

# The Theology of Lay Ministry

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## Introduction

The Reformation emphasized the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and brought to light again the understanding of what it means to live as a Christian in this world, i.e., to be a layman. Still, even in the Lutheran Church, the term carries a negative connotation for many. A layman is one who can't. He can't preach, marry and bury. While the clergy does the real work of the church, the laity has, as someone has said, but to pray, pay and obey.

At any rate, we know that within the church we have a disastrous unemployment rate among the laity. The Institute for American Church Growth has estimated that in many churches 10% of the members are doing 90% of the work. In such churches those 10% are probably not consciously ministering but simply doing work. They are the willing workers who do what needs to be done, regardless of spiritual gifts or qualifications. Pastors rightly praise God for such people!

The need for increased lay involvement in our church body was noted by Mr. James Jones, president of Resource Advancement, in his report of a development study conducted on behalf of our WELS. An outsider to our circles, he conducted several hundred interviews to learn the nature of the WELS. On that basis he included in his report this observation: "It is the *layman* who will set aside his first fruits; it is the *layman* who will offer his money to support the Lord's work; it is the *layman* who must have a sense of ownership in WELS. It is the *layman* that WELS should give more and more authority, as well as responsibility, in practical and business affairs" ("Development Study Conducted for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1986-87," p. 30).

The role of the layman in the WELS today might well parallel the contemporary image which Francis Ayres uses to portray the role of the laity. He says the prevailing notion views the "church as housed in a split-level dwelling—the laymen in the cellar with a limited view and the clergy upstairs with all the comforts of home. (*Ministry of the Laity*, p 30)

Much of the "church work" being shouldered by laymen in recent years has not basically departed from this two-tiered approach. The tacit assumption is that the clergy really are the church in action and the best the laity can do is to assist that clerical ministry. Such an example would be the view of lay evangelism which puts the laymen to work in getting an unchurched person into the church building so that there the parish pastor may perform the real work of the church on that person. What goes on in and around the church building is viewed as church work. The layman is doing church work when he assists the clergy as usher, elder, treasurer, altar guild, etc.

Pastors face a dilemma of their own in regard to lay ministry. It is a dilemma stated very well in the title of an article in the Spring, 1982, issue of *Leadership*: "Doing VS Managing, the Eternal Struggle." Pastoral doing is direct ministry to individuals and the preparation for that direct ministry. It is John 21:15, "Feed my sheep," applied through preaching, teaching, counseling and other direct ministry. Doing is the crowd favorite. Parishioners like to see their pastor visiting, working with youth, etc. That's what his life is all about, many assume, so they cheer for the doing. Managing, on the other hand, is guiding and enabling people to minister according to the gifts they have received. It is providing the climate, knowledge and skills that

enable the laity to function successfully. Pastoral managing is Eph. 4:12, “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Managing takes time. It is often an investment which seeks future dividends.

Both managing and doing are worthy things for pastors to do with their time. Both are essential; both are ordained by God. Neither should be avoided. Pressure, however, tends to crowd out the managing. There’s just too much to be done in too little time. It’s easier to do it yourself, especially when so many members don’t want to be involved. It’s easy to think the work is done better when I do it myself because lay people just don’t know how to do it as well. There are genuine pressures of time and work that needs to be done just to keep the parish afloat. It’s so easy to look around to see who can be recruited “just so I can get my work done.” Survival pressures of the parish can narrow the scope of church work in our thinking and preaching to only that which is done around the church and directly for the church. No one really intends it to be that way but somehow that’s how it is.

In our time it may well be that the greatest single bottleneck to the renewal and outreach of the church is the division of roles between clergy and laity. Problems of understanding and practicing lay ministry exist. Your own perception of the status of lay ministry may be much more positive or negative than this introduction. It matters little, so long as we are prepared to seriously consider the subject at hand. In this paper you will find no easy solutions for complex matters. You will find, I pray, a clear presentation of biblical truth that will motivate us even more to develop substantive approaches to the practice of lay ministry.

### **The Theology of Lay Ministry**

The theology of lay ministry involves the study of three subjects: the membership of the Church, the mission of the Church and the ministry of the Church. As we consider each we will find the complete theology of the laity, much like the study of a triangle requires the study of all three sides.

### **The Membership of the Church**

Throughout this paper the word “Church” will appear with a capital “C”. When it so appears it will have the meaning given by the Augsburg Confession in Article VII: “Assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”

The Scriptures use a multiplicity of images or pictures to describe this Church. In *Enlightened With His Gifts* the statement is made that Paul S. Minear in a book he has written has identified and explained 96 different images of the Church in the New Testament. Obviously there are many ways in which the Church is pictured; however, one of the more frequent and illuminating images that the Bible uses is the Church as the people of God. In the Old Testament, for example, the phrase ‘*am Elohim* (people of God) often describes all of Israel. In Ex 19:6 we read, “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” To be sure the people often lost their, corporate sense of being God’s people. Yet God continued to emphasize this truth through his prophets, such as Jeremiah: “For as a belt is bound around a man’s waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to me, declares the Lord, to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened” (13:11).

There are many New Testament passages which use this picture, i.e., Ro. 9, Ga. 6, 2 Cor. 6, Titus 2. In 1 Pe. 2:9,10 the metaphor stands out in unmistakable clarity—“a people belonging to God,...once you were not a people but now you are the people of God.”

In passages such as these we find the Greek word *laos* which is the root term for the word *laity*. *Laos* is a technical term for God’s people, in contrast to other people, the *ethnos* who are the nations. It is a term of honor. God has taken individuals who believe in Jesus, both Jew and gentile, and has called them apart from the *ethnoi* (nations) to make them a *laos* (people) for himself (Acts 15:14). In Christ we are now both the temple and the people of God (2 Cor. 6:15f). The God of holiness has taken up residence in our lives. Because he now lives and walks among us as our God we are in a unique way his own. In Old and New Testament usage all Christians are God’s laity (*laos*).

This unique relationship with God is the prized possession of all his children. All now being children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, there is among his people “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Ga. 3:28).

A second image that contributes to our understanding of the Church is that of the body of Christ. The most thorough discussion of this image is found in 1 Cor. 12:12-27. The human body is described as both one and many: one body with many members, each of which has its important function in and for the body. So the Church, Paul states, is one body in Christ. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (vs. 13). Paul points out different functions: apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. In spite of this diversity, however, Paul insists, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (vs. 27).

A third set of images portrays the Church as the household of God. This image is rooted in Jesus’ statement concerning his followers, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt. 12:49b-50). In Eph. 2:19 we read, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.” There is the long comparison of the Church with the family in Eph. 5:21-6:4. Though this section applies to the family first and the Church second, its effect may be seen in both directions.

Through the above mentioned images of the Church there seem to run at least four common themes. First, the Church is a corporate reality, a group of people, a family. It exists and as Christians we are members of it.

Second, God is the one who calls the Church into being and sustains it through his Holy Spirit. The Church is people, but not just any people. It is made up of the saints, the holy people of God.

Third, the Church comprises the whole people of God, clergy and laity together. The fullness of the Church is found only in its total membership. The laity as it is, not a select laity, must always be kept in mind. It is a dangerous tendency to think only in terms of a select laity, of those who have demonstrated commitment and faithfulness and who possess the advantages of education and position.

Fourth, there is equality in the Church. The biblical concept of a people of God who find their identity in him helps us guard against the particularly dangerous heresy of different classes of Christians. Christ, Paul affirms, “is all *and is in all*” (Col. 3:11). God has revealed that this Jesus has entered into an amazing relationship with believers, “which is Christ in you, the hope

of glory.” Thus Paul goes about his ministry “admonishing and teaching *everyone* with all wisdom, so that we may present *everyone* perfect in Christ”. (Col. 1:28f).

This is important for us to grasp when we approach the role of the laity in the Church. God knows nothing of two tiered Christianity; the Bible affirms the equality of all believers! To some this might seem a threatening teaching. It might appear to drag the clergy down to the level of the laity. In fact, equality in the Church must be understood as lifting every believer up to realize his full potential as, one of the *laos* of God.

- Christ who is all is in all.
- With Christ in you there is hope for each of glorious things.
- With Christ in you everyone can be instructed and built up.

The biblical concept of the *laos* of God demands that we call the whole community of faith to confront their true identity, to show the root of their identity in God’s mighty acts and calling. We are to invite all the people of God to a personal commitment to live out their identity as his own people by responsive obedience to a God whose voice calls each one to minister and serve.

### **The Church is Mission**

God’s all-pervading concern about the world in need, the world lost in sin, is basic to the meaning of the Church. When God singles out Abram he does so for a universal purpose. Abram is told to leave his own country and family in blind faith to go to an unknown land in order to become the father of a great nation. But the final word about this elective and selective act of God is: “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gn. 12:3). In choosing Israel God remained faithful to his purpose for the world. Jn. 3:16 tells us clearly that God so loves the world that he gave his one and only Son. It is not said that he loves the faithful, the believers, the Church. The whole world is the object of his love. Jesus in his prayer, “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” sees the world as the theatre of God’s activity. The Apostle Paul writes, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). Paul opens up the wide scope of the Church’s mission in Eph. 1:9,10, “And he made known the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

The import of these and many other passages is that the Church exists for the world. The Church dare not be self-centered. The Church is always to be God’s apostolic people who are reaching out to the world.

Hendrik Kraemer has expressed this in a striking manner in his book *A Theology of the Laity*. He says that the Church is Mission. Mission is not something that the Church does, so much as it is a part of the very essence of the Church. He writes: “The Church is Mission. That is something quite different from what is commonly meant when we speak about the missionary task or obligation of the Church. In the minds of people the missionary task or obligation of the Church is conceived as being one of its activities. Perhaps one of its important and great activities, but at any rate an activity in regard to which one can take different attitudes, of real involvement or of greater or lesser detachment. This possibility which is in ordinary church life a reality, contradicts the nature and calling of the Church, if it is true that the Church is Mission, and not only has missions as one form of its activities. The Church has missions suggests that there are certain times and certain parts of the world in and on which this activity becomes as

actual fact. The Church is Mission implies that it is in all times and places the world-wide and local-near embrace of the world, in and to which it is sent” (pg. 131-32).

The Church needs an organizing and integrating principle around which all of its members may gather, which unites and enthuses, and which enables all to understand the relationship of all activities. God gave us such a principle when he gave us his mission stated in the words of Mt. 28:18-20. A close reading of the Greek shows that there is really only one command in the Great Commission, that is, the mission to make disciples. The mission of the Church is singular and simple to grasp. The mission of the Church is the making of disciples.

The word “disciple” means basically a learner, one who accepts the teacher’s beliefs, lifestyle and mission. Sometimes in the Bible “disciple” is used to designate a follower of Jesus, regardless of the level of commitment. Generally, however, it implies a marked degree of maturity in the Christian faith. In this sense a disciple is a dedicated, loving, obedient and fruitful follower of Jesus. In *Good News Is For Sharing* Leighton Ford wrote: “Discipleship is not a point someone reaches. Rather it is a process. I am a disciple if I am one who is moving with Jesus and for Jesus, learning from him, reaching out to others because of him.”

The mission is singular, but the focus is dual. The Church carries out its mission on behalf of the world through daily service, witness, evangelism and the work of missions. When the Holy Spirit works faith through God’s Word, a new disciple has been born. Now begins the process of living with Jesus and for Jesus, learning from him and being equipped to serve him and reach out to others because of him. The Church, therefore, becomes the focus of the mission through such ministries as worship, education, exhortation, service and fellowship.

Everything that the Church does, whether it is scattered in the world in daily life or gathered in such units as family, congregation or synod, is to have something to do with mission, with getting the gospel of Jesus Christ out to people. The communication of this mission and the acceptance of it by more and more Christians are essential for building the joy, dedication and excitement that is so evident among those Christians whose story is told in the Book of Acts.

The work force to carry out this mission is available. The Institute for American Church Growth, for example, has determined that members of churches have the following time for structured church ministry: 30% have 1-2 hours per month, 39.3% have 3-5 hours; 25% have 6-7 hours; and, 5.7% have 8+ hours. Dr. Win Arn notes that most churches are under-utilizing their available people power by 70-80%. If a typical church of 200 members was to see each member find his/her place in ministry, the church would add the equivalent of 16 full-time staff persons (“Growth Report” #6, Pasadena: Institute for American Church Growth).

### **The Church is Ministry**

We have seen that the Church is God’s people, the body of Christ. Inherent in the life of that Church is Mission. Another essential in the life of the Church is Ministry. Mission and ministry belong to the Church as breathing to the human body. They are the means through which the Church continues to be the instrument for God’s purposes.

Again, I make reference to Kraemer’s book *A Theology of the Laity*. He writes that the Church is Ministry and therefore has ministries. All ministry is a witness to Christ, an overt or covert invitation to accept him as the Lord of all of life and of each individual life.

In answer to the question, “Why does it seem worthwhile and justified to say the Church is Ministry and therefore has ministries?” he writes, “For two main reasons: because of the evidence which shines through the New Testament in the centrality of the *diakonia* (ministry),

and because of the Church's whole relation to Christ. The former is dependent on the latter" (pg. 138).

Indeed there is a great deal of evidence in the New Testament. On the very day he rose from the dead Christ spoke the words of Jn. 20:19-23 to his Church. Several points of importance can be learned from this passage. First is that the Office of the Ministry, i.e. the right and authority to be God's ambassadors, and its content—the gospel in Word and sacraments which proclaim the forgiveness of sins are a gift to the Church from our Lord Jesus Christ. The Office of the Ministry is the voice of Christ to his people. The Church does not control this ministry. It is the agency of God for carrying out his ministry.

Secondly, Jesus entrusts the Office of the Ministry to the whole Church. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (vs. 21). The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions are very clear in affirming that the Office of the Ministry and the Office of the Keys by which forgiveness is proclaimed or withheld are given to the whole Church.

The biblical designation of all Christians as "priests of God" is a further affirmation of this truth. In 1 Pe. 2:9,10 we read that all Christians are royal priests. They have free access to God because sin no longer separates them from God. They may approach God personally. The name is no mere empty title; it gives expression to the rights and powers of God's people. It also reminds them of their duties and responsibilities.

The application of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in the Bible is the designation of all Christians as ministers. It is important for us to note that the term minister and its derivatives in the Bible are used as often with reference to lay Christians as they are to someone we'd consider a clergyman or holder of a specific church office. All Christians are called by God into the ministry; all are called to serve. The historian Philip Schaff provides an accurate and workable definition of the priesthood of all believers: "The right and duty of every believer to read the Word of God in his vernacular tongue, to go directly to the throne of grace, and to take an active part in all the affairs of the church according to his peculiar gift and calling."

Ministry is service and there are a number of functions of ministry which apply to all Christians as specified in Scripture. A listing of these functions includes such activities as forgiving and retaining sins, studying Scripture, worshiping and communing, praying, giving of offerings, service to those in need, witnessing and counseling. In addition Scripture tells us that every Christian has received one or more spiritual gifts (1 Pe. 4:7-11). A spiritual gift may be defined as a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit according to God's grace. Every member of the Church possesses at least one such attribute which is to be used within the body of Christ for the purpose of building up the Church in terms of both numbers and spiritual strength. We will find listings of spiritual gifts in Eph. 4, Ro. 12, 1 Cor. 12 and 1 Pe. 4.

In discussing the many different gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the people of God, his Church, the Apostle Paul reminds us that the Church is like a body with many parts—all are necessary, all are useful and all are important. Because all Christians are ministers called to serve in general ways and through spiritual gifts in more specialized ways, it is important that all the Church has a proper understanding of how each member fits into the body and what each member is specifically equipped by God to do in ministry.

The sectors of life in which the Church ministers number three. The first and most important sector is the family. Parents are to be priestly witnesses toward their children, for example. Paul exhorts the Ephesians in this way, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). These words imply

a twofold duty on the part of parents. First, they must train their children, that is, nurture them with the Word of God. They must also admonish them, that is; set them right with the Word of God. The ministry of the Church to the family includes such activities as worship, study of God's Word, absolution of sins, witness and Christian service. As the primary institution of God in this world the ministry of the Church must properly begin here.

In the organized, visible church the Church also ministers. We must not say with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Our duty to this respect is described by Paul in these words: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as to fact you are doing...And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Th. 5:11,14,15). The specific aim of such ministry is indicated by the writer of Hebrews in these words: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching" (He. 10:24,25). Here all Christians carry on their ministry through such functions as preaching, teaching, worshiping, praying, giving offerings, evangelizing, sending missionaries, serving, etc. Here the Church demonstrates especially that it is a body of many parts, and the importance and distinction of spiritual gifts is evident in such ministries as exhortation, leadership, administration, showing mercy, knowledge, wisdom and discerning of spirits.

With respect to the world the Church has a similar duty to minister. Here the Church is the Church of the dispersion. Through lives that have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ the Church continues to minister in acts of hospitality and mercy as tangible demonstration of faith and in verbal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What can be confusing is the relationship that is to exist between all ministers and those called to be in the public ministry, such as pastors and teachers. The difference is not one of status but of function. The Apostle Paul, for example, says of laymen that they are "my fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Col. 4:11). As a public minister he also sees it as his responsibility to exhort them, "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord" (Col. 4:17). From this brief example and passages such as Eph. 4 we see that the public ministry flows from the ministry of all Christians (the Church) and is for the benefit of all Christians (the Church).

We offer the following analogy to aid our understanding. A father of six children dies. In his will he leaves his considerable possessions of real estate and business to his six children with the provision that the estate is not to be divided but is to be held in trust by all. The six heirs are equal in their standing but they now elect one of their peers to be administrator. Being one of the children he is a joint heir with his five brothers and sisters, but as administrator he has responsibility to supervise, make decisions, plan and carry out the functions of the business.

So it is also in the Christian congregation. All Christians in the congregation hold the Office of the Ministry jointly. However, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, public ministers have been divinely called to a form of administration. As Paul says to the Ephesian elders so he says to all in the public ministry: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Ac. 20:28). On the other hand, it is likewise essential that the congregation hear the words of He. 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." Maintaining this balanced relationship between

congregation and public ministers is essential for the spiritual well-being of the members and for the work of God's kingdom.

Pastors and teachers are called by the congregation to fill certain public functions of the Office of the Ministry in behalf of all members who continue to hold the Office of the Ministry together as a common possession. It is the call, issued by the calling body under the direction of the Holy Spirit, which determines what those public functions are to be. In the case of pastors, for example, the call specifies such functions as publicly preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments. In so doing the congregation does not "surrender" these functions of ministry to the pastoral office. For the sake of decency and order it has delegated their public administration, but the authority and responsibility for them remain with the congregation.

Through their public administration of the gospel especially, but in other ways also, it is incumbent upon those to the public ministry that they provide leadership for the congregation. Leadership involves our daily living of the gospel as examples to the saints. It includes our giving direction to worthwhile endeavors and or people in such a way that the membership follows and goals are accomplished to the glory of God.

Also in Ephesians 4 God clearly specifies that a major function of those in the public ministry is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The public ministry is provided by Jesus Christ, and people are called to fill it, so that all of God's people can be engaged in ministry. Public ministers are to provide the training activities so that the rest of the ministers of Christ can function effectively in ministry.

In other words, public ministers are not hired by the "stockholders" of the congregation to perform their functions for them. It is impossible for publicly called workers to begin to perform the ministry which God has given to all Christians. Attempts to do so lead to spiritual immaturity, instability, frustration and dissatisfaction.

In *Pastoral Leadership* Jay Adams clearly warns the pastor who on his own tries to do the work of an entire congregation:

"1. He fails because he does not have the blessing of Christ upon his program; he has substituted (well-meaningly, perhaps, but none-the-less highhandedly substituted) a human plan for the divine one.

"2. He fails because he does not have the many opportunities and contacts that only the members of the congregation have.

"3. He fails because he spreads himself too thin, trying to do too much as one person. It is nothing less than pride for any one individual to think that he is capable of doing what God has said is the work of the entire congregation.

"4. He fails also as a pastor-teacher. In spreading himself so thinly over the works of evangelism as well as that of shepherding and teaching, he does none of these things well. His sermons suffer, his members are not cared for and even the fruit of evangelism is usually minimal.

"5. He fails—and this is the most significant failure of all—because wittingly or unwittingly, he has disobeyed and thereby dishonored the Chief Shepherd by whom he has been 'given' to the church in order to shepherd and teach so that the sheep might discover, develop and deploy their own gifts. Thus he fails to equip each member for his own work of ministry."

## Summation



As a means of gathering our thoughts we might summarize the theology of the laity in three foundation statements.

**1. The laity are the Church.** Biblically we have no basis for saying that the Church is composed of clergy and laity, as though they were two separate groups. The current use of the terms *clergy* and *laity* goes back in history to the appointment of priests by bishops and originated in the post-apostolic life of the church, according to Oscar Feucht in *Everyone A Minister* (pg. 54). In the New Testament *kleros* and *laos* are the same people. When, according to God's provision, certain people are called to a public ministry (which we often call clergy), they do not cease to be *laos*.

**2. The laity possess the mission of the Church.** All Christians are workers in the Great Commission. All Christians have responsibility for its fulfillment.

**3. All the laity are ministers of God.** Public ministers are called to teach and preach and to equip others according to God's Word. Nevertheless Scripture speaks only of first-class citizens. There is no such thing as part-time ministers as compared with full-time ministers. All Christians are called to minister in ways that are common to all Christians and in differing ways according to call and gifts.

A Theology of the Laity must become a "theology of personal ministry" on the part of all Christians. It must show how our identities are to be expressed in personal ministries. Therefore, permit a few statements regarding the practice of lay ministry.

### **The Practice of Lay Ministry**

This portion of the paper will not labor with specifics, at least not many, nor with the "how to's." That will be the task of the next essayist. It will rather seek to list a few of the "whats" that this writer thinks are necessary. In so doing I pray that we might further develop the vision that we have and accept some of the challenges for ministry that confront us.

#### **Public Ministers**

1. As pastors and teachers we need to be reminded that our primary calling is in our baptism and not in our ordination. Our ordination needs to be understood against the background of the general ordination of all Christians through baptism. The laity are not a secondary order; they are, in fact, the first order, for basically all of us are *laos*, and those called to a public ministry are first lay and then clerical.
2. We need to remember that we are laymen. The ministry which God gives to all Christians is a ministry in which we are involved also. This is true in our families and in the world, but it also has its applications in our congregations and schools.
3. We are to exercise authority that is earned by love. The primary nature of the church is not that of a democracy. Rather it is a theocracy with Christ as its Head. His authority is represented in the church through the Office of the Ministry and that is publicly administered through those called to do so. By our divine call we are persons of authority, but in a church characterized by images such as family, household and body, it will not do for us to seek to exercise that authority as little dictators.

Love must characterize our ministries. People must be our priority.

4. We must commit ourselves to leadership development. The pattern of Jesus who selected twelve disciples as his companions and who had an inner circle of three among the twelve is to be our pattern. I'd like to suggest four reasons why this makes sense:
  - a. It is within the realm of possibility of accomplishment. To seek to disciple an entire congregation or all the parents of a classroom is to attempt the ludicrous. Discipling begins with a few and by stages it extends to the whole.
  - b. It deepens personal relationships. The quality of interpersonal relationships with lay leaders will spell success or defeat. In most churches it's impossible to know everyone intimately, but it is possible with a select group of leaders. This means spending personal time with them.
  - c. It deepens spiritual relationships. In making disciples we teach them with loving care with the goal that they believe and obey the words of Jesus. Our effectiveness as leaders is directly proportionate to our helping others understand and live the Christ-like life.
  - d. It improves communication. Good communication builds trust. We don't have to shout a hole-in-one or catch the most fish to win the confidence of our leaders, but we do have to be with them. They need to know us as people in touch with their world. When two people pray the masks are off, and loving acceptance and trust can be established.
5. We must know our calling and plan our work. Each week it would be helpful for both pastors and teachers to block out those hours we will spend in direct ministry and those which will be used for equipping. We have a responsibility to educate the congregation regarding our game plans. The public ministry is shrouded in too much myth. That is one reason why the ministry of equipping has never been popular. Everyone likes the results in time, but few are able to spend the time necessary. Unless the congregation knows and agrees with our plans for ministry there will be misunderstanding and conflict.

### **The Church**

1. Mission and ministry must become over-riding concerns of the congregation. There will never be a widespread ministry of laity until there is widespread understanding and acceptance of the mission and ministry of God's Church. In our congregations questions such as these need to be asked and answered: (1) What is the true mission of the Church and of this congregation? (2) How can all that is done in this congregation promote our true task? (3) To what extent is everything that we are doing changing the lives of the people involved? and (4) What is this congregation doing to train and involve our members in the true work we have to do? Too seldom are such fundamental questions asked; less seldom are they given satisfactory answers. Such questions open our eyes to the need for developing disciples within the congregation and help us see better the evangelism field which surrounds the congregation.
2. Let's seriously examine the terminology we use in our congregations. Lay and clergy are terms freighted with secular meanings of amateur and professional respectively. It would seem more biblical to give the laity the title of ministers and to refer to those in the public ministry by the office to which they are called—pastors, teachers, etc.
3. The theology of the laity needs to become lay theology to a greater extent than it now is. Even having 25% of the ministers in Bible class is not a satisfactory level. All Christians are in need of good theology. How we will involve all members in the study of God's Word is

perhaps the most critical issue of all. Here there seems to be much need for research and creativity. It is time to explore more fully different methods of Bible study such as Bible study cells, weekend seminars and retreats, and quarterly spiritual growth programs. It is important that we utilize the communications technology available to us also.

4. Our congregations need to develop the training habit. Within the Christian education program of the congregation it should be determined when and how people will acquire such skills as worship, being able to read and interpret the Bible, develop a devotional life, and an ability to verbalize the Christian faith. We need to be trained in the art of Christian giving, absolving and retaining sins, and Christian counseling. Specialized training in areas of congregational ministry such as exhortation, church discipline, evangelism, teaching, etc. is essential.
5. Spiritual gifts must be understood, personally identified, and provision made for their use in the congregation's ministry. When members know their spiritual gifts, they will know better how to function as God's ministers.
6. Congregations are to be supportive. In addition to theology and training ministers need the support of a group in which they are personally involved and in which they find fellowship. In small congregations the entire body may provide that support. For most, however, it is essential that fellowship in connection with ministry be planned and incorporated into the program of the church. In such ways ministers are given opportunity to strengthen the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
7. Adequate staff must be provided. It is a fallacy that the development of a ministering congregation will mean less staff. The reality is that most congregations are so inadequately staffed that a ministering congregation cannot develop and that is why there is a shriveling of the numbers of people involved in ministry. Ministry requires prepared people, and that means people to do the preparing.

### **Family**

1. Christian ministers are such, first of all, in their families. Here the Word of God is to be studied and applied. In many ways it is fitting for our congregations to honor families and seek to strengthen them. Pre-marital and post-marital counseling, marriage enrichment training and Christian parenting belong on the congregation's agenda.
2. Cooperation of day schools, Sunday schools and high schools with families is not only desirable, it is required. It seems to me that our schools and churches have become the primary conveyors of the faith to the new generation. Worse is that at times it seems that that is the role we want to have. Instruction materials and activities that enable and encourage parents to fulfill their roles in this regard need to be developed. The ministry of day school teachers needs to include ministry to the parents, and teachers need the training to enable them to do so.

### **World**

The front line troops of God's Church are the men and women who have to keep the faith and survive in the gray world of business negotiations, union loyalties, ridiculers of the Christian faith, seekers of help, etc. Here God's ministers are not faced with lofty idealism but realistic necessity to either be God's ministers or the work of Christ will not be done in that place at that time. Three items of importance that need to be treated in the congregation's program are Christian vocation, Christian service and Christian witness. Now God's people relate their faith to these three items probably has a great deal more to do with the expansion of God's Church and its well-being in this world than we might imagine.

## **Conclusion**

God's people exercising their ministry every day wherever they are in all the contact and service areas of life—family, world and church—is the ultimate meaning of the theology of lay ministry. As much as we understand about this biblical doctrine and as much as its practice has been developed among us in the WELS, it remains true that the potential of God's Church as it is represented in the WELS is vastly more than is being accomplished. Surely God is calling us to practice better what he has revealed to us and established among us.

As I view our WELS the greatest potential for growth lies in the development of lay ministry. Among our well-established congregations especially, many of great size, are thousands and thousands of Christians who do not really know that they are God's ministers and who do not believe that they can minister. To thoroughly indoctrinate and train these people so that they function as valuable members of the body of Christ is a challenging and thrilling task.

We are a church body that is lucky for a cause. In the '60's we stood for purity of doctrine in the synodical controversy. In the '70's we became a mission planting church. While we will continue to be both of the above, the cause before us now that begs advocacy and advancement is, I believe, lay ministry. May we who are leaders in God's Church respond with vision, zeal and dedication.

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