is also true that from the beginning  
17 of the church there were men specially appointed to discharge  
18 publicly the duties of this one ministry. Examples of this can  
19 be found in Acts 13:1-3 and Acts 6:1-6. At this point we should  
20 note that this public ministry is not basically different from  
21 that of the universal priesthood of all believers. It is rather  
22 a special God-ordained way of putting into practice the one  
23 ministry of the gospel.

24 In the New Testament church there is no hierarchy ordained  
25 by God. All Christians are equal before God. None are superior,  
26 nor are others inferior. All are equally entrusted with the same

1 ministry of the gospel. In view of this, no one can assume for  
2 himself or herself the functions of the public ministry except  
3 through a legitimate call. The Smalcald Articles say:

4 For wherever the Church is, there is the authority to administer the  
5 Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the  
6 authority to call, elect and ordain ministers. And this authority  
7 is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human  
8 power can wrest from the Church, as Paul also testifies to the  
9 Ephesians, 4:8, when he says: "He ascended, He gave gifts to men."

10 And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church  
11 "pastors and teachers", and adds that such are given for the ministry,  
12 "for the edifying of the body of Christ." Hence, wherever there is a  
13 true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily  
14 exists. Just as in a case of necessity even a layman absolves, and  
15 becomes the minister and pastor of another...Here belong the statements  
16 of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the Church,  
17 and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20.

18 The congregation, then, certainly has the divine right to  
19 elect, call, and appoint certain believers to the public  
20 ministry. For the sake of good order and love in the church (I  
21 Corinthians 14:33, 40, 16:14) it will certainly regularly make  
22 use of this divine right. Our God, knowing that not all are  
23 equally qualified to perform the public functions of ministry,  
24 has even given his church the qualifications it is to look for in  
25 those it would put into the public ministry: I Timothy 3:1-13,  
26 Titus 1:5-11.

1           The history of Christ's church in the New Testament  
2 certainly bears witness to the fact that he gives to the church  
3 men who are qualified for the various forms of ministry required  
4 in any given time, place, and circumstance (Ephesians 4:7-16,  
5 Romans 12:6-8, I Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31).

6           But by no means let us imagine that only some of those thus  
7 called, elected, or appointed are in the public ministry by a  
8 divine call, while others are there only by human decision. The  
9 divinity of the call is not a case of mere human expediency or of  
10 chance. The Scriptures clearly state that when the body of  
11 believers calls, appoints, or chooses some from its midst to  
12 perform the functions of public ministry that those public  
13 ministers are appointed by God: Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11, I  
14 Corinthians 12:28.

15           In a nutshell, the Scripture's teaching of church and  
16 ministry shows us that the church is real and made up of all  
17 believers, but that such believers are left free to organize  
18 themselves in whatever way Christian fellowship, love, and  
19 effective execution of the Great Commission suggest. The  
20 ministry of the church is given to all believers, but that by  
21 divine right and under divine guidance believers may choose, call  
22 or appoint certain among their number to carry out public  
23 functions of ministry as the needs and circumstances of the  
24 church warrant.

1       II.   CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN THE LCMS

2           The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod found itself wrestling  
3 with the doctrine of church and ministry literally from its  
4 arrival in America.   Seven hundred immigrants from Saxony,  
5 Germany settled in Perry County and St. Louis, Missouri.   But  
6 even before their houses were finished they were faced with a  
7 crisis relative to this doctrine.

8           Following a Rogate Sunday service two different women  
9 confessed to having had adulterous relationships with the group's  
10 leader and "bishop", Martin Stephan.   Combined with these was the  
11 charge of mismanagement of funds.   After an investigation he was  
12 expelled as leader of the immigrant Lutheran group.

13          It was at this point that the group faced its identity  
14 crisis.   With Stephan gone, both laymen and clergymen wrestled  
15 with the question: "Are we church, and therefore able to call  
16 and ordain?   Or must we now return to the church of our  
17 homeland?"   This touched on far more than just the hardship of  
18 travel back to Saxony and the disappointment of broken dreams.  
19 The group had left Saxony in the first place because it became  
20 convinced that there was no future there for confessional  
21 Lutheranism.   Would they now have to go back and make the best of  
22 a bad situation?   In April 1841 Franz Adolph Marbach and C.F.W.  
23 Walther met to debate the true nature of the church.   The  
24 following statement from Walther's thesis touches on the heart of  
25 Missouri's original understanding of church:

26           *The true Church, in the most perfect sense, is the totality of all true*

1       believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world, from among  
2       all peoples and tongues, have been called and sanctified by the Spirit  
3       through the Word. And since God alone knows these true believers (II  
4       Timothy 2:19) the Church is also called invisible. No one belongs to  
5       this true Church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is  
6       the spiritual body of Christ. The name of the true Church also belongs  
7       to all those visible societies in whose midst the Word of God is purely  
8       taught and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to the  
9       institution of Christ. True, in this Church there are also godless men,  
10      hypocrites, and heretics, but they are not true members of the Church,  
11      nor do they constitute the Church...Even heterodox societies are not to  
12      be dissolved, but reformed...The orthodox church is said to be judged  
13      principally by the common, orthodox, and public confession to which  
14      the members acknowledge themselves to have been pledged and which they  
15      profess.

16      Walther had arrived at this understanding of church through a careful study of  
17      the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. He was convinced. When the  
18      dust settled the people had been won to this understanding.  
19      They realized that they were indeed church, and therefore had  
20      every power and authority to call and ordain men into the public  
21      ministry.

22      But in the 1840's Walther's understanding of church and  
23      ministry was challenged again. J.A.A. Grabau, founder of the  
24      Buffalo Synod, issued a "Pastoral Letter" in 1840 which gave  
25      Missouri pause to consider the hand of fellowship he was  
26      extending to them. Grabau held to the view that a congregation

1 owed obedience to its pastors in all things not contrary to God's  
2 Word...even in matters of adiaphora. To run counter to the will  
3 of the pastor in all such things was a violation of God's Will  
4 and required either repentance and agreement or excommunication.  
5 To put it briefly, Grabau's concept of church ministry is that  
6 the universal priesthood of all believers was most definitely  
7 secondary to the authority of the pastor. His was a hierarchical  
8 view of the church and ministry...a view the Saxons in Missouri  
9 did not and could not agree with. But from this controversy  
10 Missouri drew a clearer understanding of ministry.

11 Unfortunately, following Walther there arose in Missouri a  
12 growing idea that the local congregation was a divinely  
13 instituted organization, but that a synod was only a human  
14 arrangement. It wasn't so much that they denied that synod was  
15 church, but rather they said that it was church only in some  
16 derived sense. Franz Pieper certainly held this view and in his  
17 Christian Dogmatics (Volume III, pp. 420-422) expressed his  
18 conviction that the local congregation was the only divinely  
19 instituted form of the church, and that conferences, synods, and  
20 similar convocations were only human inventions for the  
21 futherance of the church. He also insisted that the use of the  
22 Keys, especially excommunication, be declared only by local  
23 churches. This latter view would have disastrous implications  
24 for LCMS in years when close supervision of doctrine and  
25 practice would become crucial.

26 Where is LCMS concerning the doctrine of church and ministry



1 today? To be sure, there are those in LCMS who hold to Walther's  
2 original concept of church...one that is in agreement with the  
3 Word of God. But at the same time, there are many who hold the  
4 later view of church and ministry which caught on in LCMS. In  
5 1985 an article appeared in the Concordia Theological Quarterly  
6 (April-May) entitled, "An Assessment of LCMS Polity and Practice  
7 on the Basis of the Treatise." In that article we read (p. 104):

8       It seems significant that the original name chosen by the founders of  
9       the Synod did not contain the word "church": "Evangelical Lutheran  
10       Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States." The Synod was not the  
11       church. The synod was a walking together of churches who found them-  
12       selves united by a common confession. The churchly functions by which  
13       the church is identified (i.e., the administration of the means of  
14       grace) are not a proper function of a Synod. The Synod is not  
15       identified as a church because it does not, as Synod, possess the keys  
16       immediately as do the local churches. The Synod does not call men to  
17       administer the means of grace. The local churches or congregations  
18       do this.

19 The author goes on to say that since the Synod is not church, but  
20 only a human organization for advisory purposes, the district  
21 presidents of synod do not truly hold the office of the public  
22 ministry. In his view they have only a law ministry, since it is  
23 designed only to keep good order in the church.

24       Regarding the doctrine of ministry, the LCMS Commission on  
25 Theology and Church Relations published a pamphlet called "The  
26 Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature" (1981) In that

1 pamphlet the following definitions were given (p. 12):

2       The Office of the Public Ministry--It is the divinely established office  
3           referred to in Scripture as "shepherd," "elder," or "overseer."  
4           This term is equivalent to "the pastoral office." Within this  
5           office are contained all the functions of the ministry of Word and  
6           sacrament in the church.

7       Auxiliary Offices--These are offices established by the church. Those  
8           who are called to serve in them are authorized to perform certain  
9           of the functions of the office of the public ministry. These  
10          offices are "ministry" and they are "public," yet they are not the  
11          office of the public ministry. Rather, they are auxiliary to that  
12          unique pastoral office, and those who hold these offices perform  
13          them under the supervision of the holders of the pastoral office.  
14          Such offices are established by the church as the need arises, and  
15          their specific functions are determined by the church. The most  
16          common auxiliary office today is the office of the teaching  
17          ministry.

18       In other words, the "official" view of LCMS regarding  
19       ministry is that only the office of the public ministry (pastoral  
20       office) is instituted by God, while all other forms of ministry  
21       in the church are auxiliary to it and derived from it.

22       This concept of ministry is not necessarily new in LCMS.  
23       W.H.T. Dau and Th. Engelder quote Walther in Walther and the  
24       Church (St. Louis: CPS, 1938), p. 79:

25           The highest office is the ministry of preaching, with which all other  
26           offices are simultaneously conferred. Therefore every other public

1 office in the Church is merely a part of the office of the ministry, or  
2 an auxiliary office, which is attached to the ministry of preaching.

3 For a long time, these concepts of church and ministry have  
4 been alive and growing in LCMS, and they are certainly to be  
5 considered the current position.

### 6 III. CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN WELS

7 Since the history of our WELS was attached to that of LCMS  
8 for so many years, it should not surprise us that LCMS struggles  
9 over this issue also became our struggles. Various articles  
10 were produced on this subject by our own theologians. The  
11 faculty of the Wauwatosa seminary presented its views in a series  
12 of Quartalschrift articles in 1912 and 1913. Meetings were held  
13 between the Concordia Seminary faculty and our seminary's  
14 faculty, but no agreement was reached. In general it could be  
15 said that these articles set forth the WELS position (see part I)  
16 while the Concordia Faculty generally held to the LCMS position  
17 (see part II). The Thiensville Theses of 1932 were intended to  
18 bring the two bodies to agreement, but never quite succeeded in  
19 doing so.

20 In 1970 a booklet was produced by our Commission on  
21 Doctrinal Matters entitled Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin  
22 Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In that booklet are contained  
23 "Theses on Church and Ministry." They stand as a clear  
24 exposition of our understanding of this doctrine.

25 This writer is in perfect agreement with the two antitheses

1 found there relative to church (p. 9) and ministry (p. 11):

2 We hold it to be untenable to say that the local congregation is  
3 specifically instituted by God in contrast to other groupings of  
4 believers in Jesus' name; that the the public ministry of the keys  
5 has been given exclusively to the local congregations.

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

10 For a better understanding of these important doctrines of  
11 Scripture I can do no better than to heartily encourage you to  
12 attend the 1990 Fall Pastors Institute at Wisconsin Lutheran  
13 Seminary. The doctrine of ministry and its application to the  
14 life of the church and our life's work will be one of the two  
15 topics discussed.

16 IV. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WELS AND LCMS OVER  
17 THIS ISSUE

18 First, and perhaps most obviously, this difference in  
19 doctrine and practice between WELS and LCMS is one that continues  
20 to make church fellowship between these two bodies impossible.  
21 In fact, the doctrine of church fellowship is so closely tied to  
22 the doctrines of church and ministry that one can hardly discuss  
23 one in a practical way without talking about the others at some  
24 point.

25 Secondly, it is this writer's opinion that the current LCMS

1 position on church and ministry makes the future of confessional  
2 Lutheranism (in doctrine and practice) in LCMS bleak indeed.  
3 Under current church polity LCMS is left with a house to clean  
4 but she has given up her broom. If church only truly exists on  
5 the local congregational level, then the door is open to view the  
6 synod only as a federation in which congregations are not  
7 required to be truly one confessionally. The entire Seminex  
8 movement in the '60's stepped through that door, and to a  
9 tragically large degree has taken LCMS with it.

10 At the same time, if (as the CTQ article stated) the  
11 synodical leadership of LCMS is purely a legal one, functioning  
12 under the rules and regulations set up in a constitution of human  
13 origin, then the ability to supervise doctrine and practice is  
14 hobbled. Such a view of church and ministry can easily develop  
15 into synodical leaders functioning on the basis of power and  
16 authority given them by the consitution. Is this perhaps what is  
17 occuring in practice even now in LCMS?

18 At this point it is worth recalling the warning of Paul in I  
19 Corinthians 10:12:

20 *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*  
21 WELS stands firm in this doctrine, and we need to encourage each  
22 other to keep on doing so. The confessional integrity of our  
23 church ultimately is at stake, but more importantly, our  
24 faithfulness to our gracious God and and His eternal Word  
25 requires it. We must continue to love these doctrines, too, and  
26 to remind ourselves of what they mean for us.

1           So, when we in the parish ministry begin to feel annoyed at  
2 the "synod" and how it carries out its work, we'll need to remind  
3 ourselves that "synod" is church, too...fellow believers gathered  
4 in a larger church around the means of grace to fulfill the Great  
5 Commission. In the WELS we'll need to remind ourselves that we  
6 are synod.

7           When those times come when we question whether "those guys"  
8 at 2929 N. Mayfair Rd. are getting too numerous, we'll have to  
9 remind ourselves that the larger church has conferred on those  
10 men the office of the ministry, albeit a somewhat specialized  
11 one, and that the larger church of the synod has done so with the  
12 same divine authority as was used when we were placed into our  
13 respective ministries.

14          On the circuit, district and synodical levels we will have  
15 to work through the tension that naturally exists between not  
16 wanting to interfere in the ministry of others and yet at the  
17 same time desiring to closely supervise doctrine and practice  
18 among us. That will call for renewed appreciation for the forms  
19 of organization we have established for ourselves using our  
20 Christian liberty and sanctified common sense.

21          As I stated previously, Satan will not be content to let us  
22 retain our doctrines of church and ministry in harmony with the  
23 Word without a fight. He certainly must know that if we become  
24 confused about what the church is, the church somewhere becomes  
25 vulnerable to attack and inactivity. If he can confuse us about  
26 who really has the keys, he hampers the mission of the church.

1 And if he confuses you and me about whether our call into the  
2 public ministry is truly divine, he shakes our confidence in God  
3 and in his blessing on our work to its very foundations.

4 Only by holding on to the Bible's teaching of church and  
5 ministry and by living it out in the life and work of our church  
6 will we all continue to find courage and commitment to our  
7 ministry in the words of Jesus:

8 ...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.  
9 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind  
10 on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will  
11 loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19)

12 **TO GOD ALONE BE GLORY!**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brenner, John M., "The Congregation in its Relationship to the Synod". An essay delivered to the Michigan District Convention of the WELS on June 12-14, 1984 at Saginaw, Michigan.
- Commission on Doctrinal Matters (WELS), "Theses On Church and Ministry," Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1970.
- Commission on Theology and Church Relations (LCMS), The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981.
- Concordia Triglotta. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921.
- Mueller, John Theodore, TH.D. Christian Dogmatics. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955.
- Nelson, E. Clifford. The Lutherans in North America. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Schuetze, Armin, "The WELS and LCMS--Where Are We Today?" An essay delivered to the Nebraska District Convention of the WELS on June 13-15, 1988 at Waco, Nebraska.
- Simons, Daniel W., "The Future of Confessionalism in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod." A senior thesis in the files of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library, dated April 20, 1980.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Dogmatics Notes.