

LAY LEADERSHIP: HOW THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD HINDERS A “PASTOR
ONLY” MINDSET

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ABSTRACT

The topic that will be focused on in this paper is applying the teaching of the universal priesthood to the development of lay leaders. If one properly understands the teaching of the universal priesthood, it will then follow that one wants to develop lay leaders in the church. This comes with the aim of introducing lay leaders to a method that hinders congregations from having a “pastor-only” mindset.

Some highlights of the research show that there is a distinction between the public ministry as well as the private ministry of every believer. It is also at the same time understood that God gives to his church every right to preach and teach his word. How that is applied in different WELS churches changes depending on location and available gifts. However, the importance that has been discovered is that when the universal priesthood is put into action, God blesses that work.

INTRODUCTION

“It’s okay, the pastor can do it.” Maybe that is not so unfamiliar a phrase heard in WELS circles. It is not the craziest thing to go to a council meeting and see all tasks taken over by the pastor. The thinking of many people is that the pastor has been trained. He has gone to school for eight years and is called specifically for this task. Of course, this line of thinking leads down a slippery slope. It becomes easy for a congregation to rely solely on the pastor, and allows for laziness to set in.

Another issue that often appears is when a pastor takes a call. A pastor takes a call to a different location, and as the pastor leaves, the congregation notices a distinct shift in not only weekly worship attendance but also in the various programs and events that were previously held there. This phenomenon has been observed before and will likely continue. The problem is that the congregation becomes normalized to a pastor being the one in charge in every aspect of the congregation. The mindset of the pastor doing “all” develops into a culture that is not beneficial for a congregation. This mindset often forgets about applying the biblical teaching of the universal priesthood.

In no means is this meant to heap coal after coal on the congregation, either. Often, the pastor is also at fault. It does not take long for a pastor to say to himself, “Well, no one else is going to do it.” As a certain pastor once said, “Once you get in the mindset of, ‘Well, I have to

do it if it needs to get done,’ it is difficult to ever get out of that mindset.”¹ As one falls into this mindset, it becomes a huge burden on the pastor. He is now the one who has to take charge of everything, even the smallest thing, to make sure it gets done. Not only does this hinder the pastor and what he has been called to do, which is to preach and teach the gospel through the administration of word and sacrament, but it also hinders the congregation from realizing its Christian calling. All believers are a part of the royal priesthood of Christ. It is the absence of applying this biblical truth that has led to a pastor-only mindset in certain congregations.

But is the mindset of a pastor as the sole leader the answer? Both biblically and academically, the development of lay leadership is an important point of emphasis every congregation should undertake. A “pastor-only” mindset can lead to the death of a church and not to a flourishing of the gospel as Christ has called the church to be. This paper will look to apply the calling that Christ has called the church.

In this paper, the author intends to approach the teaching of the universal priesthood of believers and how the Bible talks about applying that truth. This does mean that there will be applications made on a biblical truth. That is not to say that the applications to pastoral and congregational ministry in this paper are the only way to do things according to the Bible. A theological background will be established, by which it will apply those teachings in a personal manner. An academic background for leadership development that encourages teamwork over management will be developed. Then, the paper will finish with a discussion on the current

1. This is a WELS pastor who currently serves a congregation in Tennessee. Early in his ministry, he faced multiple scenarios where he either had to do a task or create an outreach event, or it would not get done. At first, he chose to do those things. However, when he went to hand it off to someone else, it quickly fell short of the expected level of excellence and was eventually cancelled. He quickly learned that it was better to let ideas be handled by the people who brought them up without putting more on his plate. If it were a good idea, it would last. If it wasn't a good idea, then it would quickly fall apart without his input and time.

approaches certain congregations in the WELS are taking to implement the universal priesthood in their lay leaders.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to establish a basis for the literature used in this paper, as there has been much discussion centered on leadership. There is also a lot of prior work done on the discussion of the universal priesthood. This includes discussing the two and how the universal priesthood translates into leadership in the church. However, specific applications to treating to the hindrance of a “pastor only” mindset have not been treated at length.

First, an understanding of what the academic world thinks about leadership and the terminology used within leadership was necessary. Multiple resources helped in this area. Information specifically dealing with the terms and the shift in terminology in leadership was found in resources like *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look At Old Leadership Questions*, written by Donna Ladkin, and *Transformational Leadership*, written by Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E Riggio. These resources not only set a basic understanding of terms but also aid in the understanding of how to apply those terms and ideas into a setting.²

Another important background was the knowledge of what has been discussed about the universal priesthood already. This included multiple resources, looking at writings from Martin Luther in Volumes 13, 40, and 44 of his works. Martin Luther expounds upon the biblical

2. More information on how these resources had a role in application can be found in the section of the paper titled “Putting into practice what is taught and confessed.”

teaching, especially emphasizing the teaching that every Christian is considered a priest of God.³ It also included an in-depth look at what the WELS has already written on the teaching of the universal priesthood. This took into account writings from Armin Schuetze, August Pieper, Mark Jeske, Mark Zarling, and others. The main point of which was to gain an understanding of the biblical teaching on the universal priesthood, which is widely discussed in the paper.

The final important area of study for this paper, which required reading from other sources, including what the WELS has written, is the implementation of the universal priesthood practice. It was the goal of the author of this paper to see if the teaching and practice of the universal priesthood in WELS churches has allowed for the freedom of a pastor, as well as the hindrance of the local congregation to be too attached to the necessity of the pastor as a sole leader. In doing this research, the author looked at sources such as those from Mark Jeske, Mark Zarling, and others. The writer also looked at the writing of others outside of the WELS in writings such as *Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership In Uncharted Territory*, written by Tod Bolsinger. While there are differences in how the teaching is applied in different areas, the same principle applies to all: it is important for this teaching of the universal priesthood to be implemented.

Now that everything is understood, this paper will try to answer the following question: can the implementation of the universal priesthood hinder a pastor-only mindset?

3. This was a special emphasis in Volume 40 of Luther's works.

THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS

The teaching of the universal priesthood is nothing new. It was an obvious teaching of Scripture. However, in the teaching of the church, it has often gone through different changes. Even in the history of the Lutheran church, there have been differences in how this teaching is emphasized. As Herman A. Preus summarizes, “In the history of the church, the pendulum has swung between the authority of the clergy and that of the laity. Orthodoxy followed Luther’s line fairly well, emphasizing the office, perhaps more than the universal priesthood. Pietism moved the emphasis from the office to the priesthood of the laity. There has been a varying emphasis in Lutheranism ever since.”⁴ In Lutheranism, there have been very different ideas on how to handle the teaching of the universal priesthood and how to apply it in congregations.

However, it is important to dive into the use of the teaching of the universal priesthood rather than just in general Lutheranism. Even in Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran circles, it is obvious that the approach to the universal priesthood has not been used much in the past. As August Pieper writes, “It is remarkable that this teaching has never really been popular among us, that it has never really been put into practice, but has, for the most part, remained merely a matter of theory. The priesthood of every believer has once again been largely forgotten.”⁵ While

4. Herman A. (Herman Amberg) Preus, “Luther on the Universal Priesthood and the Office of the Ministry.” *Concordia Journal* 5, no. 2 (December 31, 1979): 55–62.
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=d23533ce-30ba-37cd-9fad-afec4b2740b7>, 55.

5. August O. W. Pieper, *Luther’s Teaching Of The Christian Priesthood*. N.d, 2.

any good WELS Lutheran would be quick to say, “Of course I believe in the universal priesthood,” Pieper makes evident that this teaching was not actually used. The issue for the early Lutheran church in America was that the pastor often was without any lay leadership help. This problem continues to be an issue in the Lutheran church today. Craig Nesson, writing to a similar purpose as Pieper, adds, “Ironically, however, Luther’s affirmation of the universal priesthood largely has remained an unfulfilled promise of the Reformation.”⁶ One of Luther’s toughest battles against Catholicism was the teaching of the priest over the laity. Of course, Luther saw in the Bible the clear teaching of the universal priesthood. More of Luther’s views will be discussed later, but the key for now is that Luther taught this and wanted to see it grow into something profound for the church. Sadly, there seems to be the same problem, that this teaching continues to be hard to grasp.

Thankfully, there has been a push to see the teaching put into practice in WELS circles.⁷ The reason for this recent push is not just because it is something God encourages, although that is definitely important, but also because of the gifts that are becoming more apparent and available in congregations. As Armin Schuetze states, “Since we have an increasing number of able laymen, well educated with a variety of gifts who may be called on to assist the pastor in areas of the public ministry, the church fails if it does not draw on the source of God’s gifts to his church as the needs in the congregation require.”⁸ It is an amazing thing to know that God has

6. Craig L. Nesson, “Universal Priesthood of All Believers: Unfulfilled Promise of the Reformation.” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 46, no. 1 (December 31, 2019): 8–15.
<https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=e2c5a9b4-8de7-33fa-b3b6-478a7d834813>, 14.

7. Multiple pastors have relayed to the author their opinions on this matter. More of what they discuss with the author can be found under the section titled, “What are WELS congregations doing already?”

8. Armin W. Schuetze, *The Significance of the Reformation for Our Ministry Today*. N.d., 14.

lavished gifts, both physical and spiritual, on his people. Of course, that means the church and the pastor have a role to make sure those gifts are being used in a God-pleasing way. What is not beneficial or helpful is for a congregation to ignore the gifts available in its membership. After all, God has been gracious, and overly so, in distributing his gifts among his people. As Luther wrote, “This is what God does; he does not discriminate among persons when he distributes his gifts.”⁹ God has graciously supplied gifts to his church. It is a blessing that the church will want to make sure not to waste.

Of course, a believer cannot raise themselves above another because of these abundant gifts given to God’s people. As every believer is a sinner, as David confessed in Psalm 51¹⁰, all are sinful from conception and not worthy of God’s love. But through the free gift of faith offered in Christ, every believer is given a higher calling. As Richard Caemmerer states, “The believer lives not for himself but he is put into the world and left in the world for the purpose of becoming a witness to Christ; his life is to bear the marks of Christ for the sake of the world around him.”¹¹ The believer is given the calling of living as a witness for Christ. The believer can only do this because he has been called a priest through the work of Jesus Christ. As they go out into the world, they do so as ambassadors of Christ.

Now, this does not give any Christian the right to usurp the position of the pastor, either. This is a point of contention that will be expounded on later. As a look ahead, it is perhaps best pointed out and summarized by Craig Nesson when he states,

9. LW 40:214.

10. Psalm 51:5 “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” NIV 2011.

11. Richard R. Jr. Caemmerer, “The Universal Priesthood and the Pastor.” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 19, no. 8 (1948): 561–82. EBSCOhost, 263.

The necessary point is not about diminishing the service of pastors as ministers of word and sacrament. Pastors have a crucial calling in a theology of ministry oriented toward the ministry of the baptized. The central claim: baptism is the primary ordination of all Christians. Therefore, the retrieval of a robust understanding of vocation is urgently needed to reform the church and service to neighbors for the life of the world and integrity of creation.¹²

As Craig Nesson prominently points out, the role of the pastor is not diminished through the teaching of the universal priesthood. In fact, the teaching of the universal priesthood highlights the role of a pastor more than he would be without it. This is illustrated in the calling the pastor receives. A group of Christian priests in a congregation gathers to call a public leader, a pastor. This group of priests is calling their public leader, who himself is a priest, to serve them. That is an amazing role given to the pastor. It is also a wonderful blessing to be cherished by every pastor when he receives a call.

All of these things are important to keep in mind as the discussion on how training lay leaders is necessary for both the growth of a church and according to God's word.

The Biblical Basis for the Universal Priesthood

It is best for this discussion to first understand where every Christian starts in their walk of faith. For a person to become a priest of Christ, they must first understand how they were called to faith and new life in Christ. First, a person starts dead in their sins, unable to make themselves alive, as they are trapped in their sins. As Ephesians 2:1 states, "As for you, you were dead in

12. Nesson, "Universal Priesthood of All Believers: Unfulfilled Promise": 9.

your transgressions and sins.”¹³ A person, in their very nature, is dead in their sins. They are stuck in their sin and are without any means of salvation.

However, that all changes through the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit creates faith in a human heart through the word of God, the person is now made into something new. The Christian is no longer dead in their sins but has been made alive. As it states in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Through the working of the Holy Spirit, faith is created and given to the Christian. No longer are they trapped in the darkness of sin. No longer are they without any hope of salvation. Now, they are made new! This is only possible because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. He lived perfectly under God’s law to redeem those who were born under it. He died an innocent death on the cross and rose from the grave, assuring the world that his sacrifice was enough. It is because of this and the faith in it that a Christian is born.

A Christian is freed from slavery to sin and brought to a new life. But is that it? Is a Christian just meant for living in grace without any sort of response? James clarifies the matter nicely in his book when he says,

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend.¹⁴

A Christian is justified, declared righteous, through faith. As James clearly demonstrates, Abraham was credited as righteous because of faith. But faith does not stop there. Faith, James

13. All biblical references in this paper will be from NIV 2011.

14. James 2:20–23

clearly points out, continues with evidence of deeds. As James states, “faith and actions” work together.

Therefore, a born-again Christian, who has been taken from death to life, now has a calling to live their life by doing good deeds in which one is able to serve God and neighbor. As Craig Nesson states, “We serve the neighbors God gives us in our own family, workplace/school, in public life, and through religious institutions. These represent the primary arenas where the baptized are called to love and serve other people as neighbors.”¹⁵ Of course, a Christian is called to serve his neighbor and to love him through acts of service. However, it is not only a neighbor that a Christian is called to serve, but it is also service to God. As John writes in Revelation 1:5–6, “To him [Jesus] who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” Here, not only does one see the motivation for the deeds to be done, which is the freedom won through the blood of Christ, but they also see what they are all called to do: live as priests in service to God.

As priests who live in service, all Christians are also meant to keep in mind how this service applies to those around them. Luther had this helpful note to say, “Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves the others. This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.”¹⁶ As Luther does well to state, the emphasis again relies on the one faith that all Christians share. They are all

15. Nesson, “Universal Priesthood of All Believers: Unfulfilled Promise”: 11.

16. LW 44:127.

called to be a part of the body of Christ through their faith. That does not mean that every Christian has the same work to do. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12 clearly describe it.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.¹⁷

Each Christian is a part of the whole community, body, of Christ. However, just like a body has different parts with different roles, so Christians have different roles and gifts given to them.

Whether in the eyes of the world a role is more or less desirable, all roles are equal in the eyes of Christ. One can compare it to how John Brug compares it when he writes, "When we come to Christ, the living stone, we, like living stones, are built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. A person

17. 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

becomes a priest in this order when he or she comes to faith in Christ.”¹⁸ Here, Brug draws attention to the terminology of the royal priesthood of believers. It is in 1 Peter 2:4–10 that one gets perhaps the clearest language of the royal priesthood.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

‘See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.’

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,’

and,

‘A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In this section of Scripture, one clearly sees a parallel to 1 Corinthians 12 with Peter’s description of the stones being built into a house. The body is one whole community, so a house is also one. Just as the body is made up of many parts, so also is a house. In both cases, the most important portion is Christ. In this picture, Jesus is the cornerstone, the foundation of the house,

18. John F. Brug, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Ministry*. N.d, 1.

so to speak. He is the one on whom the house is built. He is the one who causes some to stumble, but more importantly, he is the one who causes many to be built up. It is through him that the many who have not received mercy now receive it. It is those who are then called a royal priesthood.

It is vital to recognize the importance of this calling. To be described as priests, who are God's special possession, is not something to ignore. In fact, this should be something every pastor constantly reminds their people of. As Ruth Mattson puts it, "All members of the church must be instilled with the knowledge that they are indeed part of the universal priesthood and that they are very important participants in the work of the church for the kingdom of God."¹⁹ The terminology is one of significance, not something to be ignored, and is a basis of comfort and guidance. Christ calls his people his royal priesthood, who help build up the house of God in their roles as priests.

It is important to note that the terminology of a believer being a priest is not just a New Testament term. It is also found in the Old Testament. God spoke to the Israelites through Moses in Exodus 19:4–6, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God called his faithful people of Israel priests and a holy nation. God had a special relationship with the people of Israel; that is undoubtedly true. It still remains true that the terminology of a universal priesthood of believers

19. Ruth Mattson Taylor, "Needed: A Re-Emphasis on the Universal Priesthood of All Believers." *Dialog* 30, no. 4 (December 31, 1991): 326–30. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=bf58024-d2a6-3bb7-bacb-b5c49db09e14>, 327.

was something God uses to describe his people throughout the Bible. This remains the truth when looking at Isaiah 61:6, “And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God.” Here, not only does Isaiah prophesy that believers will be called priests, but also ministers of God.

How does the new description, as mentioned in Isaiah, come into action? Justo Gonzalez has this to offer, “The universal priesthood of believers is not simply that each person is his or her own priest, but much more, that each one is a priest for all the rest, and that the church itself is a priestly people. If we limit the universal priesthood to the private and personal priesthood of each believer, we are being led astray by the individualism that surrounds us.”²⁰ Justo Gonzalez does well to draw a distinction. Being a priest of God is about much more than just a relationship between the believer and God. Of course, one ought to have a personal relationship with their Lord, both in service to their God and in worship of him. However, what God describes as a priest is about far more than a one-on-one relationship. It is about the relationship a priest has with all his fellow priests.

If one has a relationship with others as a priest, what does that mean? John Brug writes, “The priesthood of all believers is both a status and an activity. We become priests when we are reborn through the gospel. We enjoy forgiveness of sins and access to the father at all times. Everything we do as Christians is an exercise of our priesthood, whether it is spiritual or secular.”²¹ Being a priest of God is not something that a Christian does only in the pew or seat on

20. Justo L. González, “The Universal Priesthood of Believers.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (December 31, 2017): 328–29. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2b4942ea-ddc8-3f6b-bf19-453f2ec1560b>, 329.

21. John F. Brug, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Ministry*. N.d, 5.

Sunday. Nor is being a priest of God something that a Christian only does in the privacy of his or her home during a personal devotion. Instead, being a priest of God is something that the Christian is living out all of the time in their lives. It is a calling from God that he has given to all of his believers to live it out all the time. As Mark Zarling writes, “Christ has graciously given to his believers, all his believers, the ministry of the word of God. We are to live and serve our neighbors as priests before God, having been washed in the blood of the lamb and dressed in his righteousness.”²² Once again, there is an important reminder here for all believers: they are priests who live to serve their neighbors.

Of course, a believer is only able to serve as a priest because of Christ and his perfect sacrifice. For, without the blood of the lamb, who washes all clean from sin, there is no way to be freed from sin. Once a person comes to faith, it is important to stress that they are indeed a priest of Christ. So important was this point that Luther had asserted, “Indeed, all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians. Worthy of anathema is any assertion that a priest is anything else than a Christian. For such an assertion has no support in the word of God.”²³ According to Luther, anyone who denied the truth of the universal priesthood was worthy of damnation. This truth for Luther was especially important during the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic church taught that only priests had the right to the roles of priests. Of course, Luther saw a problem in that, as the Bible clearly taught that every believer was a priest. He also saw an issue in how believers put their faith into practice. Without the teaching of the universal priesthood, the proclaiming of the gospel was left to only those who were ordained. The teaching

22. Mark G. Zarling, *Luther and the Saints: The Priesthood of All Believers—A True Treasure of the Lutheran Reformation*. 2017, 26.

23. LW 40:19.

and ability of the laity to go out and put their faith into action by service and proclamation of the word were lost. As Justo Gonzalez states, “The universal priesthood of believers does not only mean that everyone can approach God directly, but also, and above all, that we are all priests for all.”²⁴ Every believer has the ability to go and serve those around them with the truth of God’s word.

Finally, the believer does all of this in service to God. As it is revealed in Revelation 5:10, “You [The Lamb who was slain, that is, Jesus] have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” The believer reigns in a kingdom established by God as his priest. This kingdom is not an obvious earthly one, although one can argue that the local church and the Christian people are a visible kingdom; this kingdom is established as a spiritual union, with Christ as its king. It is in this kingdom that every Christian is called to serve their God as a priest. With Christ as the king who rules over this kingdom, what can overcome and hinder the work of the priests of God? The answer is obvious; nothing can. It is in this assurance, therefore, and with these biblical truths, that every Christian priest goes out into the world to serve their God and Savior.

It is also with this understanding and solid basis that these biblical truths will be applied, and opinions will be given on how to implement the universal priesthood in local congregations.

24. Justo L. González, “The Universal Priesthood of Believers.” *Lutheran Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (December 31, 2017): 328–29. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2b4942ea-ddc8-3f6b-bf19-453f2ec1560b>, 328.

HOW IS THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD PUT INTO PRACTICE?

It probably would not take a reader long to think of a person who has a desire to serve the Lord. It's not hard to find someone who desires to go into the public ministry of the gospel. That is a great thing, but problems arise. As they start going to school, the professors notice a lack of capable understanding. The classmates notice a difficulty in dealing with other people. The gifts of the person just do not seem to match up with the qualifications necessary for ministry.²⁵

As Mark Zarling so aptly put to a group of called workers,

Most, if not all of you, have met an eager young adult in whom the spirit has placed a strong desire to serve as a pastor, or teacher, or staff minister. Evident to you is the spirit worked love for their Savior, a genuine love for souls, and a sincere passion to serve. Yet the desire to serve, which is given by the spirit, does not necessarily mean that the spirit has also then bestowed the concomitant gifts necessary.²⁶

Just because there is an obvious desire to go into the public ministry does not mean the Holy Spirit gives the gifts required to enter that field.

Other times, there are those who do not have the desire to go into the public called ministry, whether it is due to familial, personal, or financial reasons, or something else entirely. Often, there is still the desire to serve in the ministry in some capacity. Or perhaps there are

25. These qualifications for ministry can be found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The paper will discuss more about these qualifications in a later section.

26. Mark G. Zarling, *Luther and the Saints: The Priesthood of All Believers—A True Treasure of the Lutheran Reformation*. 2017, 33.

definite gifts present in a person for use in the ministry, but they do not have the desire to go into the public called ministry.

What happens when a person is faced with scenarios like these? This is where the teaching of the universal priesthood comes into action. Every believer is called out of death in sins to a new life through faith in Christ Jesus. Because of this, they join the royal priesthood of all believers who are called to serve their Lord and one another in love and acts of service. There is, however, a partnership that must be understood in the roles assigned to the universal priesthood. There are those who are publicly called to a congregation to serve as their public called workers. It is this relationship that will next be discussed.

Understanding the Partnership of the Called and Lay Workers

It is perhaps best stated that every Christian has a role in their local congregation. Whether that role is served by being an usher on Sunday morning, a person who comes to trim the hedges in the middle of the week, a council member, the man with a firm handshake in the seat next to you, or any sort of service to the church, all Christians play a role. August Pieper puts it nicely when he says, “In a Christian congregation, no two members are completely alike, he is his own special gift, given by God to be invested in the welfare of the entire body of Christians.”²⁷ Each person, as a priest, has a different way in which they can serve that role. While they might be doing the same “job,” they are, at the same time, doing it completely differently from the person next to them.

27. August O. W. Pieper, *Luther's Teaching Of The Christian Priesthood*. N.d, 16.

A community of priests all using their God-given gifts in service to one another and their local congregation is a beautiful sight to behold. However, this does not mean that this community of priests can serve in any way and at any time they want. After all, a local congregation has called a pastor to be a shepherd of the flock and to lead as their public worker in the community. Armin Schuetze had this to say on the topic, “Good order will result when the individual Christian priest does not presume to function publicly without a call. Whoever functions publicly is functioning on behalf of, in the name of, others by the authority and for the benefit of other universal priests.”²⁸ For without a call, and without a direction from the pastor or the congregation, it can be very easy for a member of the church to distract from the purpose and goal of that congregation.

An example of this can be found in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. In the church of Corinth, it seems that there were issues happening at their local services. Many had been blessed in that congregation with gifts of the Spirit. Some were even given the gift of speaking in tongues and prophesying. However, it seems that many had taken this gift of the Spirit and made it a mocking matter. As many were trying to prophesy over one another and others were speaking in tongues, no one was able to give an interpretation. All the believers who were in Corinth were priests. However, they had taken this truth and misapplied it to create a dysfunctional and chaotic worship setting. Instead, Paul called for order. As he states in 1 Corinthians 14:26, 33, and 40,

What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up...For God is not a God of disorder but of

28. Armin W. Schuetze, *The Significance of the Reformation for Our Ministry Today*. N.d, 10.

peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people...But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

As was clear to Paul, the Corinthian congregation needed some change. The way they were going about worship of God was not building up the church. Instead, it had been thrown into chaos as everyone had their own opinion or part that they wanted to do. This is not only something that was meant for the congregation in Corinth, either. As Paul makes clear, all of God’s congregations are to act peacefully, and everything should be done in good order.

Every believer in Corinth knew fully that they were priests who had the authority and command to go and preach the good news of Jesus Christ. That calling, however, when inappropriately applied, creates disorder. One way this disorder can become a major issue is if the Christian priest decides, by himself, that he has the right to act publicly on behalf of the congregation. As Mark Zarling writes, “As a priest before God, a believer has the duty to preach and proclaim the good news, but that does not mean that anyone at any time can publicly claim that right on behalf of all.”²⁹ To do so would overthrow good order and throw into chaos what is meant to build up the church. God is not a God of chaos but of peace, and he desires to have his church built up in peace as well.

This, of course, does not mean that the teaching of the universal priesthood should be thrown aside because it is far too dangerous and leads toward chaos more often than not. As Peter stresses in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” It is evident that God has declared all of his people to be his priests and

29. Mark G. Zarling, *Luther and the Saints: The Priesthood of All Believers—A True Treasure of the Lutheran Reformation*. 2017, 26.

a holy nation. This is not something that one should throw to the wayside. This is not a truth that should be cast away out of fear. This is something that is important and necessary for all believers to know and understand about themselves. It is something that every Christian should hold dear, and it is something that they should fervently and eagerly desire to put into practice.

However, there is still Satan who wants to corrupt even this teaching of the Church. As Herman A. Preus warns, “Let no layman take this doctrine [the doctrine of the universal priesthood] as a license to set himself up as an adversary arrogantly challenging the minister's God-given authority.”³⁰ The desire of the sinful nature will be one that seeks to use the calling of a priest to directly challenge the calling of the ordained pastor. As Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:17, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” A pastor has been called by his congregation to serve as their public leader. He is worthy of honor and respect. Let there also be the warning to the pastor not to allow evil or falsehood to creep into his teaching and preaching. Paul makes this charge to the congregations, admonishing those who do such things in 1 Timothy 5:20, “But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning.” It is this balance that the Lord calls his people to have in their congregations.

There are, of course, reasons why some are called to serve in the public ministry while others are not. Two places in God’s word are often quoted in the Bible. First, in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Paul gives a list of qualifications for what one would call a pastor today. Paul writes,

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-

30. Preus, “Luther on the Universal Priesthood and the Office of the Ministry.”: 62.

controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Many details are given in this section from Paul to Timothy. That is an important thing to note.

Going into the public called ministry of God is not something that God has designed for everybody. One detail that stands out in this section is how the overseer, or pastor, is charged by God to manage his own family well. For if he cannot do that, then how could he manage the church of God? Of course, the answer is obvious: a man who does not manage his family well cannot manage a church well. A pastor is called by a community of priests to be their shepherd. He is also called to publicly serve God's people by administering God's word to them in an orderly and fitting way.

Another list of qualifications to be a pastor is given in Titus 1:6–9. There, Paul writes,

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

While this list of qualifications is very similar to the list given in 1 Timothy, there are noticeable differences in stress. This time, it is assumed that the elder, or pastor, is a manager of God's household, or congregation. Therefore, he must be able to fulfill the qualifications. One thing of special note is the emphasis on the pastor's role as one who is able to encourage others in sound doctrine and refute those who teach against it. The blessing that is given to the WELS is that, in their training, called workers, pastors, teachers, and staff ministers all go to school with a focus

on the instruction of God's word. Most notably, the pastor in WELS education takes eight years of schooling. What a blessing that is! How important it is as well, to know that a pastor is one who has gone through special education to be able to stand on the truth of God's word.

Of course, these two lists of qualifications are something every priest of Christ should strive to achieve. Every called worker also knows that they will never perfectly follow these qualifications, either. The comfort found in Christ is that when one sins, when one fails to meet these standards, there he is. Christ bleeds as he hangs from the cross, and at the foot of the cross, every believer finds his forgiveness and his identity. He or she is a forgiven, holy priest of God. It is with this understanding that the whole community of priests, whether called or not, understands the relationship between called and lay believer. It is also a reason that the public calling of a priest, a pastor, is left to those priests, every member of the church, and not to the personal opinion of one priest. As Luther nicely summarizes, "Because we are all priests of equal standing, no one must push him so forward and take it upon himself, without our consent in election, to do that for which we all have equal authority. For no one dares to take upon themselves what is common to all without the authority and consent of the community."³¹ It is with the consent of the priesthood of all believers in the local community at a church that a pastor, teacher, or staff minister is called to be the public leader of that congregation.

The called public leader is called with the specific intent of preaching the word and administering the sacraments. Of course, if one says that the called worker is a priest and is exactly like the rest of the universal priests, then the same can be said of all of the priesthood of believers. Luther again nicely summarizes when he writes,

31. LW 44:129.

For we [ordained ministers] teach with the word, we consecrate with the word, we bind in themselves sins by the word, we baptize with the word, we sacrifice with the word, we judge all things by the word. Therefore, when we grant the word to anyone, we cannot deny anything to him pertaining to the exercise of his priesthood.³²

All believers are a part of the royal priesthood, and all believers have the command to go and preach to all nations.³³

Of course, this requires teaching the word. This teaching of the word is also entrusted to everyone, as Luther summarizes, “If the office of teaching be entrusted to anyone, then everything accomplished by the word in the church is entrusted, that is, the office of baptizing, consecrating, binding, loosing, praying, and judging doctrine.”³⁴ Everything that is given to the disciples by Jesus, that is given to the elders by Paul, and finally, that is given from God, is given to all of his royal priests, his believers.

Now, this does come with the understanding that there is a relationship between the public called worker and the lay member. John Brug states distinctly the exact situation one faces when discussing these two truths. He writes,

Like Luther, we must always guard ourselves on two fronts whenever we speak of the relationship of the priesthood of believers in the public ministry. On the one hand, we must speak highly of the rights in royal status of the priesthood of all believers in order to guard against every form of hierarchicalism, which makes the people of Christ subservient to the clergy. On the other hand, we must also speak highly of the called public ministry in order to guard against disrespect for it and usurpation of its duties.³⁵

There are two very distinct but similar truths in a local congregation. On the one hand, the congregation of priests has called a priest to be their public leader. On the other hand, the

32. LW 40:221.

33. This command is given in Matthew 28:14

34. LW 40:36.

35. John F. Brug, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Ministry*. N.d, 7.

congregation is filled with priests of God who are a holy nation and are given the same responsibilities and capabilities as the called and ordained pastor. It is these two coexisting truths that must be stressed in every congregation.

With an understanding of this relationship, one comes to realize what August Pieper did. “Essentially, the public ministry is nothing else than the joint exercise, in orderly fashion, of the priesthood given to every individual believer.”³⁶ What a beautiful picture painted by August Pieper here! The local congregation, as a team, that is, the local congregation as a community of priests, shares in the same mission. They share in the same public ministry, the spreading of the gospel. What a powerful opportunity there is for every congregation to put these words of Pieper into practice. The church goes into the ministry, not as separate people with separate roles, but as a team that shares a common goal.

Of course, this is also done in good order. A joint exercise of the priesthood given to every believer has been emphasized throughout this section. The implementation of this teaching in a local congregation must always keep in mind the good order required by our Lord. However, the way that good order is brought about is not specifically instructed by our Lord. As John Jeske states, “There’s absolutely nothing intrinsically sacred about the congregation structure, or about its procedures, or its paraphernalia. The congregation, like the individual member of the congregation has been called into existence only for the sake of serving God and the people.”³⁷ All that God commands is for things to be done in good order and for the preaching and teaching of the life-saving gospel to be the center of that congregation’s mission. Of course, there are

36. August O. W. Pieper, *Luther’s Teaching Of The Christian Priesthood*. N.d, 13.

37. John C. Jeske, *Building Lay Leadership Within A Congregation*. N.d, 2.

multiple biblical principles that a congregation will work through when establishing itself.

Finally, there is no firm and fast rule on how the local congregation is to operate when understanding the implementation of the universal priesthood and the right to the use of the word of God. Instead of there being some sort of rule or direct principle and example that the Lord gives, he leaves it up to his believers, according to the best of their abilities, to find a way of good order and implementation of this teaching.

It is a matter of freedom how a congregation establishes the way it will function. Jeremy Wosje mentions, “Christian freedom gives us the liberty to govern our churches as we see fit. This freedom is not an excuse for poor leadership or poor use of the gifts God has given to us and the members of our congregations. We must put to use the gifts God has given us to better the church.”³⁸ Of course, there is a warning that Wosje mentions whenever we deal with something that is a Christian freedom. This is especially true when one is dealing with something as public as the liberty to govern the church. This freedom does not give the called worker the right to be a poor leader, nor does it allow the member to make ill use of his or her gifts. Because God has graciously given abundant gifts to his church, poor leadership and a lack of use of those gifts are a bad example of so-called Christian freedom.

However, that worry should not stop anyone from putting the truth of the universal priesthood into practice. Yet, it has often led to a lack of practice, despite the truth being emphasized in Lutheran churches. This is what August Pieper noticed about the churches in his day. He writes,

Here’s the truth that needs to be emphasized in our day, that individual Christians are to exercise their priesthood as long as they do not violate good order in the church.

38. Jeremy D. Wosje, *THE PASTOR AS TEAM LEADER: BUILDING A FOCUSED LEADERSHIP TEAM*. n.d, 11.

Unfortunately, one doesn't see much of this among us Lutherans. Congregations call someone to be their pastor, others to teach their children, still others to serve as officers of their congregation. But what about the rest of the membership?³⁹

Sadly, the same might be said about many Lutheran churches, yes, even WELS Lutheran churches today. The structure of a WELS church does well to call public priests of Christ as a pastor or a teacher, and even does well to establish a church council. However, putting into practice the teaching of the universal priesthood of all believers is one that has often been lost.

In response, one might hear that only those who are put into an office in the church, whether it is a member of the council, an elder, or serving as an organist, are really putting into practice their priesthood. Therefore, an entire community of priests cannot all be in those positions. It just so happens that some will not be using their priestly abilities because there are not enough positions at church. In response, John Brug has this to offer: "Christians may fully exercise their priesthood without ever holding an office or formal position in the church."⁴⁰ The application of the priesthood is about more than official positions in a church. There is an importance to knowing that a Christian is a priest whenever he or she is making use of God's word, whether that is verbal or not, in words or action, or by letting the light of Christ shine in their lives.

The important thing is that the priests of Christ actually put into practice what they are taught and encouraged to do. It should be the goal of a congregation to constantly remind its people of this truth. Armin Schuetze offers encouragement when he says, "The congregation wants all of its members to carry out their individual priesthood by serving as evangelists, by

39. August O. W. Pieper, *Luther's Teaching Of The Christian Priesthood*. N.d, 9.

40. John F. Brug, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Ministry*. N.d, 5.

speaking to, encouraging, inviting unbelievers, serving as examples for the unchurched whom they meet individually and personally.”⁴¹ There are many ways that a Christian can live as a priest of Christ. Perhaps nothing is more important than the work of evangelizing. Many may say they do not have the gifts to evangelize. However, the argument made by Armin Schuetze is that even outside of conversing with a person, a priest of Christ is always evangelizing the message of Christ. An important distinction to make is that everyone can do outreach, but not everyone can witness. Outreach, in this sense, is when a Christian lives their daily life as a Christian, being a light in their community, which any Christian can do. However, witnessing is when a Christian goes directly to witness Christ, by talking with a person about Jesus, which is something not every Christian can do. The emphasis, though, is that any priest of Christ is always able to evangelize. This is because the priest does not stop being a priest when they leave the church on Sunday. As Mark Zarling writes, “The priesthood of all Christians is not limited by location to the local parish, nor limited in time to a scheduled service, meeting, or work day. The priesthood of all believers is our joyous life.”⁴² One point of stress here is the joy that a priest of Christ has. It is the joy that they were once dead but are now raised to life. It is the joy that they were drowning in their sins, but the hand of their savior plucked them out of the rising waters. It is the joy that at the foot of the cross, they see their savior hanging there, cleansing them of their sins forever through his blood. It is that joy that a priest of Christ can go out and live their life as a priest.

41. Armin W. Schuetze, *The Significance of the Reformation for Our Ministry Today*. N.d, 14.

42. Mark G. Zarling, *Luther and the Saints: The Priesthood of All Believers—A True Treasure of the Lutheran Reformation*. 2017, 35.

Whether that is in their personal lives outside of church on Sunday or whether it is in the local congregation, a priest is constantly striving to serve in joy. That joy includes a loving partnership between the pastor and the laity. Herman A. Preus summarizes Luther nicely on this topic when he writes, “Luther regards the relationship between the minister and the laity as a holy relationship, a marriage of love and respect. No conflict. No jealousy. No competition.”⁴³ God has called his believers to live in unity and peace and do so with a shared goal of the spread of his life-saving message. When this is done in a loving way and keeps in mind the shared goal, it no longer seems to be a competition, nor does there seem to be any conflict. Instead, ministry becomes something more. Jeremy Wosje describes it well when he states, “Ministry is a team sport; it has never been God’s intention that one or two select people would be the only ones capable of carrying out the work of gathering and tending to God’s people.”⁴⁴

As one goes into ministry, whether called public priest or not, they go into it with the encouragement of their savior. They go into it with the joy of knowing they are saved and never need to fear sin or the devil anymore. They go into ministry knowing that God has called them his holy nation, his royal priesthood, and his children. God has called them to live their lives as Christian priests and to do so publicly and privately, in unity and peace, and with one shared goal. To proclaim the praises and wonder of God, to share what saved them, that is, the love of God found in Christ, who hung on the cross and rose from the grave.

43. Preus, “Luther on the Universal Priesthood and the Office of the Ministry.”: 62.

44. Jeremy D. Wosje, *THE PASTOR AS TEAM LEADER: BUILDING A FOCUSED LEADERSHIP TEAM*. n.d, 4.

Putting Into Practice What is Taught and Confessed

It is with these biblical truths and principles that this paper will attempt to apply what is taught and confessed. In the next sections, it will be the goal of the paper to lay out an approach to applying the priesthood of all believers. This is not a command of God, as this is something left up to Christian freedom. At the same time, there are also biblical principles being applied as well as academic principles supplied into this discussion. This may not be something that is able to be applied in every scenario or situation, but this paper will try to offer some ways in which this teaching can be put into practice.

As one sets up a congregation that will make every effort to apply the universal priesthood, they must understand the relationship between pastor and lay member. As Ruth Mattson states, “The task God puts before us requires the efforts of all members of the universal priesthood of believers, pastors and lay members alike, working together in partnership.”⁴⁵ It is this partnership that allows for a general ministry that flows well and creates a space for hardships and difficulties to be discussed without any form of hatred or disconnect.

It is also the congregation’s goal to create an environment that is hospitable towards the growth and development of priests. As Armin Schuetze writes, “Whatever the church can do to equip Christians for the priestly role. Also, by way of special instruction and materials should prove a blessing.”⁴⁶ It is important for a congregation to want to equip its members for the service to which God has called them. Instruction will be necessary, and it will not just be the pastor that this responsibility relies on. It is also the responsibility of others who are built up in

45. Taylor, “Needed: A Re-Emphasis on the Universal Priesthood”: 327.

46. Armin W. Schuetze, *The Significance of the Reformation for Our Ministry Today*. N.d, 13.

the church and have the ability to instruct those who know less than them. A community of believers cannot continue to grow and flourish if there is not a continued atmosphere of growth in the congregation.

Another reality of a congregation that is trying to implement the upbringing of the royal priesthood also realizes there is a simple reason for more lay members to become actively involved in the life of a church. It is simply stated that as a church grows, eventually a singular pastor is unable to handle properly all of the duties that the congregation has been blessed with. One can find this same scenario playing out with Moses in Exodus 19:25: “He [Moses] chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.” Moses had become so overworked and burdened by the number of people coming to him that he was no longer able to carry out his different roles as the leader of the people. Moses needed help. It is with that same thought in mind that Jeremy Wosje writes, “The purpose for which we asked the laity for our congregations to serve in positions of leadership is very similar to why Moses selected God-fearing, trustworthy men from among the tribes of Israel. He did this so that he would not work himself to death.”⁴⁷ It is best for the growth of the church if others are raised in the church to help the pastor with the congregational tasks present there.

This form of leadership is not something that appears only in the Bible. It is also a form of leadership that has support from the academic world. According to Donna Ladkin, the author of *Rethinking Leadership*, “Leadership is seen to be a collective process, encompassing both

47. Jeremy D. Wosje, *THE PASTOR AS TEAM LEADER: BUILDING A FOCUSED LEADERSHIP TEAM*. n.d, 10.

those who would be known as ‘leaders’ and those who would be known as ‘followers.’”⁴⁸ As a pastor is a leader, so the community of priests is also a leader. The group is brought together under the idea that they are all leaders, working together toward the same goal.

This also implies that leadership is more than a single action. It is a moment, as mentioned again in the book, “Understanding leadership as a moment implies that all of those involved in its enactment need to attend to its systemic and dynamic nature, not just the leader.”⁴⁹ Everyone who is involved realizes that what they are doing requires more than just one person. It requires the whole community to be involved, so that the public leader, the pastor, is not left alone in this form of leadership. Applying this to the teaching of the universal priesthood, it becomes apparent that there are many similarities. In the balance of pastor and laity, and the teaching that all are priests, it is obvious that in a congregation, there is a need for the full involvement of all believers.

Another important part of creating an atmosphere that allows for the growth of the priests in the laity is having a need for emotional investment. As Jeremy Wosje states, “The necessity for creating emotional investment is simple. Without emotional investment from leadership there will not be strong commitment to your cause. Without commitment your chance for success is greatly diminished.”⁵⁰ If there is no emotional investment from the public leaders, then there will be no emotional investment from the rest of the priests in a congregation. When a person is

48. Donna Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look At Old Leadership Questions*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2010, 11.

49. Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look*: 180.

50. Jeremy D. Wosje *THE PASTOR AS TEAM LEADER: BUILDING A FOCUSED LEADERSHIP TEAM*. n.d, 2.

emotionally invested, they are deeply involved in the process. They care for the outcome and are deeply affected by both positive and negative ones. For example, if a new project is being presented to the church, one allows for emotional investment by laying out reasons for the new project. Then, a person buys in emotionally when they care and are affected by the outcomes of that project. If a person is helping with the Soccer Camp and cares that the majority of their class comes to church that following Sunday, they might show their emotional investment by making follow-ups on the weekend with those families to encourage them to come. It should be an important step for every congregation to create some sort of emotional investment for its congregation.

Another wrinkle to keep in mind when a congregation plans to implement some sort of pre-planned laity engagement training means there will be change. Change often leads to difficulties. No matter the change that happens, whether good or bad, there will be those who do not agree with it. As Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio mention, “There’s perhaps no circumstance which better demonstrates the difficulties associated with creating shared meanings than that of leading change. Leaders are particularly called to manage meaning during times of formally driven, organizational change efforts.”⁵¹ When change is happening, it is important that the leaders are ready to take the brunt of criticism and critique in a moment of change. Especially in a local congregation, this remains apparent, as any change creates a need for the leadership to change first. This is an idea shared as well in the academic community: “Transformational leadership at the top of the organization is likely to be needed for commitment to extend the

51. Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look*: 125.

organization as a whole.”⁵² Any sort of change first starts with those who are higher up in the leadership position.

This, of course, requires a congregation that is willing to foster the creation of leaders. As John Jeske states, “A congregation can condition its membership for leadership by consciously seeking to foster a climate favorable to the development of leaders.”⁵³ When a congregation fosters this type of community, it is evident that leaders will want to be developed. There is an emotional effort made by the congregation to identify the need to develop leaders. With that emotional effort, there is then a need for the same emotional effort to be put into changing the leaders who are already present in a congregation.

Often, leadership is what the book *Transformational Leadership* calls transactional leaders, who lead by using the way of doing one thing for the giving of another.⁵⁴ However, *Transformational Leadership* encourages a more transformational leadership model. They write,

Transactional leaders, particularly those who rely on management by exception, who emphasize reactive corrective actions, may actually increase stress in their followers. Transformational leaders who emphasize charismatic, inspirational, and individualized consideration and proactive, vigilant solutions are likely to reduce the feelings of stress in their followers.⁵⁵

In this transformational leadership model, the leader is one who empathizes with their followers and offers solutions that take into account the response of the followers. The transactional

52. Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*. Second Edition. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006, 34.

53. John C. Jeske, *Building Lay Leadership Within A Congregation*. N.d, 2.

54. Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*. Second Edition. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006, 60.

55. Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*. Second Edition. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006, 61.

leadership model sees it as something one does for the other as a reward. The transformational leader encourages the follower to buy into the idealized goal that has been conceived together.

If one does not follow this new form of leadership and instead sees it only as something transactional, it becomes easy for that leadership development to fall apart over time. “For too long, leadership development has been seen mainly as a matter of training, as such, and skill development. But leadership should be regarded as an art and a science likely to be enhanced with a quality education process.”⁵⁶ Applying this to a local congregation, it does not take one long to think back to this paper’s introduction. If the pastor spent years forming leaders, but only as something that is transactional, then as soon as the pastor left, that leadership did not hold on for too long. However, if transformational leadership was used, then the priests in that local congregation are likely to be more emotionally invested. They will likely become leaders of a sort in and of themselves, so that, when a pastor leaves the congregation, it does not become a free-fall, but instead, the congregation has a structure in place that allows for continued growth and development of lay leaders.

This same thing is emphasized in the book *Transformational Leadership*: “Members start behaving as a team when they display individually considerate and intellectually stimulating transformational leadership behavior toward each other. They coach, facilitate, and teach each other and are willing to engage in continuous improvement.”⁵⁷ In a local congregation, this plays

56. Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*. Second Edition. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006, 135.

57. Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*. Second Edition. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2006, 165.

out when the priests of Christ are constantly involved and integrated into their local communities' lives.

This, of course, must start with the pastor understanding his role. Jeremy Wosje writes, “Your goal in preparing and leading these fellow leaders of your congregation is not to pretend like you have all the answers on how the treasurer is supposed to do his job. The pastor’s job as team leader is to equip the team with God’s word.”⁵⁸ The pastor can take multiple approaches to how he will go about encouraging priests in their priestly roles. However, it is most important that the pastor knows and uses the word of God to build up lay leaders. Because, through the word, the Lord guides and strengthens his people in the gifts he has given to them.

Of course, this desire to train leaders will not be an easy thing to do. As Tod Bolsinger, author of *Canoeing the Mountains*, states,

Leadership isn’t so much skillfully helping a group accomplish what they want to do. That is management. Leadership is taking people where they need to go and yet resist going. Leadership, as I have come to find it, is energizing a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world.⁵⁹

A pastor is faced with a challenge that often, when there is a gift or a desire, there is a need for change to encourage its growth. However, it will take a buy-in from the congregation for the growth of the priesthood to continue. As Jeske points out, “Here is the big job of Lutheran congregations and church councils; to provide abundant opportunity for the promises and the

58. Jeremy D. Wosje, *THE PASTOR AS TEAM LEADER: BUILDING A FOCUSED LEADERSHIP TEAM*. n.d, 13.

59. Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing The Mountains: Christian Leadership In Uncharted Territory*. Expanded Edition. InterVarsity Press, 2018, 124.

claims of Jesus Christ to be brought to bear on the hearts and lives of men.”⁶⁰ With the buy-in of the congregation and council as a whole, the abundant opportunities given by Christ continue to grow and be shared.

The reason for this continual growth of the priesthood is evident when it comes to the view of the congregation in the local community. If a church goes from doing a lot in a community to doing nothing simply because the pastor is gone, that is a major problem. As Jeske describes,

A big reason why the community does not always take the church more seriously is that the church does not completely take its work seriously. In industry, it would be unthinkable not to make plans ahead of time for replacing key personnel in the event of death or retirement. Is there a good reason why a Lutheran congregation should not use the same common sense?⁶¹

It is important that the priests of a congregation are invested in the growth of their own leadership so that the congregation might be viewed positively in the community and have a plan for when leadership changes, so that the congregation does not miss a step when implementing change.

This requires a congregation to have an emotional investment in the work of the church. This requires the congregation to have an environment that encourages the growth and development of leaders within their community. This requires the congregation to understand that change brings difficulty and questions, but that change is often necessary. This requires everyone, from top to bottom, to be involved in the change of culture. For without the investment of everyone, the building up of the priests can very quickly be squashed.

60. John C. Jeske, *Building Lay Leadership Within A Congregation*. N.d, 6.

61. John C. Jeske, *Building Lay Leadership Within A Congregation*. N.d, 5.

What are WELS Congregations Doing Already?

Now that both the biblical and academic picture of leadership and the use of the priesthood have been discussed, it is time to see what some WELS congregations are currently doing to foster an environment that encourages the priesthood, and specifically the laity, to become involved in their congregations and continue to grow and develop the gifts God has given to them. It is also important to note what some congregations are doing to hinder the “pastor-only” mindset when it comes to the ministry of the church.

“Are they a chair stacker?”⁶² A pastor shared this after talking about looking for leaders in his local congregation. What was his point? When he would be looking at his membership to see who could be a new leader in the congregation, he was looking for someone who was actively involved in events. He was not looking just for a person who was involved in the church, but involved in the way of a servant leader: someone who, for example, would stack chairs. This would be someone who stuck around and cleaned up, mopped the floors, and swept. The pastor was looking for the attitude of a servant before he looked for the attitude of a leader. This is, of course, an important thing for any congregation to look for in their leaders, as Jesus mentions in Matthew 20:26, “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant.” To be a leader, Christ calls his priests to be servants first.

Why would a pastor be looking for other leaders in his congregation? Is the pastor not enough? Obviously, there is much to this discussion. Most important is that every believer is a leader, as they are called to be priests by Christ. However, there is also a practical aspect to this. A pastor cannot continue to do everything himself. When a lay leader is identified in a

62. Pastor Keith Schleis shared with the author in a weekly Vicar meeting, January 2025.

congregation, it allows the pastor to be free to do more of what he has been called to do. As Nate Paul, Chief Operating Officer at 922 Ministries in Appleton, Wisconsin, states, “Pastors are freed to do more gospel ministry, word and sacrament ministry, and not be so focused on the administration stuff.”⁶³ As a pastor is freed from certain duties, he is given more time and energy to spend in other areas of ministry.

Specifically, to the ministry at the CORE in Appleton, Wisconsin, there is special encouragement for the development of lay leaders. Their main theme, as shared by Nate Paul, is, “We can do more by identifying the unique gifts of the people in our ministry.”⁶⁴ Already in that language, one sees how the identity of a congregation is the identification of gifts and making use of them in the ministry. A way in which the CORE goes about establishing this is in the area of their Life Groups. A life group could be compared to what most would call a small group bible study. These groups meet and often do not have a pastor leading the group, but instead, it is a lay leader. In their life groups, a pastor oversees everything, but there are paid lay leaders who facilitate everything. That includes training. If a person wants to become a life group leader, they must go through training beforehand with the pastor and the life group (paid lay leader) facilitator. This is an amazing way to use the gifts God has given to his people and to allow them to serve as priests.

Another way in which the CORE has established the universal priesthood is by actually encouraging its lay leaders to become fully active in their church through paid positions. The

63. Nate Paul (Chief Operating Officer of 922 Ministries in Appleton, WI), in discussion with the author by zoom meeting, October 2025.

64. Nate Paul (Chief Operating Officer of 922 Ministries in Appleton, WI), in discussion with the author by zoom meeting, October 2025.

staff at the CORE looks like this: 30 called workers, 32 full-time lay staff members, 34 part-time lay staff members, and a vast number of unpaid volunteer lay workers.⁶⁵ This may seem unattainable, but there are multiple reasons the CORE is able to do this. They are a much larger congregation and have a much larger ministry plan than many WELS churches. However, there is a great opportunity to learn from the ministry plan of the CORE. They do well to encourage lay leaders to grow in their gifts and to use them without any hindrance.

After all, the development of lay leaders allows the pastor to be freer to use the gifts God has given him. As Nate Paul expressed, “Let the pastor use the gifts God has blessed him with and let that be his role.”⁶⁶ That has been a central theme for the CORE, and they have continued to encourage their pastors to spend more time on gospel ministry instead of having to worry about other details that lay members can take care of.

Another congregation in the WELS that has a high emphasis on the development of lay leaders and the implementation of the royal priesthood is Crosswalk in Arizona. Crosswalk has been a portable church for 20 years. Being a portable church means that one has to set up and take down every Sunday. That cannot be done by just a pastor. Instead, it relies on lay members volunteering their time to set up and take down for worship every week. “This has fostered a culture of service and, over time, has led to systems that are now in place.”⁶⁷ It is with this focus that the systems at Crosswalk were developed. And as they developed, they created systems that

65. Nate Paul, email message to the author, October 24, 2025.

66. Nate Paul (Chief Operating Officer of 922 Ministries in Appleton, WI), in discussion with the author by zoom meeting, October 2025.

67. Tim Glende, pastor at Crosswalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ, email message to author, October 22, 2025.

had clear expectations and responsibilities. Pastor Tim Glende says that this is one of the most important things to implement in a congregation if they want well-done and properly encouraged lay involvement. He says, “People who love their church will volunteer, but they desire to know what and when their time is going into.”⁶⁸ It is important to have those clear, thought-out explanations for people to realize what they are getting into before they actually volunteer their time. One understands the reaction of a worker if they are told a meeting will only take an hour, but it actually takes 2 hours. In the same way, if there are no clear explanations for a lay volunteer, then they will be more wary of lending their time and energy to a project that they have no idea whether or not will be rewarding.

Tim Glende also noticed over his years as a pastor that those people who often volunteered their time more than others would be the ones to become leaders in the church. Tim Glende says, “Oftentimes, you will find that those ‘high capacity volunteers’ will become your first part-time paid people. When you can find 2-3 people who have 5-8 hours a week to give regularly to volunteerism, it will allow the pastor to still do all the things a pastor needs to do without calling a 2nd full-time staff person.”⁶⁹ Another benefit to the lay leaders, the priests of Christ, becoming more involved in the church, is that they allow the pastor to be freer with his time and energy spent.

This requires trust from the pastor as well. Tim Glende states, “Trust those volunteers to carry out their role. You picked them because they are reliable and passionate about your

68. Tim Glende, pastor at Crosswalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ, email message to author, October 22, 2025.

69. Tim Glende, pastor at Crosswalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ, email message to author, October 22, 2025.

ministry and spiritually plugged in and rooted.”⁷⁰ Part of the goal to encourage lay leader development is to allow the congregation to become less reliant on the pastor to do everything. Not only does this allow the congregation to flourish as the Spirit continues to supply gifts to his church, but it also allows the pastor to extend his time with a higher quality in areas he may have had to cut back on without lay involvement.

This does require time from the leaders already present in the congregation and from the pastor. As Tim Glende notes, “There is a culture piece to this that I think happens both organically and strategically. You have to be willing to sit down and identify areas others can do, and you also have to identify people with gifts and passions who are willing and available to serve and get plugged in.”⁷¹ This requires the pastor to be willing to give up some of the things that he might often feel he needs to do. The reality is that if a pastor has this mindset, it will lead to burnout or to a reliance on the pastor alone. It is taking away the right of the priests in the congregation who have been called by Christ to serve one another and the world by sharing his gospel message.

One will notice multiple similarities between the two approaches to the involvement of lay leaders in both the CORE and Crosswalk. Both have built a culture that encourages the involvement of the laity. Both have created an emotional investment from top to bottom to ensure there is an obvious desire for the laity to be involved. Both have a clear path and desire for their members to get involved, and what it will require of the membership. Perhaps most

70. Tim Glende, pastor at Crosswalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ, email message to author, October 22, 2025.

71. Tim Glende, pastor at Crosswalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, AZ, email message to author, October 22, 2025.

importantly, both have set out with this desire to create space for the pastor to serve according to the role he has been called. Both congregations want their pastors to be free to serve God's people with his word and sacraments.

So, how does a congregation go about making sure it is not solely reliant on the pastor? As one looks at the two congregations of the CORE and Crosswalk, they have many similarities. But they also have multiple differences. The answer is not a one-size-fits-all solution that fixes everything. However, there is a clear emphasis that can be encouraged in every WELS congregation. Take the teaching of the universal priesthood and encourage the membership to grow the gifts he has given to his church. Whether some are meant to lead or not will become obvious. God has blessed his church with those who are called to serve. No one would want to hinder God's people from serving their Lord. Create an environment and space that is beneficial and helpful for lay members to grow in. Then watch how God blesses the work of his church!

CONCLUSION

The teaching and implementation of the universal priesthood is a necessity if any congregation seeks to avoid a sole reliance on a pastor. It is evident throughout God's word and the teaching of the Lutheran church that the universal priesthood applies to all believers. It is also evident that there are two distinct calls given to God's people in general and those who are publicly called. Understanding the distinctions as well as the partnership will help a church create an environment that encourages the priesthood to use their gifts to the benefit of the church. Implementing this in a local congregation will take time and will require research outside of biblical sources. As God has not commanded his church how they are to go about doing it, just that they actually do it.

While the discussion on this topic focuses more on the teachings than implementation, the general discussion has added to what has already been delivered by others. As the focus is more on how the universal priesthood helps a church with sole reliance on a pastor. However, what this paper does not do is give too much information on how one can implement these teachings. Some examples are provided, but there is a lot larger source of data and ideas to be gained from a broader discussion. One area that the author would encourage a reader to research further is the training of lay leaders. This point of discussion was one that was developed very minimally in this paper.

The conversation on the importance of the universal priesthood and the congregation's sole reliance on the pastor is one that is vital to the life of the Lutheran church today. Likely, a church will not survive without the involvement of its laity. It is also likely that a pastor will come to find that his laity wants to be involved. Applying the teaching of the universal priesthood is something every church will strive to do. May God bless the work of his priests in their congregations!

APPENDIX: INFORMED CONSENT FORM⁷²

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. My name is Noah Vogt, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. I am conducting this study as part of my senior thesis project (TH3300) on the topic of the universal priesthood and its application to lay leadership. This project is in partial fulfillment of my MDiv degree. You have been invited to participate in this research because I believe that you can provide valuable information on the topic. I will be asking you questions about how your ministry applies the universal priesthood to lay leadership development.

Your involvement in this research will be shared in the paper through quotes.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any or all questions. You may fully withdraw from the interview at any time and information that you provided will not be reported in the research.

“By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information, and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study under the conditions described.”

Name : _____ Date: _____

72. These forms were handed out to multiple sources who participated in this study and were willing to be quoted in the material.

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