

**LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS**  
**Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology**

**Volume XXIV, No. 1 (Issue 47) January 2016**

**<http://lsfm.global>**

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.  
View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global>.  
Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.  
E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

**LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS**  
—Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc.—  
ISSN 2470-1874 (print); ISSN 2470-1882 (online)

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Rev. Dr. Victor Raj, Editor & Chairman	Mr. David Berger
Rev. Dr. Daniel Mattson, Editor Pro Tem	Mr. Mark Kempff
Rev. Dr. Robert Kolb, Editor	Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler
Rev. Dr. Joel Okamoto, Book Editor	Rev. Dr. Rudy Blank
Rev. Jeffrey Thormodson	Rev. Dr. Rich Carter, DCE
Rev. Dr. Robert Scudieri	Mrs. Miriam Carter

***Lutheran Mission Matters* continues the publication of *Missio Apostolica*, the journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology founded in 1993.**

*Lutheran Mission Matters* is published twice a year in the spring and fall by the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc. (LSFM), and special issues may be published occasionally. *Lutheran Mission Matters* serves as an international Lutheran forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion of issues related to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ globally. The views expressed by the individual writers, however, are not necessarily the views of the editors, Editorial Committee, or the Board of Directors of LSFM.

The journal is an open-access publication and is available online at <http://lsfm.global>. Members of the society who contribute more than \$30 per year may choose to receive an identical paper copy of the journal.

The journal is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database (online journal index of the American Theological Library Association) and its related online full-text component, ATLAS (American Theological Library Association Serials). ATLAS may be accessed at no charge by alumni of many seminaries upon request to the library of their alma mater.

Since its inception the journal has been edited by an editorial committee led by these individuals:

Editor: Won Yong Ji (1993–1996); Robert Kolb (1996–2011); Victor Raj (2012); Robert Kolb (2013–)

Editor and Chairman: Victor Raj (2013–)

Chairman: Daniel L. Mattson (2011–2012)

Book Review Editor: Willard Burce (1993); Charles P. Arand (1994–1996); David R. Schmitt (1996–2002); Joel Okamoto (2002–)

©**Copyright** 2016, The Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc., St. Louis.  
Cover design by Justin Kumfer



# LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS

Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology, Inc.

Volume XXIV, No. 1 (47)

January 2016

## CONTENTS

Inside This Issue .....3

### ARTICLES

Messengers of the Message: Preparing Tomorrow's Pastors Dale A. Meyer .....	6
One Pastor's Efforts to Nurture: A Congregation of Priests Gerhard C. Michael, Jr. ....	13
Missio Trinitatis: Averting the Trifurcation of Witness, Service, and Life Together John Nunes.....	24
God's Plan, My Mission Gerald Perschbacher .....	34
The Word, the Baptized, and the Mission of God Robert Newton .....	42
Vocation and Mission: The Role of the Laity in the Mission of Christ Dean Nadasdy.....	50
Faithful and Missional from the Beginning: One Hundred Years of LCMS Mission Paul Heerboth .....	59
The New Religious Context in the North Atlantic World: God's Mission in a Secular Age Chad Lokies.....	68
Category Error, Common Sense, and the Office of the Public Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Dust Kunkel.....	81
Rehabilitating the Doctrine of the Call: Building Strength and Agility for Mission Michael T. Von Behren.....	96
Useless and Bankrupt: Confession and Mission in Light of the Symbols Matthew Borrasso.....	118
How Lutherans Have Done Mission: A Historical Survey Volker Stolle .....	126
Vocation in Missiological Perspective Douglas L. Rutt .....	139

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

# LUTHERAN SOCIETY FOR MISSIOLOGY

---

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Rev. Dr. Daniel Mattson, Chairman  
Professor Phil Johnson, Vice-chairman  
Rev. Michael Lange, Secretary  
Mrs. Ruth Mattson, Treasurer  
Rev. Jeffrey Thormodson, Executive Director  
Rev. Dr. Victor Raj, Editor  
Rev. Dr. Eugene Bunkowske (ex-officio)

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Rev. Dr. Victor Raj, Editor & Chairman  
Rev. Dr. Robert Kolb, Editor  
Rev. Dr. Joel Okamoto, Book Editor  
Rev. Dr. Daniel Mattson, Editor Pro Tem  
Rev. Jeffrey Thormodson  
Mr. David Berger  
Mr. Mark Kempff  
Rev. Dr. Robert Scudieri  
Rev. Dr. Jon Diefenthaler  
Rev. Dr. Rudy Blank  
Rev. Dr. Rich Carter, DCE  
Mrs. Miriam Carter

---

ALL CORRESPONDENCE SHOULD BE SENT TO THE OFFICE OF THE EDITOR:

*LUTHERAN MISSION MATTERS* TEL: (314) 505-7116  
801 Seminary Place FAX: (314) 505-7124  
St. Louis, MO 63105, USA

BOOKS FOR REVIEW SHOULD BE SENT TO THE BOOK EDITOR:

Joel Okamoto TEL: (314) 505-7152  
801 Seminary Place E-mail: [okamotoj@csleu](mailto:okamotoj@csleu)  
St. Louis, MO 63105, USA

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:

Stacey Parker  
c/o Dr. Victor Raj  
801 Seminary Place E-mail: [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com)  
St. Louis, MO 63105, USA

---

Stay connected with LSFM.



LSFM's website

<http://lsfm.global>



Find us on Facebook.

[https://www.facebook.com/  
LutheranSocietyforMissiology/](https://www.facebook.com/LutheranSocietyforMissiology/)

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

# Inside This Issue:

## Pastors and People in Mission

There are several reasons why “Pastors and People in Mission” has been chosen as the theme for this “special edition.” First, it helps call attention to the change of name for this journal from *Missio Apostolica* to *Lutheran Mission Matters*. The Editorial Committee is fully aware of the confusion that often accompanies transitions of this type; but we are determined to make the articles in this and subsequent editions available to a wider audience of pastors and people who are convinced that Lutheran mission matters, that the Lutheran faith is something to be shared with the world, especially the world that does not know Jesus.

Secondly, the perennial issue of the missionary roles of pastors and people is one that continues to raise concerns for Lutherans in North America and around the world. One might say that the conversation began with Martin Luther’s treatise of 1520 on “The Freedom of a Christian,” in which he emphasized that the Gospel liberates all to serve God and neighbor.

For The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the issue reared its head as early as 1839, when the colony of Saxon immigrants found it necessary to depose their bishop, Martin Stephan. In the resulting crisis, the Saxon clergy continued to fulfill their God-given role as shepherds of the flock, but was it enough? Could this little band of immigrants be the church? What was its role in this new land?

At Altenburg, MO, in 1841, C. F. W. Walther, after a time of carefully studying the Scriptures and the writings of the Lutheran reformers, laid the foundation that would ultimately empower both pastors and people in their efforts to carry forward together the mission of the Lord on the frontier, affirming that the Lord of the church was always with His flock wherever the preaching and teaching of the truth of His Word was taking place and wherever the sacraments were administered according to His command.

As Lutherans around the world prepare to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, and as churches in this country face the daunting task of reaching out to people in communities where the influence of Christianity is clearly waning, the members of the Lutheran Society for Missiology believe it is important to come to a fuller understanding of those who never have had or have lost the faith, to recognize the points of weakness, as well the strength of our Lutheran witness to the Good News of Jesus, and to renew our commitment as pastors and people to sharing it with others in both word and deed.

For the sake of achieving this objective, we have assembled an excellent lineup of authors and articles.

President Dale Meyer of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Dr. Gerhard Michael, president emeritus of the Florida Georgia District, who is now at work as interim pastor in one of its congregations, highlight today's mission formation challenges with respect to both pastors and laypeople and efforts they are making in their respective contexts to meet these.

Dr. John Nunes, the president-elect of Concordia College, New York, and Gerald Perschbacher of Lutheran Hour Ministries focus attention on the threefold emphasis that the Missouri Synod is placing upon *Witness, Mercy, and Life Together*. They not only explore some of the implications they see for pastors and people, but address several of the missional questions being raised regarding the relationships of these same three to one another.

Dr. Robert Newton and Dr. Dean Nadasdy offer us the perspectives on this edition's theme from the viewpoint of two seasoned LCMS district presidents: one who has had firsthand experience at the front line of mission overseas and one who has provided senior leadership at a large, growing congregation on the twenty-first-century American scene.

Dust Kunkel and Michael Von Behren provide a measure of in-depth study of the confessional legitimacy and the contemporary necessity of keeping Licensed Lay Deacons in the arsenal of workers available to congregations seeking to be in mission.

The context for mission is not the same today as it was the first century and a half of the Missouri Synod's existence. An article by the late Dr. Paul Heerboth and another from Dr. Chad Lakies, a member of the religion faculty at Concordia College, Portland, OR, demonstrate the contrast.

Two sources of conversation about the need for pastors and people today to see that being "confessional" and "missional" are complementary rather than competing identities are provided by a young LCMS pastor in his first parish, Matthew Borrasso, and Dr. Volker Stolle, a Lutheran theologian from the Independent Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK), the partner church of the LCMS in Germany. Dr. Douglas Rutt of Lutheran Hour Ministries then examines the theme of this edition from the standpoint of the Lutheran doctrine of vocation.

In 2016, the LCMS will hold its triennial convention in Milwaukee. In connection with the convention, officers will be elected and multiple decisions about the future of the Synod will be made. The church will seriously discuss the mission and ministry of a Lutheran church of more than two million members, seeking ways to strengthen the faith of its existing members even as it sends those members into the world to bear witness to Jesus. It is the desire of the Editorial Committee, through the articles included in this "special edition," to add to this conversation by providing food for thought and discussion. *Lutheran Mission Matters!*

The Lutheran Society for Missiology has decided also to experiment with a twenty-first-century method of distribution. Articles will be delivered to pastors and people electronically, singly and in pairs, over a period of weeks during the late winter and early spring. The articles will then be assembled in a hard copy and distributed to members who have requested a paper copy.

The society recognizes that many of our readers will welcome an opportunity to read one or two articles at a time over a period of time, rather than a host of articles in one issue. At the same time, it will also provide additional opportunities for pastors and people who are not as yet members of LSFM to read the ideas of others who think that *Lutheran Mission Matters*, to join the movement, and to do their part in awakening the Lutheran church to the mission opportunities that God is placing before His people.

Special Edition Committee  
*Lutheran Mission Matters*

## Articles

# Messengers of the Message: Preparing Tomorrow's Pastors

Dale A. Meyer

**Abstract:** Perhaps your child or grandchild has stopped attending church. We all know people who have walked away from regular worship. For us it's a worrisome trait in contemporary American culture, and there are many reasons why it's happening. Among the reasons is one that concerns seminaries: the conduct of some pastors. Some messengers display pastoral demeanors and personal lives that do not reflect positively on the message of Jesus Christ.

More than ever before, seminaries need to form pastors who are continually growing in personal sanctification, men who take theological head knowledge down into their hearts, first and foremost because it is the message of their own salvation. Then, as a consequence, they go to congregations and communities as messengers of salvation, pastors who model the Christian life. Because these are changed times, Concordia Seminary is revising its curriculum. The message of the Gospel continues to be paramount, non-negotiable, but new curricular emphases will focus on the messenger of the message of Jesus Christ. One pastor who works with people who have disconnected from church says, "We are in a time when what you are saying is as important as how you are saying it. What you are saying needs to be genuine and authentic." As Paul said, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

This isn't the America many of us knew growing up. It's changed so much, in ways we wouldn't have imagined a few decades ago, changes that affect our lives in more ways than we know. As church people, these changes worry us when we see congregations struggling, and the statistics are bad. The majority of congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are struggling. It's when we see our young people walking away from the church that these cultural changes pierce our hearts. No doubt you have a family member or friend who has become a "none," the word used by pollsters to identify someone who had identified with a congregation and denomination in the past but now lists "none" as his or her religious preference. To be sure, the increase in "nones" doesn't mean that your child, grandchild, or friend has left the saving faith. God knows their hearts, but their walk away from the institutional church is dangerous. In leaving the spiritual disciplines that have formed

---

*Rev. Dr. Dale A. Meyer is the president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*  
[meyerd@csl.edu](mailto:meyerd@csl.edu)

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.  
View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.  
Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.  
E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

us in faith and in which we've tried to raise our young people, these precious souls are wandering into a spiritually dangerous far country, not unlike the prodigal son who went his own way, thinking that he knew best. So why do people leave participation in the life of a congregation? There are many reasons, but there is one that especially grieves us at Concordia Seminary; and I know it grieves all who love their congregations. This reason is the conduct of pastors.

Pastors should have loving hearts and welcoming arms; they shouldn't put people off. That's why our seminary is constantly talking about how to improve the quality of graduates. Ongoing efforts include evaluation of teaching effectiveness, workshops on curriculum and teaching techniques, focus groups and regular conversations with leaders in the church, especially the district presidents who have to deal with problem cases.

Overwhelmingly, our research has shown that our graduates do well when they are placed in their first congregations. Some do not do well because they were not a good fit for that first assignment, even though extensive work by the seminary and consultations with district presidents led us to believe it would be a good fit. Thankfully, these students often do much better when they are called to their second congregation. Sadly, however, there are a few graduates who fail badly, and the seminaries hear about it.

The following are some cases that I have heard about over my many years of ministry, inappropriate behaviors that have stuck in my memory. One pastor went ballistic when the trustees planted a tree without his approval. Apparently his view of the office of the ministry included landscape authority. Another pastor, asked by a member to visit a non-church member dying of AIDS, refused, saying the sick person was dying because of his sin. A third case was the pastor whose ways led people to leave his congregation. When the congregation could no longer afford to pay him, he insisted that someone had to pay him because he was a "called and ordained pastor."

But far more common are examples like my fourth case. A pastor whose two predecessors had failed morally, scandalous failures, arrived, visited members, listened patiently to their anger at the clergy. Thank God, through his patient pastoral leadership, the congregation today is healthy and growing.

Just as these cases have stuck in my memory, you may well have had your own hurtful experience with a pastor. "Are they learning this at the seminary?" Like heat-seeking missiles zooming in on a target, complaints zero in on the seminary, and please be assured that we take the complaints seriously. I recently asked a district president, "Let's take ten congregations that weren't getting along with their pastor. The conflict is great enough that you, the district president, were brought in. Out of those ten, how many congregations were in conflict because of the doctrine the pastor is preaching and teaching?" This district president answered, "Almost none."

Indeed, dysfunction in congregations is predominantly caused by interpersonal conflicts that in varying ways include the pastor. His doctrine is probably correct, the Law and Gospel rightly divided, but the messenger bringing the message is in some way flawed. It's common sense; we pastors are fallible sinners too!

“Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction” (Rom 15:4). At the start of this essay, we mentioned the changes in America these last decades, changes that have had an impact on the life of the church. Popular culture also caused problems in St. Paul's relationship with the Christians in Corinth. We can learn a way forward by seeing how Paul handled his strained relationship with that ancient congregation.

In our twenty-first century, the wonders of modern communication have made us conscious that we're living in a global world. Diversity accelerates, opinions and factions proliferate, Washington is gridlocked, but through all the dysfunction there is one dominant factor: political correctness. It dominates public conversation and tries to impose itself wherever it wants. This has come upon us in no small measure because of the dominance of major thought centers, like liberal universities, and many in the major media. This combination of liberal intellectual thought disseminated by willing media has successfully planted attitudes and conducts into the popular culture that couldn't have been imagined decades ago.

A sobering note: It's not going to change any time soon; the twentieth century is over. Back in the first century, the culture in Corinth had its own version of intellectuals and media influencing popular thought. Founded as a Roman colony in 44 BC, Corinth was in a location that made it a cosmopolitan city. Merchants, soldiers, philosophers, dramatic performers, tourists, religious pilgrims and evangelists all streamed through Corinth. It was truly a pluralistic society. The popular culture of Corinth found public expression through traveling orators called

the “sophists.” These intellectuals came to town and spoke in public, attracting followers with their wisdom and knowledge. They fostered a popular culture that was self-centered and self-serving. They promoted strength and belittled weakness, exalted knowledge and disparaged the unschooled. These sophists contributed significantly to a popular culture in which power, position,

prestige, and personality were more important than substance. In other words, the messenger was more important than the message. It was what we Lutherans call a “theology of glory,” and it was harming the Body of Christ in Corinth. Of course, those believers didn't understand this and so Paul had to teach them, pastorally.

You might expect Paul to have said, “My dear Corinthians, it's all about the message; pay no attention to me, the faulty messenger.” But no, he handled his

The messenger was  
more important  
than the message.  
It was what we Lutherans  
call a “theology of glory.”

relationship with the congregation in a different way. Paul wasn't a sophist, but he was perceived as one of the sophists. That's understandable. When he first arrived in Corinth, he had an agenda, spoke in public as a skilled rhetorician, and attracted a following. When he left Corinth, he got word that he was being compared somewhat unfavorably to other leaders, not just to sophists but especially to other Christian leaders, like the smooth Apollos. "I follow Paul" or "I follow Apollos" (1 Cor 1:12). Paul and other leaders were being compared and judged because the Corinthian Christians were more under the influence of popular culture than under the cross, reflecting the conventional wisdom that exalted the strong and knowing more than the wisdom of God in weakness.

Paul didn't dodge criticisms against him by saying the church members weren't getting the message right, and to be sure, the Corinthians weren't properly living out the message. Instead, *Paul presented himself as a model of how the message of the cross applies to life*. He said, "Be imitators of me" (1 Cor 4:16). While we can intellectually separate the messenger from the message, Paul recognized that the two are closely linked in the perception of the public within and outside the church.

If the saving message is carried by a flawed messenger who causes offense, many people will reject the Gospel, or at least have nothing to do with that congregation. The messenger must be a different kind of person, a leader willing to let his life be scrutinized for the sake of the more important message. "I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ" (4:16–17). "I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (10:33–11:1). Then and now, the pastoral demeanor and personal life of the messenger of the message is mission critical.

If the saving message is carried by a flawed messenger who causes offense, many people will reject the Gospel, or at least have nothing to do with that congregation. The messenger must be a different kind of person, a leader willing to let his life be scrutinized for the sake of the more important message.

Historically, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has kept the message and messenger somewhat separate. Seminary formation focused on intellect, on lectures, and on reading books of theology. The character of the messenger, while important, was not given a priority. That preponderant stress upon the message is seen in the questions asked a candidate for ordination or installation. Seven questions are asked; all but one are about content, about fidelity to the biblical and confessional message. Only one question turns to the character of the pastor. "Finally, will you honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life?" This emphasis upon faithfulness to the Word is as it

should be. Jesus says, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31–32). “Scripture alone” is our Reformation heritage. The masthead of the German predecessor to *The Lutheran Witness* said, “God’s Word and Luther’s teaching shall to all time endure.” Most personally, it’s Jesus who saves you and me, and we know Jesus only through His Spirit working through the Word. “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31).

Your future pastors will continue to receive this blessed Lutheran emphasis upon the message, God’s Word. Right now the faculty of Concordia St. Louis is revising the curriculum for our major pastoral formation program, the Master of Divinity program. “Curriculum” means not only what is taught in the classroom but the entire campus experience. The very first goal of the seminary experience is “Theological Foundations,” the acceptance and use of Scripture “as the inspired and normative Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions as their authoritative interpretation.” That’s not just a nod; the intent of the new curriculum is that our graduates conduct their ministries and guide their congregations from a biblical and confessional mindset. Worldly wisdom and knowledge can aid in ministry (for example, Paul used the devices of rhetoric), but such helps must always be subservient to ministry animated by the Word of Christ.

In that light, the new curriculum highlights “Pastoral Practice and Leadership” more intentionally than in the past. Students will have more experiences with healthy congregations. And through a new curricular emphasis, “Cultural Interpretation and Engagement,” students will learn first-hand about bringing the Word of God to people of different cultures and ethnicities. The focus will always be on God and faith. Tomorrow’s pastors must have the determination of Paul, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4–5).

Because there has been a problem with the conduct of some pastors, much more attention will also be given by the seminary to the character of the candidate for ministry so that our future pastors “be above reproach” and “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim 3:1–7). Paul David Tripp has written,

Tomorrow’s pastors must have the determination of Paul, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4–5).

Academized Christianity, which is not constantly connected to the heart and puts its hope in knowledge and skill, can actually make students dangerous. It arms them with powerful knowledge and skills that can make the students think that they are more mature and godly than they actually are. It arms students with weapons of spiritual warfare that if not used with humility and grace will harm the people they are meant to help.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the new curriculum includes special attention to “Personal and Spiritual Formation,” emphasizing your future pastor’s devotional life, physical and emotional health, relationship skills, accountability, sensitivity to other cultures and ethnicities, and much more. Before the whole faculty votes to certify a student for the holy ministry, each student will have to demonstrate successful progress toward these desired outcomes. By the way, this isn’t only about seminarians. Manifest integrity of head and heart should be the character of every follower of Jesus. For pastors, ordination isn’t completion; it signals intensified zeal for sanctified living. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

This is a holistic approach that theological educators see as appropriate and necessary to ministry in our changed American culture. Nancy Ammerman, Professor of Sociology of Religion at Boston University, writes:

Simply teaching the basic skills of preaching and teaching will not help students assemble the disparate pilgrims moving through the city to hear what they have to say. Simply ensuring adequate scriptural and theological knowledge may or may not help a student hear the halting questions of a young adult who has never been to church. . . . All the things seminaries have learned to do are still essential, but they are no longer sufficient. Today’s religious leaders have to invite people into a spiritual community where worship introduces connections to God, fellowship introduces connections to one another, and service introduces connections to a large mission in the world.<sup>2</sup>

There is reason for hope. The Point, a mission church in Knoxville, Tennessee reaches people who have wandered from the church. “To date the average visitor to The Point is 10–20 years disconnected from the church if they have ever attended the church.” Pastor Matt Peeples writes, “People are tired of spin and gimmicks. . . . As a result of being bombarded with messages, they have become more savvy to what the message is really communicating. We are in a time where what you are saying is as important as how you are saying it. What you are saying needs to be genuine and authentic.” “In this culture, content becomes secondary to connection. If you do not connect, you will not be given the opportunity to share your content.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul’s strained relationship with the Corinthian congregation wasn’t as much about doctrine as about their failure to deal with one another as fellow members of the Body of Christ. “There is no evidence that the factions Paul describes in 1 Corinthians represented any differences in doctrine or practice.”<sup>4</sup> L. L. Welborn carefully describes the setting that Paul portrays and makes a convincing case that

the problem is power struggle and not a theological controversy.<sup>5</sup> The message gave them all they needed for vibrant congregational life (“you are not lacking in any spiritual gift,” 1:7), but their most vocal members didn’t get the difference between prevailing culture and life in the church. Society’s emphasis upon knowledge became their pride in theological knowledge. To that Paul said, “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up” (8:2). Society’s stress upon individual power and prestige became their justification for self-assertion to the spiritual harm of other church members. “All things are lawful (that is, can be justified theologically), but not all things are helpful” (10:23). In short, their theology of glory blocked the power and wisdom of God that comes from the message of the cross. To translate the message from their heads to the habits of their hearts, Paul presented his personal life as a model. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” That’s mission critical for tomorrow’s pastors, and today’s as well, for Jesus’ sake.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Echristian, 2012), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Ammerman, “America’s Changing Religious and Cultural Landscape and its Implications for Theological Education,” *Theological Education*, 49, no. 1 (2014), 33.

<sup>3</sup> For easy access to Peebles’ work, see Matthew Peebles, Engage the Digital Age: Preaching the Unchanging Gospel in and Ever Changing Culture, [connectingthedisconnected.com](http://connectingthedisconnected.com), at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdE6S1oqvxs> (accessed August 19, 2015) and *The New Realities of Communication* at [connectingthedisconnected.com](http://connectingthedisconnected.com).

<sup>4</sup> Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000) 55.

<sup>5</sup> L. L. Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 7.

## *Encountering Mission*

# **One Pastor's Efforts to Nurture: A Congregation of Priests**

**Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.**

**Abstract:** The author describes his efforts in a small congregation in Dahlonega, Georgia to help it understand its role in God's mission from the perspective of the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood is a corporate reality, but the way a congregation accomplishes its priestly service is through the individual members working together, with each doing his or her part. Paying close attention to the role of priests in the Old and New Testaments, the author helped the congregation to see that their role as the priesthood of all believers was to present God to the nations through their witness and service and the nations to God through their prayers. Consequently, this pastor sought to help his whole flock realize how their conduct is an integral part of their service. He taught the vital role intercessory prayer plays in God's mission. He highlighted the critical role listening plays in knowing how to witness to people in their various situations. He emphasized how Scripture reveals the all-sufficiency of Christ, who meets the entire range of human needs. If the priesthood is to declare the wonderful deeds of God, the priests need to know the story of salvation. He showed how special occasions provide opportunities to connect a congregation with the workplace, marriage and family, and society for their witness, service, and prayers.

In December 2013, I began serving in my retirement a small Lutheran congregation seeking to get established in Dahlonega, Georgia. The town has a population of roughly six thousand. As the country's first gold rush community (1828) in the midst of scenic mountains, it conducts a brisk tourist business. It is also home to the University of North Georgia's main campus. The challenge for me was to learn how I could help this little flock live under the Good Shepherd's care and enable it to take its place in Jesus' mission to bring in others who are not yet part of His fold. Focusing on just scattered Lutherans was not a promising prospect, since all

---

*Gerhard C. "Mike" Michael, Jr. is serving as pastor of the missionary congregation of St. Peter Lutheran Church, in Dahlonega, Georgia, convinced that the Good News is worth sharing. In this role, he draws on his experience as a missionary in Japan, parish pastor in Wisconsin and Georgia, president of the Florida-Georgia District (1997–2009), and Executive Director of the Luther Institute—Southeast Asia, 2010–January, 2015. [gmjrflga@aol.com](mailto:gmjrflga@aol.com)*

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Lutherans in Georgia comprise only 0.6% (.006) of the population. In Dahlongega, the percentage is even lower, and most people have no idea what Lutheranism is. My challenge was heightened by the fact that my wife and I do not live in the community.

The question that stood before me—and stands before every congregation with some variation—is this: What approach should we take to meet our evangelistic challenge? I intend to walk readers through our process in the hope that it will encourage thought on theirs. I will share the gist of Bible studies, sermons and services, and activities which we have undertaken to help the whole congregation see itself as “A Congregation of Priests.” A bit of background will be helpful for understanding our approach.

While serving as the Executive Director of the Luther Institute—Southeast Asia, I developed a course entitled, “Equipping the Whole Priesthood for Its Ministry.” Its purpose was to unpack the biblical teaching on the priesthood of all believers so that national pastors could equip and empower their congregations, with all of their members, to serve as priests in and to the world.

What approach should we take to meet our evangelistic challenge?

One module highlights the pastor’s role. He should model for all the priests what it means to witness, serve, and pray. As a steward of the Gospel, he should teach them so they know and can witness to the mighty acts of God. He should equip them to see their placement in a middle position between God and the world and how to fulfill it. I determined this approach could be applied in Dahlongega. I focused on fulfilling this pastoral role to help the whole congregation function as God’s royal priests. Having the whole priesthood serving, witnessing, and praying seemed to hold greater promise for doing the Lord’s mission than just the pastor and a few people trying.

After having served them approximately ten months, I shared a proposal to help them see themselves as a “congregation of priests.” One aspect of this congregation’s DNA—commitment to service in the community—encouraged its approval of this proposal. And, in fact, the congregation readily committed to learning what it meant to be God’s kingdom of priests in this community.

This commitment now challenged me to develop resources (for Bible classes, sermons, and services) and activities that would foster their understanding of the priesthood concept—and, importantly, how they could put it into practice as a congregation and personally. The intent was not to adopt a program but to foster the practice of the priesthood in the many relationships of their everyday lives.

## **Laying the Foundation: Helping the Congregation Understand Its Priestly Identity and Role**

Our first Bible study, consisting of three lessons but covered over nine sessions, was designed to help us understand the biblical teaching on the priesthood of all believers. While the New Testament witnesses are few in number, they highlight significant aspects of it. Key references are present in Revelation, 1 Peter, and Hebrews.

The references in Revelation (1:5b–6; 5:9–10) help us understand that the church is the priesthood because it has been ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ to be a “kingdom, priests to our God and Father.” Notably, the references in Exodus to Israel being the kingdom of priests are in the future tense, but in Revelation they are in the past tense. Christ’s redeeming work accounts for the transformation! We are the priesthood by virtue of what Christ has done for us.

Christ’s redeeming work accounts for the transformation! We are the priesthood by virtue of what Christ has done for us.

The juxtaposition of “kingdom, priests” leads us to understand the corporate nature of the concept. “Kingdom” is a collective noun, singular in number, but implying many citizens. However, this is a kingdom of “priests,” and the character of kingdom will be expressed by the attitude and action of the priests. This understanding is reinforced in 1 Peter 2:9–12, where the juxtaposition of the singular collective nouns, “race, priesthood,

nation, people” (v. 9) is made with the plural, “sojourners, exiles” (v. 11). Just as a committee needs the individual members to each do his part to achieve its goals, the priesthood will accomplish its service—and the priesthood is primarily one of service—only when the priests do their work.

The collective nouns, however, stress that our individual work is part of the corporate personality of the church and should serve a common end: living and serving in accord with the King’s will. Our individual work should cohere, serving the divinely given common purposes. The New Testament refrains from using the term “priest” for its leaders (they are called apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, elders, deacons, and bishops), but instead uses the collective noun “royal priesthood” to denote all Christians. The priesthood belongs to all the people, and thus the title is meant to highlight both the corporate and personal nature of this high calling: “a congregation of priests.”

Behind the passages in 1 Peter 2:9–10, three Old Testament passages highlight the missionary dimension of this concept. The first is Exodus 19:3–6, where we find expressions echoed in 1 Peter: treasured possession, holy nation, and kingdom of priests. Israel’s identity as God’s people is not established at Mount Sinai, but originates from the call of Abraham. God has chosen him and his descendants. He

calls them “my people,” again and again even as they languish in Egypt. Through the plagues climaxing in Israel’s deliverance from the house of bondage, He is revealing Himself to them as the Lord (Ex 6:2–8) who will rescue them. It heightens the significance of their identity as His people. The covenant at Mount Sinai is God’s call to them to live out their identity as His people and to fulfill the missionary responsibility to which He is calling them. All the earth is the Lord’s. Israel is God’s treasured possession out of all the peoples. He has separated them unto Himself. They are His “holy nation.” Their job is to reflect that identity to the surrounding nations among which they live, that all the earth may come to know its Lord.

This missionary dimension had already been suggested earlier with the exodus and the plagues. For example, consider the reason God attached to the seventh plague, that of hail: that Pharaoh may “know that there is none like me in all the earth” (9:14); “but for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth” (9:16); and “the thunder will cease and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s!” (9:29) Now the witness continues through the people’s service.

To be a priest is to be a mediator, and when the people of God are called His royal priesthood, they stand in a mediate position between God and the world. They are called to represent God to the world through their witness and service, and they are called to represent the world to God through their intercessions. Priests serve. Priests witness. Priests pray.

God’s grace motivates the priests’ service. A glance at the performance of the Israelites before they arrived at Mount Sinai suggests that God is not calling them to this service because of their stellar performance in the past. They reflect the faithful and faithless behavior of all of us. When Moses and Aaron first informed them that God was going to set them free, they believed them. When the taskmasters no longer provided straw for the bricks, they complained. When God told them to observe the Passover, they followed the instructions; they believed! But when they were sandwiched between the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army, they questioned God bringing them out of Egypt: “to die?” When God delivered them through the opened sea, they rejoiced, but when the water was bitter at Marah, they grumbled.

Just such  
“saints and sinners”  
are the ideal members  
of the priesthood,  
for they can testify  
to God’s rescuing,  
redeeming grace.

Just such “saints and sinners” are the ideal members of the priesthood, for they can testify to God’s rescuing, redeeming grace. They have experienced it. It gives them content for their witness, power for their service, and a basis for their intercessions for the nations to which they are being sent. The pastor has the

awesome privilege of anchoring the priesthood's ministry securely in the grace of God.

In Isaiah 43:20 ff., we have the passage that Peter echoes when he writes "that we are to declare the excellencies (mighty acts, wonderful deeds) of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pt 2:9). Israel was God's chosen people to witness for Him and to declare His wonderful deeds. They had that vocation, not due to their own accomplishment, but solely by God's grace. As the latter part of Isaiah 42 indicates, Israel was deaf and blind, dull to the Lord's word and way; that is why they were being disciplined, stuck in exile. However, Isaiah 43 reverses that judgment with the astonishingly good news, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name." They are God's witnesses (43:10, 12). Just as in Exodus, God's redeeming action results in their vocation of witnessing for God.

The third Old Testament text (Hos 1:6–9; 2:1, 23) highlights God's forgiving action in declaring old Israel to be His people. It records the transformation that God effects for the children of whoredom that Hosea and Gomer had. "Not my people," became "my people," and "have not received mercy" became "have received mercy." God's mercy, His undeserved grace forms the basis of the wonderful reality that we are God's kingdom of priests. This amazing reality motivates us to fulfill this priestly role with humility and faithfulness.

In this Bible study on the basic background on the priesthood of all believers, the class spent a significant amount of time discovering how Jesus Christ fulfilled what Old Israel had failed to accomplish. Instead of Israel's remaining faithful to God, they repeatedly caved in to temptation and worshiped the gods of the neighboring nations. Instead of reflecting the light of God's grace to the nations, they let the darkness of paganism cover them. Jesus Christ, however, did not fail. He came as the servant of the Lord, as God's light to the nations. He fulfilled the law, rather than ignoring it and disobeying it.

The Gospel of Matthew helped the class see how Jesus embodied Israel in His person and was indeed the true Israel. He lived out His Baptism by which He was identified as the Servant King of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. By resisting the devil's voice and obeying God's, He showed He truly was the Son of God. He used His power to demonstrate His authority over disease, the demonic, nature, and even death. With parables He opened the eyes of the disciples to see the gracious rule of God in action in His own person. Finally, He fulfilled the mission inherent in His Baptism by dying for the sins of the world and then rising again. His kingdom was not of this world; rather, it demonstrated to the world that He indeed was God's King.

We directed our attention next to the Epistle to the Hebrews to see how Jesus also served as the perfect priest, one with us in every way, except for sin. By His own death, He offered the perfect sacrifice once for all so that no more sacrifices have to be made. He now lives to make intercession for us. We can draw near to God

through Him, since He has given us access to the throne of grace. The best part is that through Holy Baptism we are united with Him, made the beneficiaries of His saving work. We now have the astounding vocation of being His priests in the world. The living sacrifice of our bodies dedicated to His purposes in the world can now be offered to God through Him (1 Pt 2:5; Rom 12:1–2), as well as the “sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb 13:15).

To sum up our role as God’s kingdom of priests, we now stand in the mediate position between the world and God. We are in the world but not of the world. Our role is to serve the world through our witness to Jesus Christ and our service to others in His name. At the same time, we take the world and its needs to the throne of grace as priests for the world. Our life together within the congregation nurtures and fosters the priestly vocation of the whole people of God. We gather together for worship, instruction, and mutual encouragement that we may be scattered into the world of family, work, and neighborhood as priests for the Lord.

We gather together  
for worship, instruction,  
and mutual  
encouragement that we  
may be scattered into the  
world of family, work,  
and neighborhood  
as priests for the Lord.

### **Helping the Priesthood Understand that the Priests’ Conduct Is Part of Their Priestly Service**

Into the Lenten season, the class pursued a double track. On Wednesday nights for midweek services, we sought to explore what it meant to be God’s “holy nation.” We knew that holiness meant that God had separated Israel and the church to Himself, to be His people in the world. It recalled 1 Peter 1:14–16: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy as I am holy.’” The class remembered how we had been “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pt 1:18–19).

The class then looked at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1–17. If God had prescribed them for old Israel, they undoubtedly still have value for us providing guidance for our conduct today. Experience teaches that people whose lives and lips are not congruent have the words from their lips falling to the ground; they do not hit the mark of the ears, minds, and hearts of their hearers.

The critical emphasis of the sermons was how the cleansing work of the Lord Jesus enabled us to pursue a life of holiness. The sermons focused on the Commandments topically as follows: First, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments: “Hearts that are Holy”; Second and Third Commandments: “Keep God’s Word

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

Holy”; Eighth Commandment: “Keep Our Words Holy”; Fourth and Sixth Commandments: “Holiness in our Homes and Relationships”; Fifth Commandment: “Holiness for Life”; and Seventh Commandment: “Holiness in the Stuff of Life.” On Maundy Thursday, we drew on 1 Corinthians 10:14–22, “Let Christ’s Holy Meal Strengthen You.” On Good Friday, we read John 18 and 19, divided into seven segments under the overall title, “Behold Your King!” with brief meditations for each segment.

## **Helping the Priests Understand Their Important Role as Intercessors**

The second track we began to follow in the Lenten season was the role of priests as intercessors. On Sunday mornings, we began a new Bible study: “Prayer in the Service of Our Mission as God’s Kingdom of Priests.” We saw how Jesus links prayer with His mission. At the end of Matthew 9, He teaches His disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers in the harvest; and at the beginning of Matthew 10, He enlists and commissions those very persons as His messengers. In Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 11:25–27, He reveals how God’s kingdom works. Jesus alone makes the Father known. In verses 28–30, He then invites the weary and heavy laden to come to Him. They receive Jesus and now are called to take His yoke on themselves and learn from Him, undoubtedly a call to His mission. In Mark 1, we see additional evidence of the connection between prayer and the Lord’s mission. After praying all night, Jesus knew that He must press on to the next villages, for “that is why I came out” (1:35–39). Further, Jesus’ high priestly prayer (John 17) reveals His own dependence upon God, His concern for His followers, and His prayer for the church’s unity that it might reflect the unity of the Father and the Son, surely a magnet to draw people into communion with them. We recall how Jesus had taught His followers earlier, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). Although He says that He is not praying for the world (Jn 17:9), He does have a strategy to reach the world: His disciples and those who believe through their word. That means the church is His means; we are His royal priesthood assigned the task.

What power there is for that mission in our intercessions! United by our baptisms with the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, we can go to the throne of grace confidently (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 4:16). Nothing blocks our access. We can plead urgently through the presence of the Spirit who enables us to go to God as our “Abba, heavenly Father” (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). And when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit Himself will intercede for us so that we may faithfully carry out our priestly duties for the world. We are not carrying out this mission by ourselves.

Our study of prayer also examined how Paul prayed for the congregations he was serving, his partners in God’s mission. In his letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians, we saw the rhythm of thanksgiving and intercession

followed by instruction and encouragement, which reflects the flow of the mission—out from God to His people and then through them to those beyond the church. This dynamic process can also be suggestive for our intercessions. In 1 Timothy 2:1–8, we have Paul linking prayer for all people with the work of Christ, who gave Himself as the ransom for all. If prayer is conversation with God, then listening to the Word of God will inform our praying so that our intercessions might respond to who God is and what He has done. When that happens, our intercessions will approach God on the basis of His character, for God’s unchanging characteristics of right, faithfulness, and grace inspire our prayer. We can count on Him to be true to Himself!

Taught by our Lord, our prayers will be offered in His name, be filled with gratitude, be persistent, confident, submissive to His will and purposes. By praying for the people we wish to serve and to whom we want to witness, we enlist God’s help in reaching out to them and will surely find our own hearts and minds opened to sense their situation, their struggles, and the way we might best minister to them.

Finally, we worked our way through the Lord’s Prayer, drawing heavily on the insights of Georg Vicedom’s *A Prayer for the World*.<sup>1</sup> In his book, Vicedom, first a missionary to New Guinea and then professor of missions at Neuendettelsau in Bavaria, reflects the wisdom of the *Missio Dei*. He guides its readers to see how the Lord’s Prayer indeed is a prayer for His mission and powerfully shapes us in our efforts to share the love of Christ with the world He has redeemed.

### **Gaining Wisdom for Our Witnessing**

To further equip our people for their role as the royal priesthood in the world, I led a course entitled “Listening and Witnessing” on Wednesday evenings during the Easter season. This course focused on the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1–23, together with the two preceding chapters. I sought to help the participants to see that the seed that produced as much as ten times the amount of a bumper crop was good, because it encased the Lord Jesus. The previous two chapters suggest some of the ways in which Jesus’ goodness is evident. He only reveals the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth. In contrast to the burden of keeping the Law for salvation, He gives rest, and so empowers people to take up His yoke and follow Him. He is greater than the temple, Jonah, and Solomon. He, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath. He comes as the Servant of Isaiah 42, with humility and compassion for the bruised reed and smoldering wick. He is the King whose power conquers the enemy. The context helps us realize the goodness of the seed and helps us see that we have something truly good to share—the Lord Jesus Himself, a great encouragement to confident witnessing!

The wider context of the parable also confronts us with the opposition the Seed will encounter. The Seed comes in lowliness and vulnerability; He can be resisted. In our study we identified two common forms of opposition to Jesus’ lordship: our

desire to remain in control (especially Matthew 11) and to do it ourselves, seeking to earn our salvation by keeping the Law (Matthew 12). Being transformed by the goodness of the seed is a testimony to God's grace. The priests of God are recipients of the revelation, telling us that it is a matter of grace, not of works (Matt 13:11, 16). For that reason, they are not discouraged in their task of witnessing, knowing that God will open the hearts of many to receive the revelation. Also, since it is a matter of grace, the priests of God will continue to be receptive to the Word, seeking to understand it so that they may grow to produce a bountiful harvest themselves (Matt 13:18–23).

The diversity of people we meet calls us to listen carefully to them so that we might present the Gospel in ways that will connect with them where they are. Jesus' all-sufficiency suggests that no matter what concerns our listening to others alerts us to, Jesus can be presented in a way that meets those concerns. Our ongoing efforts to learn the Word and discover meaningful ways to present it are worthwhile. We can end up being scribes trained for the kingdom, who can pull out of our storehouse things old and new to meet the opportunities we encounter.

The diversity of people we meet calls us to listen carefully to them so that we might present the Gospel in ways that will connect with them where they are.

With this course, we hoped to help our people realize that witnessing is not project or program, but rather listening to the people in one's own home, at the workplace, in the community, and then responding in sensitive ways to their concerns. The everyday witnessing which takes place in such ordinary settings is often better received than the witness which is part of an organized campaign to win one's community for Christ. The seeds we plant often grow, we know not how, as the farmer in Jesus' parable in Mark experienced (4:26–29). By listening, however, we learn the needs and situations to which our witness should be directed and how it can be expressed in a way that connects, whether in our own family, congregation, or neighborhood.

As a follow-up to our course on "Listening and Witnessing," one Saturday in June, together with support from several neighboring congregations, we went on a "listening canvass," in a number of neighborhoods in the community. We asked people two questions, "What concerns might you have that you would like us to pray for?" and "What needs in the community do you think the church should be addressing?" Our purpose was to help our people realize that when we go as a listener, we are often introduced to points of contact to which we can respond with the good news of Jesus Christ. Upon our return, we spent time in prayer for the needs which were identified and in discussion how we might respond in caring and faithful ways. Through this "hands-on" activity, we gained wisdom for our witnessing.

## Ongoing Efforts to Help the Congregation Practice Its Priestly Service

By God's grace and the hard work of the members, our congregation relocated to a new facility this past summer. In our new location, we are close to probably forty medical offices and social service agencies. To make ourselves known to our new neighbors, we hosted an open house over the lunch hour one day. We personally delivered invitations to our event to these offices and were thrilled that probably thirty people from the immediate neighborhood came. We shared that our facility was open for prayer and meditation, as well as conversation about matters of concern. We invited those interested to join us for "Conversations over Lunch" on Wednesdays over the lunch hour. While this program has not been successful, we believe that our reaching out to the community has sent the signal that we are not just trying to recruit members for our congregation, but are seeking to be servants and witnesses to the grace of God.

The dedication of our renovated facility was meant especially for our members and those from sister congregations. We naturally celebrated the hard work the members had done which enabled the renovation. Our service reflected our joy over the accomplishment and asked God's blessing on its use as we dedicated it to the glory of God. We emphasized that our new facility is a place to help us carry out our responsibilities as God's people. The sermon title suggested it: "A Physical House to Help Us Live as God's Spiritual House," based on 1 Peter 2:4–12. A Project Connect booklet from Lutheran Hour Ministries was given to each of the worshipers to reinforce the message, "*Live the Six*," the "six" being the days of the week from Monday through Saturday. It was another way of saying that we are "A Congregation of Priests."

On occasion, we have used Sunday worship services to highlight the priestly dimension of our lives. The Fourth of July weekend, we drew on 1 Peter 2:9–17 to help our members sense how our identity as God's people, His holy nation, can and should inform our participation in our American society so that the wisdom of God might be brought to bear on decisions made in the public sphere. We did a similar thing on Labor Day weekend; Ephesians 6:5–9 gave insights into how our relationship with God provides guidance for our roles in the workplace. A Sunday in late August had Ephesians 5:22–33 for the Epistle. This was a great opportunity for us to encourage husbands and wives to be priests to one another and see their home as a place to practice the meaning of the priesthood: praying, witnessing, and serving, in effect mediating the grace of God to one another.

We continue to grow in the joy of the priesthood. In Luther's "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," he asserts, "We are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2 [9], 'You are a royal priesthood, and a priestly realm.'"<sup>2</sup> Beginning in mid-November, our Sunday morning Bible studies will have us exploring how Baptism can direct and empower our priestly service. Following that study, we will undoubtedly spend time on vocation as a way to help

our members realize that functioning as God's priestly kingdom takes place in all of our roles, wherever we may be. As a way to sense how the priestly role plays out in a most concrete way, we will wrap up our basic introduction to the priesthood of all believers by discussing the matter of suffering. We will alert the priests to see it as an opportunity for their serving, witnessing, and praying.

As we go into the future, we will likely discover additional ways to sustain the priestly movement in our midst, such as through service projects in the community and workshops on topics like establishing a family altar in the home and witnessing in the workplace.

In conclusion, let me emphasize that our congregation has grown together as a community through our focus on the priesthood of all believers. We sense and are committed to the mission God has entrusted to us and are reaching out in natural and responsible ways to share the goodness of our God. We already see signs that our priestly service is taking root. In due time, we believe we will reap the harvest God is causing to grow from the seeds which we are planting. We commend this concept to you, the readers, for your consideration, as a biblically faithful way to help all the priests in your congregation take their place in the mission of God to His world.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Georg Vicedom, *A Prayer for the World* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" in American Edition *Luther's Works, Vol. 44: The Christian in Society I*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 127.

# Missio Trinitatis: Averting the Trifurcation of Witness, Service, and Life Together

John Nunes

**Abstract:** The Trinitarian God calls the church to be in mission through redeemed relationships (*koinonia*) in which witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (*martyria*) enact works of service (*diakonia*). While professionalization and progress contribute many benefits to the Christian West, a negative consequence is the tendency toward operational separation of ministry functions.

The growth and strength of Lutheran churches in the global south provide an inspiring opportunity for Lutherans in the pluralistic North America context to reimagine their mission informed by the more comprehensive approach of communities like the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). One EECMY leader, Gudina Tumsa, born in 1929 and martyred for the cause of Christ in 1979, advocated for Christian mission not to be “divided or departmentalised.”

The fuller sense of relationality implicit in a *missio Trinitatis* approach will help cultivate greater unity as the church lives leaningly into witness, service and life together.

---

*“Help us to see ourselves as your mission to people in their every need, to society in all its tensions, to the church in all its tribulation and to the whole world in all its futile struggles to find its peace without you. Give us, who are your sent ones, your compassion for your lost ones.”*<sup>1</sup>

*Mission Affirmations 1965*

This epigraphic prayer shines conspicuously in its affirmation of various ministries supporting evangelistic witness in a constellation of interrelated action. It is a petition speaking directly to the unique, salvific, wholeness found only in Jesus Christ. It exudes a wide-eyed sensitivity to the various contexts of mission. It avows its intent to be in solidarity with human struggle against sin and suffering. Overall, these words reflect the life and ministry of Jesus in whom there was no dissection between fervor for the lost and compassion for the “least of these.” Multiple times

---

*Rev. John Nunes, PhD, is the Jochum Professor, a chair supporting the study of Christian values in public life, at Valparaiso University. He is also the president-elect of Concordia College—New York. [john.nunes@concordia-ny.edu](mailto:john.nunes@concordia-ny.edu)*

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

we hear variations of how He accomplished His mission: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Mt 4:23).

While many positive changes since 1965 have strengthened the practices of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s faith-based development work *and* mission activities, the escalation of a professionalized approach raises potential concern; namely, techniques imported uncritically from disciplines external to the church have, in part, led to a disconnection of the various componential functions. This, coupled with the tendency of Westerners to prefer tidy silos in life, i.e., sacred and secular—which perhaps is intensified among Lutherans who hold to a binary interpretation of the doctrine of two kingdoms—has not resulted in the best outcome with respect to mission.

Standards have risen, arguably, and foci become clearer, but the result has also been an either/or dilemma: either human care ministries (*diakonia*) or evangelism (*martyria*). Further, the proximity between proclamation (*kerygma*) and expressions of ecclesia (*koinonia*) with diaconal activity has lessened. This essay will propose a theological approach for the de-departmentalization of these marks of the church recoupled with a recovery of what the epigraphic prayer asks God for—the gift of eyes to see the church’s mission comprehensively, especially as Western Lutherans learn from their sisters and brothers in the developing world.

The term *missio Trinitatis*<sup>2</sup> is proposed as a framework in nuanced contrast with the *missio Dei*. The image of God, inherent in all humans, cannot be either understood or realized by Christians apart from personal relationships of mutual recognition, along with respect for the personhood of the other.

Correspondingly, the God of Christians cannot be understood apart from the personal, trinitarian, interrelationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. People bearing the image of the relational God will be in relationship with one another, *analogia relationis*. They bear in relationship the image of the relational God. Further, these missional marks of the Christian Church—namely, its service (*diakonia*), its life together (*koinonia*), and its witness (*martyria*)—cannot be understood fully apart from relationships, as deriving and occurring within relationships.

For example, *service* apart from *life together* tends toward patronizing acts of charity that create dependency, that do not honor an individual’s or community’s

These missional marks of the Christian Church—namely, its service (*diakonia*), its life together (*koinonia*), and its witness (*martyria*)—cannot be understood fully apart from relationships, as deriving and occurring within relationships.

capacity, and that do not lead to sustainable development. Or, conversely, *life together* apart from the sense of responsible *service* tends toward a crisis of stewardship, blind to the opportunity to aggregate intentionally goods and services so that they might be extended toward those in need. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted in a volume ironically called *Life Together*, “We are inclined to reply too quickly that the one real service to our neighbor is to serve them with the Word of God. It is true that there is no service that can equal this one. . . . (Y)et a Christian community does not consist solely of preachers of the Word.”<sup>3</sup>

## **An Historic Opportunity**

The five hundredth anniversary of the start of the Reformation, as the historian Jaroslav Pelikan once axiomatically observed, represents a “tragic necessity”<sup>4</sup> for all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are baptized into His death and resurrection. By *tragic*, Pelikan was pointing to the ever-spiraling rupture of the church prompted by that first major breach—a problem some Protestants are quick to abet and slow to acknowledge (Jn 17:11); and by *necessity*, he meant the historical moment’s imperative to reassert in 1517, amid princes, powers, popes, and perversions of the Gospel, God’s saving gift of justification by grace—an urgency some Roman Catholics do not immediately concede and some Eastern Orthodox consider irrelevant.

From a global, twenty-first-century perspective, however, this five hundredth anniversary commemorates not merely a *tragic necessity*, but it provides for Western Christians within Reformation traditions an historic opportunity; for Lutherans, in particular, the shifting demography of their membership suggests a momentous circumstance from which to reinvigorate their ecclesial and missional movement with Gospel resources emanating from Lutheran traditions outside of Europe and North America. Anniversaries are not only for looking *backward*, of course, but also provide occasions for looking *forward*. Moreover, for those who prioritize the church in mission, this five hundredth anniversary can become an invitation to look *within* in order that we might look *outward* in a learning and listening posture toward the expanding global church.

This five hundredth anniversary can become an invitation to look within in order that we might look outward in a learning and listening posture toward the expanding global church.

## WMLT or WMST (*Diakonia* as “Mercy” or “Service”)

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, since 2010, has promoted a three-fold focus to thematize strategically its ministry. Derived from Scripture—the sole rule and norm for teaching in the LCMS—these dynamic foci are Witness (*martyria*), Mercy (*diakonia*) and Life Together (*koinonia*) and commonly abbreviated a WMLT. These ancient marks of the church reinforce a confessional *fusion* of the LCMS, even as they catalyze a welcome missional *fission*. A church stabilized and united in confessional subscription (fusion) will walk together with clarity, confidence, and charity amid the inevitable disruptive messiness of being energetically in mission (fission).

WMLT provides, furthermore, a focused opportunity for theological conversation concerning the interpretation and implementation of these emphases. In that spirit, this article commends LCMS leaders for introducing WMLT even as it proposes that our current Reformation commemoration offers a momentous moment: As the LCMS embraces the opportunity to reimagine how WMLT can be more fully refined and defined by global expressions of its evangelical confession beyond North America and Europe, it could be anticipated that there might be a corresponding shift in the linguistic translation and theological conceptualization of *diakonia*: towards *service* rather than *mercy*.

A church stabilized and united in confessional subscription (fusion) will walk together with clarity, confidence, and charity amid the inevitable disruptive messiness of being energetically in mission (fission).

First, *service* lends itself to fewer misunderstandings than *mercy* about the sort of compassionate interaction being undertaken, providing fewer semiotic misperceptions leading to condescension or paternalism—either among the beneficiaries (who internalize inferiority) or by the doers of *diakonia*.

The term *mercy* in the Christian understanding is never without divine dimensions reflected in one of the faith’s oldest and purest prayers, *Kyrie eleison*. Mercy’s effusive source is always God (Psalm 136). Human beings, at best, serve as instruments providing others with gifts originating in God. Only in view of God’s steadfast love (Rom 12:2) do Christ-bearers offer themselves humbly in service toward others. The word “mercy” can carry a linguistic insistence of charitable action conveying a relationship of power to powerlessness, of capacity to incapacity, of knowledge to lack of knowledge.

Ministries of compassion, relief, and support that are most effective, however, recognize the power, the capacity, and the knowledge resident within even the most debilitated communities. All people inherently possess agency (for working, for

achieving potentially everything except salvation) since all people are created in God's image.

Finally, "mercy," as it is used in the English-speaking world, seems tinged with a tone of someone's benevolent disposition of forbearance toward another who is guilty of some moral transgression. Such discretionary withholding of punishment is akin in its usage to Jesus' biblical illustration of the Pharisee's smug petition as contrasted with the tax collector's urgent plea, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Lk 18:13).

The parable of the father's lavish love, also known as The Prodigal Son, highlights the implication that those in need of mercy are experiencing their plight because of bad or sinful choices; as Art Just suggests rightly, the primary point is the "proclamation of the mercy of a loving father made manifest to the repentant sinner, no matter how gross the sinful conduct has been."<sup>5</sup> Service does not carry as readily that baggage or that judgment of the other.

Thus, *diakonia* is most appositely translated as service, striving to live out Luther's axiom that "There is no greater service of God than Christian love which helps and serves people living in poverty and need."<sup>6</sup>

When *service* is coupled missionally with *life together* and *witness*, it invites the sending community to see itself primarily engaged with prepositions of horizontality or companionship. So, we are not in service *at* them or *for* them or *to* them, but we see ourselves related to them through the preposition *with*. Such *with-ness*, especially with partner churches, implies mutual mission, partners joined by Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, "members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph 5:23).

We are not in service *at* them or *for* them or *to* them, but we see ourselves related to them through the preposition *with*.

Further, when witness, service, and life together are held together in creative tension, the level of sensitivity to contextual nuance will rise, as will the respect for everyday patterns, everyday speech, local customs, and language—not imposed from above, but as Martin Luther suggested:

We do not have to ask about the literal Latin or how we are to speak German. Rather we must ask the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common person in the market about this. We must be guided by their tongue, the manner of their speech, and do our translating accordingly. Then they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them. . . . The literal Latin is a great barrier to speaking proper German.<sup>7</sup>

## Learning from Ethiopia

The conference was called “Diakonia.” It was held in Adidas Ababa, Ethiopia in 2010. I attended it as President and CEO of Lutheran World Relief; and so, during a break in the sessions, I was privileged to sit with the then-president of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), Iteffa Gobena. This church body has grown from 65,000 members at its founding in 1959 to more than five million members in 2010. As of 2015, it hovers at the seven-million mark in membership. In light of the struggle for Baptisms and confirmations in the LCMS, I took the opportunity to hear and learn about the Holy Spirit’s work in that community. Pastor Iteffa identified four reasons for the growth.

1. “We emphasize equipping the saints and the ministry of the laity.” All baptized believers are called into action for the work of ministry, the exercise of spiritual gifts belongs to the whole church, not just the ordained clergy; in fact, the EECMY has a dire shortage of clergy, but this has not impacted negatively its growth because of its equipping of the saints.
2. “We’ve been in revival since we were founded.” I worshiped with them; the character of their liturgy is ebullient with joy and evangelistic energy. The buildings are simple and spare; but despite the barren, spare, simple outdoor churches, multiple times there were Baptisms. But more than spiritual fervor, revival refers to repentance and baptismal renewal.
3. “We are in mission to the whole person.” Again, there is nothing particularly innovative about this emphasis. The church operates organically a vast network of social service, health care, and outreach ministries within the nation of Ethiopia and beyond—especially among some of the most marginalized people groups. In their strong commitments to ministries of service, this church is teaching us all that witness and life together become disingenuous without care for the livelihoods of others, especially those with whom one shares fellowship.
4. “We are prepared to die for our faith.” And some in their church body rendered the ultimate sacrifice. In the 1970s, Gudina Tumsa served as the General Secretary of the EECMY. Refusing to bow down to the draconian political demands of the revolutionary Marxist military government seeking to silence the church, he was arrested. Refusing to submit or recant, he was tortured. Refusing to flee from Ethiopia while he had a chance (like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany) he was re-arrested and viciously murdered.

Each refusal was predicated on his doctrinal conviction: that God’s justice in the world and God’s justifying act in Christ are inextricably linked. He wrote:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is God’s power to save everyone who believes it. It is the power that saves from eternal damnation, from economic

exploitation, and from political oppression. . . . It is the only voice telling about a loving Father who gave his Son as a ransom for many. It tells about the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body. It is the Good News to sinful humanity. . . . It is too powerful to be compromised by any social or political system.<sup>8</sup>

The life of Gudina was resonant with another early African church leader, Tertullian, who affirmed that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (*Apologeticus*, Chapter 50).<sup>9</sup> He should be remembered among us, *Augsburg Confession XXI* and his death day, July 28, should be commemorated.

### **Life Together and Diversity**

The church’s *life together* requires constant scrutiny against any one particular cultural expression’s becoming an exclusive unifier, filtering out of the fellowship those who are different, rather than *life together* being unified in Christ, with a common confession of faith, as agents of Christ through *witness* and *service*.<sup>10</sup>

The sole source of life (*bios*) and meaningful existence is God’s creative, redeeming, and enlightening Word to the world. The following inhere:

- life replete with dignity (*Würde*<sup>11</sup>) and purpose (*zoe*, Jn 10:10),
- life rich with integrity, of life redolent with living traditions robust enough to both anchor community and prompt spiritual growth,
- life rooted in fellowships of Christ’s forgiveness.

“If human dignity, as built in the image of God, ceases to be based in God’s address to human beings, which extends without exception to all humans and awards them a principal authorization to live, other criteria will gain prevalence.”<sup>12</sup> These “other criteria” might include culture or sociological phenomena. When an individual or a group’s fundamental identity become incurred (*incurvatio in seipsum*) rather than oriented toward Christ and neighbor, people are prone, according to Luther, to make false gods even of otherwise virtuous goods: “great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family and honor.”<sup>13</sup>

These pursuits—apart from God, apart from the deliverance of Jesus Christ, apart from the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment—become idols. These prizes and gifts, apart from their subsuming to the worship (*leitourgia*) of God’s Son, become idolized. This happens quite apart from any inkling of deliberate, conscious intention since such desiring “sticks and clings to our nature all the way to the grave” according to Luther.<sup>14</sup>

Not only do these priorities in themselves not sustain and nurture the sort of life in which God intends us to live, but “great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family and honor” by the very vigor of their virtue become invisible fences which exclude those lacking “great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family and honor” and

prevent *koinonia*. Without the tempering effect of a spirituality of stewardship, the ego will create a God from the good. Without the incursion of the outsiders, strangers, new neighbors, redemptive truth often is not received.

Remarkably, Jesus is recognized in Mark's Gospel by the "way he breathed his last." This recognition did not come from a sacred insider, nor a tribe-member, nor a disciple, but from a secular outsider, an agent of state, an imperial mercenary. At Jesus' maximal point of godforsaken suffering, it takes an *other* to tell the truth on the *same*.<sup>15</sup>

But the mere position of being an outsider does not ensure truth. Lack of proximity and familiarity can lead to exoticizing and fetishizing the other. For example, during the development of the African American worship supplement in the 1990s, another well-intended impulse—that of fascination with the other—led to a sort of liturgical dilettantism evidenced in the introduction of rarefied practices that, albeit pondered in academic theology and mused about at conferences, were and are not recognized in the worship customs of the vast majority of everyday African Americans.

One such practice proposed by more liberal Lutherans included libation rituals, a traditional heritage ritual among some West Africans, which were debated for hours though they are virtually unknown among black Lutherans or committee members from "real" congregations who were suspicious of the wisdom of their introduction. Furthermore, very few Lutheran Christians who are Africans from the continent followed these practices.

## Conclusion

Gudina Tumsa highlighted in his Nairobi address (1974)<sup>16</sup> "the contrast between the traditional African concept of life and the Western concept." To heal, then, is not simply a question of medical care, but "has to do with the restoration of man to liberty and wholeness": "In the ministry of Jesus we note that forgiveness of sins and healing of the body, feeding the hungry and spiritual nurture, opposing dehumanising structures and identifying himself with the weak were never at any time divided or departmentalised. He saw man as a whole and was always ready to give help where the need was most obvious." The theology and practice of this comprehensive approach leads us, for example, to an amplification of the notion that Jesus saves. From what? From sin, from malaria, and from oppression.

Typical dichotomizing is not only unhelpful, but untrue: either service or verbal witness, either social justice or moral righteousness, either prophetic zeal or charismatic spiritual zeal are false and unnecessary options. The contention remains that, in their engagement with the rest of the Christian world, Christians in the West bear a unique challenge to be confessionally critical and self-critical, and to be reflectively creative in mutual mission. The relationality implicit in a *missio*

*Trinitatis* approach will help cultivate greater unity as the church lives leaningly into witness, service and life together.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Original wording: “Help us to see ourselves as Thy mission to men in their every need, to society in all its tensions, to the church in all its tribulation and to the whole world in all its futile struggles to find its peace without Thee. Give us, who are Thy sent ones, Thy compassion for Thy lost ones.”

<sup>2</sup> I initially became familiar with the notion of *missio Trinitatis* in a 5 a.m. conversation with Mike Breen in Palm Springs, California, in September 2015 during our shared ride to the airport. Breen uses this term in contrast to describe families in missional activity, in contrast to *missio Dei*, which he considers individualistic.

This term is used by Peter Bellini, Assistant Professor in the Practice of Global Christianity and Intercultural Studies in the Vera Blinn Chair at United Theological Seminary, “The Processio-Missio Connection: A Starting Point in Missio Trinitatis or Overcoming the Immanent-Economic Divide in a Missio Trinitatis” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (October 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Boesch and James H. Burtness, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 98.

<sup>4</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism: Its History, Its Beliefs, Its Future* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960).

<sup>5</sup> Arthur A. Just, *Luke 9:51–24:53 in Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 608.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Lindberg, Carter. *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 164.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *An Open Letter on Translating*, September 15, 1530.

<sup>8</sup> Gudina Tumsa, “The Role of a Christian in a Given Society” in Oeyvind Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974–85* (Oxford: J. Currey, 2000), 200–204. See also Tumsa’s “Memorandum to Ato Emmanuel Abraham, President, ECMY; from Gudina Tumsa, General Secretary, ECMY Re: Some Issues Requiring Discussions and Decisions,” 271–279 in the same volume.

<sup>9</sup> For easy access to the work of Tertullian, see Tertullian and Robert D. Sider, *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> While it is no sin to move in homogenous circles, it is a sin, however, not to recognize one’s neighbor. It is the essence of sin to live a radically inward-turned life. It is a sin to, under the guise of natural self-limitation, to ignore or exclude or oppress others who are trying to gain entrance to opportunity or membership or contracts through a rigid affiliation to one’s networks of friendly association. (See Luther’s explanation to the Ninth and Tenth Commandments.) The church is not a social club, it is a society of the redeemed, joined to Jesus Christ by Baptism, first and foremost, not by a group’s cultural identity. Lutherans have been guilty, in my estimation, of equating their Lutheran-ness with an inward-focused Garrison Keillor-esque identity. This exclusivizing tendency in Lutheranism, where expressions of Nordic and Germanic identity—music, being literate, art, style, even humor—

are almost tantamount with the Gospel, has largely contributed to our overwhelming whiteness and English-speaking character. The Mormons, who until the 1970s had laws against minorities having full membership, are three times(!) as diverse as we. It irks me that we say we are knitted together primarily by our Confession of Doctrine when that does not seem to be the case.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Rosen notes that, rightly or wrongly, Immanuel Kant's thought about dignity occupies a critical philosophical centerpiece of any discussion of dignity. "The German word for dignity . . . closely related etymologically to *Wert*, the term for 'worth or value.'" *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes Schwanke, "Luther's Theology of Creation." *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel and Lubomir Batka, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 205.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, "Large Catechism," *The Book of Concord*. ed., Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 387.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Gudina Tumsa, "Serving the Whole Man; A Responsible Church Ministry and Flexible International Aid Relationship" in *Proclamation and Human Development. LWF Documentation for a Lutheran World Federation Consultation in Nairobi, Kenya, October 21–25, 1974* (Rome: IDOC International, 1974).

# God's Plan, My Mission

Gerald Perschbacher

**Abstract:** This article unfolds the shaping of mission from a Lutheran/biblical perspective. The goal is to “reach” with the Gospel, through a motivated body of believers (the Church) which is heavily lay orientated. With the action of witnessing comes the practical application of mercy and the comprehension of grace. Examples of “doing mission” past and present, with special reference to the work of the Lutheran Laymen’s League (LLL) and Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM), are explored and elaborated as signposts on the trek of future outreach in an era of multicultural realization amid a shrinking world with a burgeoning population.

Since the first action of God in creation and up to the present day, He is at work in the hearts, minds, and lives of people like you and me. Whether we are experts or amateurs in our abilities to communicate, He chooses to instill, guide, and bless our actions through the Holy Spirit as an extension of His own. Thus, the growing movement of sharing the Word of God has advanced mightily and knows no bounds.

## A dozen men gathered.

These were practical men, a good number of whom were fishermen. Their period of waiting wasn’t easy, especially for men of action who gauged their accomplishments by the number of fish they caught, the number of fishing nets they owned and mended, or things they did in a given day . . . or week . . . or month . . . or longer. Truly, most people are impatient. They are impatient in reaching their goals and in achieving their ideals.

When the great Day of Pentecost arrived for the disciples-soon-to-be-apostles, it was already a special date set apart by the Jewish calendar. But little did that handful of men realize the importance of their experience that struck shortly after the Ascension of Christ Jesus.

And “strike,” it did!

In Acts 2 and 3, Luke records the series of events. A public location was the site when a sudden sound from heaven was heard, like a mighty rushing wind (which evidently did not create a storm-like disturbance, or detail-minded Luke would have recorded that factor). Then came the apportionment of “tongues as of fire” that

---

*Dr. Gerald Perschbacher is editor of The Lutheran Layman (official publication of the Int’l LLL) and is head historian for the Int’l LLL and its Lutheran Hour Ministries. He has authored 17 published books and written thousands of published articles. [persch3@hotmail.com](mailto:persch3@hotmail.com)*

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

appeared and rested on each of the dozen men gathered in that place. Devout Jews and religious neophytes from various parts of Roman territories stood in awe of what transpired. The twelve relatively uneducated men spoke in languages common to the hearers. The words were different, but the thrust was the same. They spoke of God's mighty acts. They proclaimed with authority!

These men did not have the benefit of higher education. These were not elocutionists trained in the art of debate or rhetoric. They had not sat at the feet of numerous learned men who were highly recognized for special qualities as teachers. But they held one thing in common. They had walked beside Jesus, experiencing much of His earthly ministry. They formed the "corporate knowledge" of their Leader, whom they acclaimed as their Savior. More than that—they proclaimed Him as Lord of lords and King of kings, the Great, the Almighty, the very Son of God: Grace Incarnate and the Fulfillment of Prophecy.

To them, it was no secret what God had done and was going to do. They did not fully grasp the nuances of it all, but they knew He held time and events in His hand. They trusted their Master.

These were men of experience. They worked hard and seemed the part in sight and (probably) smell. They held no special positions by the measure of important men. But they had a commonality that set them apart. These were men of faith, speaking at the urging of the Holy Spirit on that Great Day. That God chose *them*, instead of potentates and priests, to speak on His behalf seemed incomprehensible. Yet . . . wasn't it a young David with sling in hand who won the field for God? Didn't a humble and trusting Abram hear the calling to move forward to a place he had not seen, so that faith could grow and be shared among the nations? The examples of the humble being chosen as vessels of God's goodness are replete with people like Ruth, Deborah, Gideon, and more.

From that Pentecost hence, the Church has been moving, proclaiming, sharing, confessing, professing, educating . . . in a progressive movement instilled by God and guided by Him.

The dozen men who had walked and talked with Jesus Christ knew something was in the air that day. They also sensed it was the beginning of something never before witnessed on the face of the earth. They were now part of something far, far greater than they ever expected or dreamed. They were ready for the tasks, whatever those would be and wherever those might take them. Their time, energy, effort, and ability were in the hands of God as never before.

They were ready  
for the tasks,  
whatever those would be  
and wherever those might  
take them. Their time,  
energy, effort, and ability  
were in the hands of God  
as never before.

## What were these Twelve to say to others?

Peter quoted the Prophet Joel and reminded the Pentecost audience that God can choose to pour out His Word via the Holy Spirit through sons and daughters (who, by their very ages, seemed the least equipped and educated to share the Good News). Even lowly servants were to be equipped for sharing. Their invitation to others was that they come to the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:21). Clear as that. Simple. Concise. It seemed so easy that inner thoughts too often were set against it. How can Good News be so valuable when it seems so simplistic?

His Word and His Grace  
is the great  
common denominator.  
It is the rule  
and norm for life.

In truth, it was quite understandable from a spiritual perspective. God’s Word is for young and old, rich and poor, and for people of all walks, nations, and cultures. His Word and His Grace is the great common denominator. It is the rule and norm for life. It is the essential element for a *full* life, a taste of the perfect walk through Eden that God enjoyed with the first man and woman. Through God’s Word, we see Him . . . know Him . . . relate to Him . . . are invigorated . . . healed . . . and strengthened for the rigors of a faith-filled life.

No one needs to be a certain age to be saved through the merits of Christ Jesus. Education cannot win that salvation. Works cannot earn it. Wealth is immaterial to it. Status, culture, language, looks—none of these are criteria for eternal life.

In Christ, the Creator had formed a New Creation, the Church, come down from heaven (not the invention of man). It was the faith-walk through eternity begun on earth and continuing, unending, beyond time and space as it had been known (Revelation 21). “Behold, I am making all things new” (21:5).

Dr. Martin Luther admitted,

I am a Doctor of Holy Scripture and have now studied the lesson of faith for twenty years and have also preached to others about it. Nevertheless, when the sun burns down upon me and temptation comes along, I feel and find that I droop and wilt, as grass in the heat and drought. And if God did not refresh me with His rain and dew, that is, with His Word and Spirit, I should have to wither away. Therefore the lesson (*Predigt*) of faith is a lesson that must constantly be practiced and rehearsed...and with all confidence cheerfully rely on God’s promise (Luther’s Ascension sermon of 1533, based on Mark 16:14–20).<sup>1</sup>

There is a freedom borne by faith. No longer did the early “Missionary Twelve” need to count their “fish” once they were “caught.” Instead, they concentrated on the “fishing.” They cast their spiritual nets, stronger and wider when the moment

offered, or in select cases when it was appropriate. Peter rose to address the multitude on the Great Pentecost but soon after was speaking one-on-one with a blind beggar (Acts 3:1–10). Lives were changed each time. Yes, the net of proclamation can be cast widely or to a pinpoint.

Luther realized keeping “tally” was not critical, since each soul was and is precious in God’s sight.

He who will not be satisfied with his ministry until he has converted and Christianized all will never find peace. Abraham found contempt of God everywhere; yet he did not become broken in spirit, but he and his family continued in the true religion and instructed others. So you should not lose courage either but should continue in the office assigned to you by God. Let Him worry about the success of the Word (Luther’s Brief Exposition of Isaiah, 1534).<sup>2</sup>

It is good to recall these words: “In His boundless kindness and mercy, God provides for the public proclamation of His divine, eternal law and the wonderful counsel concerning our redemption, namely, the holy and only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Thereby He gathers an eternal church for Himself out of the human race. . . . All who would be saved must hear this preaching, for the preaching and the hearing of God’s Word are the Holy Spirit’s instrument in, with, and through which He wills to act efficaciously to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to achieve.”<sup>3</sup>

### **On Mission with the First Vital Element of Witnessing: the Individual**

Bear in mind that the role of “the individual” takes two directions: the individual who is *delivering* the Word of God, and the individual who *receives* it.

As to its *delivery*, the biblical mission of Gospel proclamation since early days has been integral with the activity of lay believers who, for nearly two thousand years, have carried their crosses amid a world at war with the Creator, Savior, and Comforter.

Back to the beginning, Adam and Eve were the first of the laity. While they initially walked in perfection, the result of their downfall (Original Sin) was cast upon their descendants. Imagine the stories Adam and Eve may have told their offspring and descendants for generations: what it was like to experience the glory of walking in Eden, to know the grace of God who did not immediately destroy them after the Fall, and to experience life as it had been meant to be before sin.

Did their witness lessen over the years? Perhaps. And maybe the hearts of men turned callous toward it, as if the whole thing were a fable. Somehow, the ways of man superseded the spoken Word about God. As generations came, His grace and kingship were forgotten—or at least taken for granted—as the evil will of man and

the temptation brought by Satan and the world eroded the number of faithful to a mere eight (Gn 6:18; Heb 11:7).

We can surmise that the witness of Eden and God's promise that Eve's offspring would seriously bruise the head of Satan (Gn 3:4–19), along with talk of the glorious walk with God in perfection, was conveyed through the years to the ears of Noah, a righteous man in God's sight. It is likely that most or all of the people who shared the true faith during that time were not priests or educated leaders of religion but laypeople with practical application of their faith.

The list of proclaimers lengthens to include Enoch, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samson, Samuel, and more (Hebrews 11). While some were educated, some were rich, some were lowly, some were strong and obstinate, none was educated as a religious leader from what we know. Still, in their own ways peculiar to them, they no doubt gave witness.

### **How Do You Define Witnessing?**

First, it is a *mission*. It involves at least one who delivers the message of God's Plan of Salvation and at least one who hears (or reads) it. The simple beauty of the message is such that it takes no multi-degreed theologian to deliver it.

The *mission* is to *find* the person(s) in need and *deliver* the *message* in terms and images that listeners/readers can understand. More than that, it should hit the bull's-eye of the person's life.

Simply stated, a good word of witness brings a person to the foot of the cross of Calvary whereon he/she sees the Savior hanging in suffering for the wrongs of the person who watches. With spiritual tears of regret and sorrow, the person then is verbally whisked to the open tomb from which the Savior was resurrected and, in so doing, brought—and brings—salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. Thus, the faith-relationship is established through the Holy Spirit. Feelings of relief and release often bring tears of joy and a lift to that person's life!

The *mission* is to *find* the person(s) in need and *deliver* the *message* in terms and images that listeners/readers can understand.

That movement toward faith continues to the present, and we can anticipate it will continue until the Return of Christ.

Second, witnessing involves two very common elements akin to those in a court trial as practiced in the United States and many other lands. Witnesses tell about *whom* they know and *what happened*.

In a trial, witnesses may be called to testify that they know the *person* who is the main subject of the trial. Those witnesses may speak about the “character” of the defendant and provide testimony of the defendant’s upright character. Witnesses may also know *what happened* because they saw the event unfold.

Transferred to the Christian’s role, witnessing is the *testimony* that Jesus Christ is Lord, and includes what the witness *knows* about Him through first-hand experiences, especially via Word and Sacrament.

## **On Mission with the Second Vital Element of Witnessing: Creative Forms of Outreach**

The mission, ever guided by the Lord as His people are empowered by His Spirit, is endless and timeless, but technical forms of outreach change. First-person, word-of-mouth witnessing via conversation will never go out of vogue. But as the means of communication have multiplied and advanced, so have a myriad of options in *mission* and in *witnessing*.

Basically, it is a matter of communication, meeting people in a means and manner that are conducive to their understanding and comfortable to their lifestyles. Much as Jesus Christ chose the time and place for His words of witness, e.g., the Sermon on the Mount, His entry to Jerusalem, the woman at the well, timing with miracles, and the delivery manner which He selected (one-to-one with few people/many people watching, scribbling in the dirt in the case of the woman caught in adultery, His teaching in the temple, etc.), so we, too, have the opportunity to meet people where they are.

Much as Jesus Christ chose the time and place for His words of witness, . . . so we, too, have the opportunity to meet people where they are.

A good example of this variety took place nearly a century ago. A dozen men gathered in 1917 to form the Lutheran Laymen’s League (LLL), and since then countless lives around the world have been changed for the better by the Grace of God. Special means of communication have been a benefit embraced by supporters of the International Lutheran Laymen’s League and its Lutheran Hour Ministries. The initial form of witnessing remains with the individual and

with grouped supporters (local affiliated groups, larger regional groups) as a lay effort befitting the organization as one of two auxiliaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Specialized tools can simplify the delivery of the witness.

The main delivery vehicle for those laymen became *The Lutheran Hour* upon its first airing in 1930, followed by a resurgence in 1935. It was the dream of a close-knit group of men who supported seminary professor Dr. Walter A. Maier as the

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

voice of the radio program (which, by the way, was limited to thirty minutes and used the term “Hour” as was a commonly employed term in that era, signifying a “special moment in time”). The program garnered a strong response as measured by notes and letters from thousands of listeners. Soon the broadcast was heard from coast to coast. In 1940 the program became international with broadcasts from Ecuador and the Philippine Islands. The program was heard at least halfway around the globe at a given time!

Behind the movement toward broadcasting was Concordia Seminary Professor and Dean of Students, John Fritz, based in St. Louis, Missouri. Nearly as indefatigable as Maier, Fritz led the charge for advancing the witness on radio. But had it not been for the support of the laity, even for the program’s resurgence in 1935, *The Lutheran Hour* might not have succeeded. Was this due to the power of mankind? Nay! Better to admit that it was the grace of God as His hand guided the witnessing. Today that advance continues with more than 1,600 radio stations proclaiming the Message!

In the 1940s and 1950s, as the world recovered from the ill effects of the Second World War and the spread of Communism, this Gospel radio advance included the healing formation of various overseas offices in such lands as Australia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Nigeria, France, Germany, Brazil, Argentina, and more. It was not unusual that the work of those offices and centers provided a landing strip for the Good News of Christ in the hearts of numerous people. It was and is God’s grace at work. New offices and “centers” were formed in subsequent years. Local indigenous staff manned the offices in order to keep step with the terminology and formats that would best reach the populations.

Yet, by and large, it was the financial and prayerful support of the Int’l LLL laity that paid the bills and provided the means to continue international operations.

Print outreach also became a viable option with booklets, publications, and fliers being widely used throughout North America and key areas around the world. To this day, there is no continent of the world that lacks the outreach of Lutheran Hour Ministries.

The frailties of mankind often limit a person’s life to threescore or fourscore, with some who enjoy higher longevity. Yet, the inevitable passing occurs. Hence, the first voice of *The Lutheran Hour* gave way to the second, and him to the next, until the program now reaches listening audiences with the messages of Pastor Gregory Seltz as Speaker of *The Lutheran Hour* and Speaker Emeritus Kenneth Klaus on select Sundays.

The idea of motion picture messages of the Gospel by the LLL resulted in the formation of Lutheran Television by the LCMS. Several decades ago that award-winning blockbuster success on television was transferred to the Int’l LLL under the

title *This Is the Life* and Envoy Productions, which has spearheaded seasonal specials for many years.

Proclamation techniques have advanced mightily since Gutenberg's invention of the moveable type printing press in the 1400s. The rise of radio in the 1930s added another means of communication. In the late 1940s, the skyrocketing success of television boosted the opportunities even more. In recent years, personal automobile transportation is better than ever, thus allowing witnesses to visit others who await the Word of God. Computerized forms of communication including Facebook, Twitter, and more have widened avenues of Gospel delivery. People can live anywhere on the globe, travel at any speed, and still receive the message of salvation through various means of technology, at any time during day or night. There seems to be no limit to the potential.

Still, it is rooted in the human element for people to communicate with people. It involves people to make the messages, format them for delivery, and send them. And always, it is the true, wholesome, life-changing impact of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit that brings results!

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "1430 Luther Speaks from Experience" in *What Luther Says, A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 482.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, "2989 No Ministry Can Convert All" in Plass, *What Luther Says*, 952.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 530–531.

# The Word, the Baptized, and the Mission of God

Robert Newton

**Abstract:** Many in the LCMS recognize that the United States is a vast “mission field” as exotic to our American churches as any mission field overseas. At the same time we primarily follow patterns of Gospel ministry developed in and for a highly churching society rather than the mission field. In order to proclaim the Gospel faithfully in our present American context we need to embrace God’s mission paradigm. That first requires that we understand the essential differences between the church dominated world (Western Christendom) and the non-churching dominated world (mission field). Secondly, we must consider God’s missionary paradigm as described in the New Testament and amply demonstrated in present-day mission fields. Two questions guide this consideration: (1) “Are the dynamics of missionary outreach presented in the New Testament and regularly found on our foreign mission fields applicable for the missionary context of twenty-first-century America?” and (2) “If they are applicable, how do we employ them in our churches?”

For centuries we Lutherans associated world missions with countries and people groups far away. More recently, however, we’ve come to realize that world mission is here and now. The majority of our Lutheran congregations find themselves planted in communities with increasing numbers of people who have little or no affiliation with a Christian congregation. For all intents and purposes, the United States has become a vast “mission field” as exotic to our American churches as any overseas. While we acknowledge living on a mission field, our methods for reaching the millions of unchurched people are not very mission-oriented. Instead, they follow a pattern of Gospel ministry developed in and for a highly churching society. Ministry in a churching context centers the proclamation of Gospel *in* our local congregations, around altar and pulpit, which rightly assumes the ministry of ordained pastors. Our churching-based model also assumes that non-Christians should naturally come to our congregations where they will hear the true Gospel and be saved.

We Lutherans would agree that our Lord did not build His missionary enterprise with the hope that lost people might grope around in the darkness of sin until they stumbled upon one of His churches. We teach, rather, that Jesus intentionally left His heavenly sanctuary to personally “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus’

---

*Dr. Robert Newton is District President of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Previously he served as an Evangelistic Missionary in the Philippines, Professor of Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, and Pastor of a multicultural congregation in San Jose, CA.*  
[newton-r@sbcglobal.net](mailto:newton-r@sbcglobal.net)

mission paradigm, therefore, operates from the understanding that non-Christians will meet Him not by them seeking and finding His church, but by His church—Christ’s baptized people—seeking and finding them.

We need to embrace God’s mission paradigm in order to proclaim the Gospel faithfully in our present American context. To do that, we need first to understand the essential differences between the church-dominated world (Western Christendom) and the non-churched world (mission field). Secondly, we need to study the patterns of missionary expansion in the New Testament, as well as present-day mission fields.

We need to embrace God’s mission paradigm in order to proclaim the Gospel faithfully in our present American context.

The New Testament lays a sound missiological foundation upon which to build our current missionary thinking. Missionary activity common in today’s “foreign fields” also offers invaluable insights for us to consider as we develop our Lutheran missionary outreach in America. Throughout this brief exploration, we must ask ourselves a couple of questions: (1) Are the dynamics of missionary outreach presented in the New Testament and regularly found on our foreign mission fields today applicable for the missionary contexts in which we find ourselves? and (2) If they are applicable, how do we employ them here?

## **Churched World and Mission Field**

Elsewhere I have written about mission work being carried out in three contexts: (1) pre-churched, (2) churched, and (3) post-churched.<sup>27</sup> (The term “church” in these contexts refers not to the “Holy Christian Church” that we confess in the Apostles’ Creed, but to the institutional presence and influence of Christian churches in a given society or community.) We generally associate *pre-churched* ministry with classical foreign mission work where the Gospel is proclaimed among people groups that are not yet Christian and local churches have not been established. As the Gospel bears fruit among these peoples, churches are planted and increase both in size and influence in the general society. Over time, the churches grow to such significance that the ministry context shifts from *pre-churched* to *churched*.

Ministry in a *churched* context resides primarily within and proceeds from local congregations. The general society accords the church significant prestige, position, and influence in the community, including special privileges. Thus, a strong cultural bridge connects the community to the church. I recall from my childhood that many of the shops on the main streets of our small town posted signs in their windows announcing their closure from the hours of 12:00–3:00 p.m. on Good Friday in respect of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. A crèche was also prominently

displayed on the town square every Christmas. Such was the social influence of Christian churches in Napa, California.

Just as the waxing of the church's influence signals the shift from a *pre-churched* to a *churched* ministry context, the waning of that influence signals a shift from a *churched* to a *post-churched*<sup>28</sup> context. As the church's social position and influence diminish, our society increasingly reflects the cultural characteristics of a *pre-churched* world. We find ourselves once again living and serving in a full-fledged mission field.

As the church's social position and influence diminish, our society increasingly reflects the cultural characteristics of a pre-churched world. We find ourselves once again living and serving in a full-fledged mission field.

Gospel ministry in churched contexts and mission field contexts (*pre- and post-churched*) is the same ministry of reconciliation through the proclamation of Christ crucified and raised from the dead. They differ, however, in how non-Christians encounter that ministry. Gospel ministry within a churched context operates from the assumption that the church is in charge of the arena in which the Gospel is proclaimed. Its strong presence and significance in the community makes it a natural go-to place for the general community. Assuming that non-Christians have an innate attraction to the

church, Christians organize the proclamation of the Gospel almost exclusively within their congregation-centered ministry of ordained pastors. The baptized see their role primarily as supporting the Gospel ministry as carried out by the pastor. This ministry model is often referred to as the "attraction" model of Gospel proclamation.

In contrast, a mission field is defined not by the strong presence of churches but by their absence or insignificance in the general community. The Gospel is proclaimed specifically in contexts in which the non-Christian community rather than the church is in charge. Here the ministry of all the baptized becomes central. Ministry organizes with primary focus on those outside the church (see Acts 6:3–4). Pastors and/or missionaries frequent the places where the unchurched live and work, proclaiming the Gospel in and to their context. They also focus heavily on equipping and supporting laypeople to do the same. This ministry model might be called the mobile model of Gospel proclamation.

## **Gospel Proclamation in the New Testament**

The local congregation, whether the Temple in Jerusalem or a community synagogue, was a strategic location for Gospel proclamation in the New Testament. Our Lord, however, emphasized by teaching and action that His ministry must not be

centered or restricted to those places. Jesus taught God's Word and healed broken people in public places as much as, if not more than, in sanctuaries. He revealed to the woman at the well both by presence and word that, "the hour is coming [and is now here] when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father" (Jn 4:21). Later, in response to the disciples' request that the Lord restore the Kingdom to Israel (with Jerusalem's Temple at its center), Jesus redirected their attention to the ends of the earth. The altar and pulpit of the Temple would no longer serve as the attraction or "come to" place for the nations (Acts 1:8). The Lord no longer bound His saving presence to place (Temple) or office (Levitical priesthood) but to Himself and His Word alone: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," referring to the temple of His body (Jn 2:19, 21).

The Lord no longer bound His saving presence to place (Temple) or office (Levitical priesthood) but to Himself and His Word alone.

The radical shift from God's dwelling in a fixed location to His dwelling personally in Jesus of Nazareth was the focal point of St. Stephen's preaching in Acts 6 and 7. The Jewish leaders bound God and, therefore, His salvation to their pulpit and altar, the Temple. Stephen, on the other hand, testified to the reality that God binds His presence and saving work (Divine Service) to Jesus alone. Jesus Christ is the sole dwelling place of God on earth and the "temple" in which He proclaims His Good News. Stephen saw the ascended Lord Jesus standing at the Right Hand of His Father. From that "place of authority," Jesus fills all creation and so cannot be bound to any particular place on earth. Stephen emphasized the fact that God cannot (and will not) be bound to a temple made with human hands and controlled by human will, but meets His people where and when it pleases Him. He defended his position by chronicling the great story of God's salvation plan from Abraham through Solomon. Essential points included

- God *appeared* to our father Abraham when he was in the land of the Chaldeans. Note the association with Babylon, Israel's archenemy responsible for destroying the Temple.
- God *was with* Joseph in Egypt. Note that God used Egypt to save the world, including the children of Israel, during the worldwide famine (Gn 41:57).
- Moses *worshiped* the Lord not in the Temple, but on the Holy Ground of a mountain in the wilderness of Sinai. There God commissioned him to lead His people out of bondage (Ex 3:1–12). It is also there that God commissioned Israel to be His priests for the nations (Ex 19:1–7).

- God dwelled among the Israelites as He led them through the wilderness for forty years, meeting them daily at the “tent of witness.” God designed His sanctuary to be mobile, a portable dwelling with which He and His people traveled and witnessed among the nations.

It is important to take note of the fact that during those forty years of wandering, God and His great Name (character) became known among the nations. Key to the essence of His character was the fact that, in contrast to all other nations and their gods, Yahweh dwelled personally among His people.

The story of a good and gracious God dwelling among sinful people was being played out on the center stage of history with the world watching. That fact formed the basis of Moses’ plea to God not to destroy the Israelites when they rebelled at Kadesh: “They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of your people. . . . Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, ‘It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.’ And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love’” (Num 14:13–18).

The nations were obviously talking among themselves about Yahweh and His relationship with (authority over) Israel. It may have gone something like this: “The God who dwells among the Israelites is all powerful. He dwells among His people both blessing and protecting them. No nation can stand in His way or harm His people.” Such seemed to be the “talk of the towns.” The buzz reached the ears of Rahab in Jericho far ahead of Israel’s arrival there: “For we have heard . . .” (Jo 2:10). Hearing the story of God’s mighty acts among the nations for the sake of His people moved Rahab to believe that God (through Israel) would deal kindly with her and her family: “[For] the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house” (Jo 2:11–12).

Mission strategy must always take into account the power and mobility of the Word, working far beyond the altars and pulpits of local congregations and the direct ministry of called pastors.

The above underscores the fact that God binds His saving power to His Word, and His Word goes where He sends it—through the mouths of His people and even through the mouths of those who may not yet believe. Mission strategy must always take into account the power and mobility of the Word, working far beyond the altars and pulpits of local congregations and the direct ministry of called pastors. Such

Gospel proclamation featured prominently in Luke's account of Christ's missionary work in the first century. Following the death of St. Stephen, the Lord scattered His Word among the nations as the persecuted Christians fled Jerusalem (Acts 8:1–4; 11:19–20). The Lord Jesus was on the move, proclaiming His Gospel through His baptized just as He promised.

In the Great Commission passage of Luke 24:44–48, our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples, equipping them to participate with Him in His mission. His gift of the Spirit equipped them to be His witnesses in all the world. “[You] will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). St. Luke chronicled the movement of Jesus and His people into the world (Acts 1:8) by tracking the giving of His missionary Spirit to each new believer. Each of His steps along the way—from Jerusalem to Judea, then Samaria, and “to the ends of the earth”—was specifically marked by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon the saints in those places (Acts 8:15–17; 10:44). The Holy Spirit's coming to the Gentiles assembled in the house of a Roman centurion especially alerted the Jewish Christians that Jesus would not center His ministry in a certain place or among a certain group of people. “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 11:15). The Gentiles were full heirs of the same “Promise” that the first disciples received, which included full participation in proclaiming the Gospel to the world.

In the verses immediately following Peter's testimony regarding his ministry among the Gentiles, Luke continued his narrative of the Gospel's movement to the “ends of the earth”:

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19–21)

There is no indication in the account that this ministry of the Word was carried out by a select group of clergy or the “ordained.” A careful reading of Acts 8:1b–4, of which these verses in Acts 11 are a continuation, makes clear that those “preaching the Word” were the Christian men and women scattered by persecution (Acts 8:1b, 3). Laypeople, in distinction from the Apostles (called ministers of the Word), proclaimed Christ's Kingdom to people in Judea, Samaria, and more distant places.

Participation in Christ's mission was shared by all who were baptized into Christ. St. Peter made this point at the conclusion of his Pentecost sermon when he

proclaimed, “[The] promise is to you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:39). The “promise” referenced by Peter was specifically the gift of Christ’s missionary Spirit, who was poured out on the disciples on Pentecost. (See also Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8; and Acts 2:33–35.) The Spirit was given to the baptized not for personal faith in this case, but for their personal empowering to be Jesus’ witnesses in the world.

## **Gospel Proclamation in Overseas Mission Fields**

The Book of Acts tells the story of a missionary Lord, racing into the world with His Gospel message as His faithful disciples panted to keep pace. Many of us who have served as evangelistic missionaries in mission fields overseas testify to the same phenomenon taking place. The following story relates a common occurrence experienced by many who’ve proclaimed the Gospel in *pre-churched* contexts where Christian congregations are few and far between.

The Book of Acts tells the story of a missionary Lord, racing into the world with His Gospel message as His faithful disciples panted to keep pace.

As God’s Word grew among the Kankanaey people in the mountain region of North Luzon, Philippines, it became time to relocate my headquarters from the fairly churched area of the region to a village located in a valley yet untouched by the Gospel. As a thank-you for allowing me to live among them, I hosted a feast for all of the village and gave each family a copy of the Gospel of St. Mark as a remembrance. St.

Mark was the first book of the Bible translated into the Kankanaey language. I, along with several faithful lay men and women from congregations in the churched area, labored for three years, preaching and teaching the Gospel publicly and from house to house and village to village. Our faithful sowing of the Gospel seemed to produce little fruit.

One morning, the chief elder of the village visited me in my small cabin and announced that his family as well as all the other families in the village desired to be baptized into Jesus. Given the irregular attendance of individual villagers at our Bible studies, I expressed some skepticism of their readiness. I failed to take into consideration the fact that the villagers often discussed with one another the bits and pieces of the Gospel they gleaned from our public meetings. I further failed to consider that lay men and women from our established churches often visited the village when I was away, staying in the villagers’ homes for a few days to teach and discuss God’s Word. Most of all, I failed to consider that Jesus was busy working among them all by Himself through His written Word.

“Missionary,” the chief elder replied, “you remember that you gave us the book, St. Mark? Our children have read the book to us more than once and we discuss it among ourselves. It says on the last page that if we believe in Jesus and are baptized we will be saved. We believe that Jesus is our Savior. Can we be baptized?”

The entire village was baptized a few weeks later. The Lutheran church born that day still remains committed to God’s Word and the Christian faith. Jesus is personally present where and when His Gospel is read and where His baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, speak. He proclaimed salvation in a village far beyond the earshot of pulpit or the celebration of the Divine Service. Jesus’ presence beyond the local congregation, through the ministry of His Word and His baptized, remains the primary element in the ongoing story of God’s mission to save the world.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>27</sup> Robert D. Newton, “Missionary Churches: Navigating in a Post-Church World” in *The Lutheran Witness*, 129, no.1 (January 1, 2010): 6–11. “Facing Challenges of the Post-Christian World” in *The Lutheran Layman* (November–December 2013): 1–5.

<sup>28</sup> The terms “*post-churched*” or “*post-Christendom*” should not be referenced as suggesting the demise of Christ’s Church on earth (Rev 5:10). It refers, rather, to the collapse of the institutional church’s influential role in society—the role upon which we Western Christians heavily depend in order to proclaim the Gospel. Furthermore, the *post-churched* phenomenon is most apparent among Anglo Protestants and Roman Catholics. *Christendom*, with its roots in the Roman Catholic Church, continues to enjoy great cultural and social significance in Latin America, including Latin American churches here in the United States.

# Vocation and Mission: The Role of the Laity in the Mission of Christ

Dean Nadasdy

**Abstract:** Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, calls both clergy and laity to serve in the priesthood of all believers. Vocation, a crucial aspect of this priesthood, places us in specific and varied settings in His mission.

In addition to service inside the church and on behalf of the church in the community, every Christian is called to serve in specific vocational settings. Christ calls pastors to serve by proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments within the church, equipping the saints for their service. Word, bath, and table fuel the church's mission. Pastors also serve in other roles and settings apart from their vocation as pastors (husband, father, citizen, etc.).

At the same time Christ calls laypeople to serve, according to their gifts, as members of the Body of Christ. They also serve as family members, neighbors, workers, and citizens. These specific vocational localities, distinct to each Christian, present settings for Christian love, a winsome presence, and an authentic witness.

The vocational service of both clergy and laity is integral to the mission of Christ.

The mission of Jesus Christ in the world is accomplished in His calling of every Christian to serve in the priesthood of all believers. This means that the measure of a congregation's faithfulness is never only its purity of doctrine or even its worship attendance but in the fulfillment of the vocations of its pastor and members. The pastor has it right when he responds to "Fine sermon, Pastor!" with the words, "We'll see." The Word unfolds in the lives of Christ's people.

This mission also means that the church's work is not over each week as the service ends. Rather, the service fuels the work of every priest, pastor, and layperson alike, called into the world to love and serve the neighbor. To say that the church's



*Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy, former parish pastor and seminary professor, is President of the Minnesota South District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.*

[dean.nadasdy@mnsdistrict.org](mailto:dean.nadasdy@mnsdistrict.org)

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

mission is complete when it distributes the Word of God and the Sacraments is a confusion of means and ends. These means of grace provide the nourishment and power for the mission Christ has given His church: loving the neighbor through acts of service and witness. Without the Word and the Sacraments there can be no mission of the church. Without the mission of the church, the Word and Sacraments become self-serving rites, forsaking the cross belonging to every Christian priest.

Martin Luther refreshed the church with the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Though he actually never used the exact words in his writings, he boldly attacked the accepted idea that only the work of priests and bishops is a spiritual calling (German, *Beruf*). Everyone else's work, the thought went, is secular, not spiritual. Luther destroys the idea of two estates, spiritual and secular, with God working only in the spiritual estate held by ordained clergy. For Luther, God works through both clergy and laity to accomplish His purposes. Here is his familiar statement from his *Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*:

It is a pure invention (fiction) that Pope, bishops, priests and monks are called the "spiritual estate" while princes, lords, artisans and farmers are called the "temporal estate." This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and that for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. We are all consecrated priests by baptism, as St. Peter says, "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm" (1 Peter 2:9). The Apocalypse says, "Thou hast made us to be kings and priests by Thy blood" (Rev 5:9–10).<sup>1</sup>

Worthy of note is how Luther affirms the unique vocations of both pastor and layperson as "consecrated priests." He writes, "there is no difference among them except that of office (German, *Amt*)." In other words, both pastor and laity have a calling through which God works, even though their offices may differ. For Luther, the unique expression of each Christian's priesthood is the "mask" behind which God is at work caring for us and accomplishing His mission. In his Large Catechism Luther likens God's work in our vocations to what parents do when they assign their children chores. The chores build character and give children what their parents know they need. He writes:

What else is all our work to God—whether in the field, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child's performance, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the concept of the priesthood of all believers can become a point of contention between clergy and laity. Laity may think it means that they have every right to do what a pastor does—even preaching and administering the Sacraments.

Pastors may become threatened and defend their right to their unique calling. Such misconceptions are tragic, since the priesthood of all believers by its very nature is meant to unite the Body of Christ, not divide it. Timothy Wengert writes, “Luther’s principle—a single walk of life, but many offices—arose from his conviction concerning the unity of Christ’s body. He insisted that any multiplication of walks of life (*Stände*) would imply two bodies of Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

Pastors may become threatened and defend their right to their unique calling. Such misconceptions are tragic, since the priesthood of all believers by its very nature is meant to unite the Body of Christ, not divide it.

A theology of the priesthood of all believers affirms that our High Priest has called every Christian to a life of service and sacrifice as priests. Christ calls pastors to serve by publicly proclaiming the Word and administering the Sacraments within the church, equipping the saints for their service. Word, bath, and table fuel the church’s mission. Pastors also serve in other callings as spouses, parents, citizens, etc. At the same time, Christ calls laypeople to serve, according to their gifts, as members of the Body of Christ. They also serve as family members, neighbors, workers, and citizens. These specific vocational roles or offices present settings for Christian love, a winsome presence, and an authentic witness. In these roles is where vocation and mission intersect—where Christ works through the varied callings of His people to accomplish His mission.

### **Theological Foundations for the Priesthood of All Believers**

An appreciation of the priesthood of all believers is incomplete without an affirmation of these three biblical concepts: gifting grace, equipping the saints, and bearing a cross.

*Gifting Grace:* The people of our congregations are priests because they have been justified by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Their priesthood begins and is nurtured daily with the sacramental grace of Baptism. Their life as priests is sustained by the grace of God in the Word and the Lord’s Supper. In Christ, God’s extravagant “grace upon grace”<sup>4</sup> also extends to their sanctification by which the Spirit of God enlightens them with His gifts. *Charis* (grace) is never far from *charisma* (gifts). In Ephesians 4:7, after affirming the amazing oneness of the church, the apostle Paul writes, “But grace (*charis*) was given to each one of us, according to the measure of Christ’s gift (*charisma*)” [ESV]. The same grace of God which saves us also gives us gifts specific to our callings. Paul is so confident in this

life-embracing grace that he assures the Corinthians that they “are not lacking in any gift.”<sup>5</sup>

*Equipping the Saints:* In Ephesians 4:11–12, Paul describes “apostles, prophets, shepherds and teachers” as gifts of God given for the purpose of “equipping the saints for works of service.” The word “equip” (Greek, *katartizo*) here can mean to prepare, to ready, or to fit perfectly. Some debate whether the phrase “for works of service” applies to the saints being equipped or to the equippers. Most translations go with the former. The KJV goes with the latter as if to say that the church leaders were given to the church for works of service. The same root word is used in 2 Timothy 3:17 when Paul writes that the desired outcome of a profitable use of the Scriptures is “that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” This passage seems to favor the saints of God being the ones equipped for works of service (*diakonia*). This reading also supports well Luther’s thought that the vocation of the Christian grows out of and contributes to the oneness of the church. As Paul puts it, Christ gives leaders to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith.”<sup>6</sup>

*Bearing a Cross:* The theology of the cross brings depth to the connection between our vocation and the mission of Christ. Just as God was hidden in the cross of Jesus Christ, so God is masked in our ordinary vocations. We may not see God as easily in our everyday callings, but His purposes are being accomplished as His grace is fulfilled<sup>7</sup> in our everyday walk with Christ. As we serve others and humbly enter their suffering because we follow Christ, we come to know the fellowship of His sufferings<sup>8</sup> and the fullness of His grace.<sup>9</sup> As priests we bridge the gap between man and God. We embody the love of Christ in our responsibilities and relationships. When the mission entails suffering, we may reach our deepest dependence on Christ and identify most with the One who has called us. And just here the mission of the church is engaged.

## **Locating the Congregation’s Mission**

Where does the congregation locate these works of service? Where do Christians bear their crosses in loving the neighbor? Where are sacrifices made as priests of God? Though both Matthew 28:19–20 and Acts 1:8 clearly place the locality of the church’s mission beyond the congregation’s building, many congregations spend most of their resources “serving one another.” The mission even gets narrowed further by works of service centering on the congregation’s worship services. A recent discussion of denominational leaders on the appropriate role of clergy and laity in the mission of God led immediately to a lengthy discussion limited to the assigned roles of clergy and laity in worship.

*Serving One Another in the Building:* That said, clearly the first setting for priestly acts by pastor and people is the church's meeting place. Significant sacrifices of time, gifts, and money are made in supporting the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments in worship. The pastor serves as public proclaimer and presider. Acolytes, musicians, greeters, ushers, readers, and others serve God and one another in worship. Meanwhile congregants serve on boards and committees and as leaders of the congregation. For the most part, these expressions of priestly service happen inside the church building and serve the saints who also worship and serve there. This mutual service within the ranks of the congregation is affirmed in all those "one another" passages of the New Testament; however, it is not affirmed as the exclusive expression of service.<sup>10</sup> If serving one another becomes the exclusive expression of a congregation's service, its members may find themselves isolated from those who are pre-Christian. One of the most frightening comments excusing this exclusive approach to the church's missions is, "We're here. They'll find us if God wants them here."

*Serving Others in the Building:* Priestly service in the building also takes place as a congregation welcomes its visitors. The New Testament's call to hospitality (Greek, *philoxenia*, literally, "love of strangers") recognizes that congregations serve those from the outside who visit worship or other church events. Pastors often encourage their members to invite friends for worship and other events. In Minnesota, it is common for many churches to host an annual dinner event for the community with wide community participation. Attracting people to the church building may also entail hosting conferences and community groups. The church becomes a gathering place that includes outsiders and offers many opportunities for service and love. Unfortunately, many churches compromise their service to the community by charging rent for any meeting or conference using their facility. Congregations, especially in urban settings, may depend on this rental income to stay afloat. The strength of this avenue of service, rent or rent-free, is in its bringing together Christian and pre-Christian people in the same place. It is no secret, however, that this "attraction model" for service is increasingly more difficult at a time when the local, institutional church is devalued, especially among millennials.<sup>11</sup>

*Serving Others outside the Building:* A predominant characteristic of Jesus, even as the promised Messiah, was that He came to serve.<sup>12</sup> His service went way beyond His little band of disciples and the places where they met. His proclamation, teaching, and restorative acts of service took Him to where the needs were, in both familiar and dangerous

With compassion, [Jesus] entered the needs of others, initiating acts of service rich with extravagant grace, giving more than was expected.

places. With compassion, He entered the needs of others, initiating acts of service rich with extravagant grace, giving more than was expected. A congregation as the body of Christ in a given location moves intentionally outside its building to serve others. In the name of Christ and their church, members may clean up highways, visit nursing homes, make welcome calls, work at the food shelf, volunteer at local schools, and help build low-income homes. One congregation is clearly in touch with this servant identity as a crew of its members follows the annual community parade to clean up the mess, and there are horses in the parade! One cannot imagine a richer affirmation of a Christian congregation than, “Those people really serve!”

*Global Mission Experiences:* Beyond these settings for priestly works of service is every congregation’s call to reach the ends of the earth with the Gospel. Congregations and individuals who intentionally engage in global mission endeavors are consistently strengthened in their identity and resolve as servants of Christ.

*Vocation:* Inside or outside the building, the emphasis in recent decades has been service in the name and on behalf of the congregation. We “serve the church,” we say, and that can take many forms of Christian service. Complementing these approaches to service is Martin Luther’s theology of vocation, placing the locality of Christian service in the specific callings of each Christian. A theology of vocation recognizes that priestly works of service are not just the weekend or weeknight activities of my congregation but my way of life. Here the location of my service is my workplace, my home, and my callings as a neighbor and citizen. It is precisely here that I have the greatest opportunity to express my faith in acts of service with those who are not yet Christian. In my vocations, God places me in unique venues for proclaiming the Gospel—relationships nurtured by love, time, and opportunity.

The church sends its members out as invited, equipped, and encouraged everyday disciples of Jesus Christ. . . .

The mission here is not so much what they do as members of the church but what they do as Christian students, workers, family members, neighbors, and citizens.

As many congregations face declining worship attendance and aging membership, they often look for quick solutions. One may hear, “If we can just begin using contemporary music in our worship, we will grow again.” Some dig in and say, “We will stay true to our traditional liturgy, and people will see that this is the best way to go.” Both of these approaches assume that pre-Christian people are drawn to what we do or do not do inside the church building. This trusted centripetal model, drawing people in from the outside, still dominates many churches as they think about their mission. An emphasis on vocation changes the direction: a church’s mission is

centrifugal. The church sends its members out as invited, equipped, and encouraged everyday disciples of Jesus Christ. They return again and again for the training and motivation that come with Word and Sacrament ministry. The mission here is not so much what they do as members of the church but what they do as Christian students, workers, family members, neighbors, and citizens.

It is not uncommon when churches intentionally emphasize vocational mission to see ministries like these develop: neighborhood social events and Bible studies hosted in members' homes; members intentionally placing themselves in settings where pre-Christian people are present (the local café or coffee shop; school events; service organizations; political gatherings; etc.); and church members and families working side by side with the unchurched in community service projects. In relationships forged in these settings, Christians carry on the ministries of both presence and proclamation. Their personal witness is received as an authentic word of one who cares and serves.

## **Congregational Shifts**

How does a congregation move in its mission to a greater emphasis on vocation? What are the shifts necessary for such a change?

*Pastors Living Their Vocations:* Pastors must be encouraged by church leaders to fulfill all their vocations, especially those of spouse, parent, citizen, and neighbor. Their faithfulness extends beyond their vital work as pastors. As members see their pastor spending time with his family and at work in their community, they will be encouraged to do the same.

*Preaching on Vocation:* Sermons must not only present Law and Gospel but also show people what a life of service in response to this Gospel looks like. The Gospel in sermons must unfold in such a way that it propels people into their vocation with confidence and hope. It is simply crucial, if a church is serious about vocation, for proclaimers to illustrate the sanctified life, always linking it to the life-empowering Gospel.

The Gospel in sermons must unfold in such a way that it propels people into their vocation with confidence and hope.

*Vocational Bible Study:* Perhaps as a follow-up to the New Member Class, churches may offer a class on Christian vocation, emphasizing its pivotal place in the mission of Christ.

*Vocational Retreats:* At least once a year, congregations may sponsor a weekend retreat in which participants plan their personal vocational mission, taking seriously their unique callings and opportunities for service.

*New Metrics:* Most congregations keep internal records such as worship and Communion attendance, financial giving, and official acts. Those serious about vocation may also record their members' service in their community. This metric asks, "In what arenas of community service are our members involved?" Developing metrics for the vocational impact of its members can yield helpful data for determining a church's influence outside itself.

*A New Third Place:*<sup>13</sup> For many congregations the church becomes the "third place" for its members, next to home and work. Some members may spend as many as three nights a week at church for classes, meetings, and service. Members become insulated from those outside the church. The shift here makes this third place a community or neighborhood place where relationships can be built with pre-Christian people. Christians cannot be salt and light in the world if they are not in the world.

Christians cannot be salt and light in the world if they are not in the world.

*Equipping as a Core Activity:* Perhaps the most crucial shift moves the pastor and leaders of congregations from only doers to equippers. Their leadership must go beyond delivering Word and Sacraments and supporting worship services. Merely dropping people into church positions is not "equipping the saints." Laity must be invited into works of service and trained and encouraged along the way. They must be taught what fulfilling their various vocations looks like.

## **Vocation: Arriving Where We Began?**

The final poem in Christian poet T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* is titled, "Little Gidding." Inspired by his 1936 visit to St. John's Church in Little Gidding, England, Eliot wrote the poem during the London bombings of World War II. His memory of this little village church raised thoughts of time and timelessness. The church, still standing, dates back to 1625. The church at its best today stands in places where the timeless truths of God are held fast and fiery, rich and lasting, a place where the dead are spoken of as still alive and the living are dying and rising each day in their baptism. Yet the church has always also been God's scattered saints, equipped and sent for works of service. In this poem Eliot gives us these famous lines:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>14</sup>

We know well the place we call church. We know it by its cross and book, its font and table. We know it better, though, by the *ecclesia*, those called out of the world to gather there. They are the church in this place. Yet from the beginning, they have also been the sent ones. The New Testament presents the Christian faith, not as an escape from the world, but as a way of life in the world. With every new generation, the church explores how it will engage the world in mission. Whether it was the apostle Paul or Luther, the church has been found in that place where Christians fulfill their vocations. Just there Christians love, serve, and sacrifice in Jesus' name. Just there people see Christ incarnate in His people. And just there, yet again, we may "arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."<sup>15</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Dutton, 2012), 69. Keller, a thoughtful Presbyterian pastor, is lavish in his praise of Luther's theology of vocation.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 70–71.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, "The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths," *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers* (2006), 17.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase is used by the apostle John in John 1:16, revealing the extravagant nature of God's undeserved favor.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:7

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:12–13

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 3:10

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 4:13

<sup>10</sup> The New Testament uses the phrase "one another" or "each other" 59 times.

<sup>11</sup> David Kinnaman's *You Lost Me* (Baker, 2011), a study of millennials' attitudes toward the church, is helpful here.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13; 53:12; Mark 10:45.

<sup>13</sup> Ray Oldenberg's book, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Marlowe, 1989) suggested this term for social gathering places besides home and workplace. His concept carries significant import for the church's mission.

<sup>14</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1963), 200.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

# Faithful and Missional from the Beginning: One Hundred Years of LCMS Mission<sup>1</sup>

Paul Heerboth †

**Abstract:** The Saxon immigrants from Germany who first settled in Perry County, Missouri, were strongly motivated by the desire to live in a country where they could organize their lives around their commitment to the Lutheran church and its teachings. In that group of believers, however, there were pastors and people who recognized that the Lutheran Church had much to offer a world in need, and over time the church grew in its commitment to the missionary task.

In this article, one resource and two major challenges are highlighted. As a resource the Saxon immigrants and their leaders soon discovered that other Germans, pastors and people, had arrived in the United States, and some of them had a larger vision than the Saxons of the work that God had given them to do.

The first challenge was the enormous numbers of Germans entering the United States, most of them economic migrants with weak ties to the Lutheran church. How could Lutherans already here respond to this challenge? There were also people beyond the Germans whom God had called His people to serve: Native Americans from the beginning and after the Civil War mission and ministry among Black Americans.

The second challenge involved the planning and administration of mission. Is it better that local planning and participation is emphasized, or should mission be planned and driven by people at the national level who may have resources to work efficiently on large projects? Debates about how to organize for mission start early and are answered in different ways at different times.

If we were to put the original colony of the Saxon Lutheran immigrants in Perry County, Missouri, out of our minds for a minute and consider the origin of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), there is one fact that would impress us, namely, that the LCMS was, in the words of the late Dr. Roy A. Suelflow, “basically, at its inception, a mission synod.” Of the twelve charter voting members who first formed the Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, five were trained

---

*Rev. Dr. Paul Heerboth served as one of the Missouri Synod’s first missionaries to Japan after World War II, serving there from 1949–61. After his return to the US, he served in various roles in the administration of LCMS international mission work, all centering on the recruiting, training, and support of missionaries around the globe. He died in the hope of Christ’s resurrection in 2012.*

and sent as missionaries by Wilhelm Löhe (1808–1872), a Lutheran pastor in Germany who was convinced that Germans needed to play a role in mission in the United States. Of the twelve charter advisory members, five of these were also sent by Löhe. Of the twelve so-called “Friends of the Project,” F. C. D. Wyneken also must be noted because of his 1841 appeal to Löhe to send missionaries to serve the enormous immigration of Germans into the United States. The majority of the men who became charter voting and advisory members of the Synod in 1847 were not a part of the original Saxon immigration in Perry County. Actually, C. F. W. Walther’s congregation, Old Trinity, St. Louis, was the only Saxon congregation that joined at the time of the founding convention.

Much of the credit for arousing interest in sending these men and women as missionaries to America must rightly go to F. C. D. Wyneken (1810–1876). He is remembered as the father of Lutheran Home Missions in the nineteenth century, the pastor who worked tirelessly in the interest of mission. He called attention to the need for mission work through his publication entitled *Notruf* (Eng. *A Cry for Help*, now commonly translated as *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*). It was in response to this publication that Wilhelm Löhe of Neuendettelsau, Germany, prepared and sent more than 80 missionaries in support of Lutheran work in America. Löhe published his own plea for workers in 1841 and, with J. F. Wucherer (1803–81), published a newspaper in 1843 in behalf of America’s need: *Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und über Nord-Amerika* (Church Announcements from and about North America). These two men were cofounders of home mission work, i.e., evangelistic outreach to Germans in Germany, specifically in Bavaria. They opposed the rationalism of the day and championed the importance of the Lutheran Confessions for the life of the church.

Löhe also supported a theological school for the training of emergency helpers (*Nothelferseminar*), a “practical seminary,” established in 1846 at Fort Wayne, Indiana. Wilhelm Sihler (1801–85) served as its head and professor with eleven students enrolled. At the request of the LCMS, Löhe turned the school over to the Synod in 1847.

Already in 1847, the need for mission was accented in the Synod’s constitution. One of the stated purposes of organizing the Synod was the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The new organization, small as it was, sent out missionaries immediately to survey and determine the possibility of doing mission work among the pioneers on the American frontier. In the very first proceedings of the Synod, we read of the work of these itinerant missionaries (*Reiseprediger*). In their

The new organization, small as it was, sent out missionaries immediately to survey and determine the possibility of doing mission work among the pioneers on the American frontier.

individual work, too, the early fathers were intense missionaries. It was an accepted principle that each pastor was to look after the needs not only of his own immediate congregation, but to reach out as far as possible to the unchurched.

In the meantime, Walther sounded a clear Lutheran note in *Der Lutheraner* (*The Lutheran*) which he began to publish in 1844, before the organization of the Synod. Other pastors and congregations saw this banner of Lutheranism, and for many who were looking for a rallying point, this became their regimental banner. Little by little, many Lutheran pastors of diverse origins applied to the Missouri Synod and entered into its membership. In this way, more missionaries sent by Löhe and others became part of the LCMS, and this gave the Synod an exceptional growth rate in its early years.

Among those who joined were not only pastors with established congregations and home missionaries seeking newly arrived German immigrants, but also missionaries active in outreach to those who had never known Jesus. We can mention here only a few names of those who were active in Michigan Indian mission work and who joined Synod shortly after its organization: E. J. Meier (b. 1828), E. G. H. Miessler (1826–1916), and E. R. Baierlein (1819–1901). These men added not only to the ranks of the Synod’s clergy, but they brought their mission projects with them, so that in a few years a sizable number of pastors did not serve established congregations but were actively involved in mission work.

Since a large number of missionaries were members of the Synod, it is not surprising that mission interest was intense and that already before 1850 a proposal was brought before the Synod to open mission work among the Native Americans in the State of Oregon. The fact that an Indian war was going on there at just that time did not deter them but was considered additional reason why work ought to be planned immediately.

To enable it to carry on mission work on the local level, districts of the Synod were formed.

As the Synod grew, administration became more difficult, especially over the far-flung mission fields. To enable it to carry on mission work on the local level, districts of the Synod were formed in 1854. The emphasis was on decentralization, the theme of the Synod in its early years. Local guidance and direction seemed to the early Synod to be one of the chief factors that could make a vigorous mission program possible.

However, American Indian mission work received one setback after another. First, one of the champions of the work, Baierlein, was recalled by his sponsor, the Leipzig Mission Society (1819 on) in Germany, and sent to India in 1853. Baierlein had been sent to America by the Leipzig Mission to do mission work among the Indians, and his association with the Missouri Synod was purely incidental.

The Native Americans in Michigan were being settled on reservations. That government program interrupted some of the work in the older stations when the Indians were moved away from the stations. Competition from sects tore away chunks of membership. Furthermore, the language barrier was a problem. There appear to have been only a few men who learned the Indian languages. In one report, we find a plea that a young man be found who would be able to handle at least English to help a missionary working among the Indians. The Indians, understandably, had no appreciation of the missionary's German.

Finally, after the mission projects had suffered repeated setbacks, the Synod resolved to close all of its work among American Indians. This blow felled completely the Missouri Synod's first attempts at mission to non-Christians. The Synod's efforts were then narrowed to the home mission program of outreach to the German immigrants who were arriving in a steady stream.

In home missions, the Synod faced a tremendous challenge, of course; for those were days of the Midwest frontier, when the Midwest and the West were receiving tens of thousands of immigrants. The Missouri Synod faced the challenge admirably and strained its energies to gather German Lutherans into congregations and supply them with pastors. Column after column in *Der Lutheraner* reports the difficulties of the *Reiseprediger*, the circuit-riding preachers, in their journeys to gather scattered German immigrants into Lutheran congregations.

There was a downside to this work, however. As admirable and commendable as the home mission program of Synod was from the beginning, it is clear that their goal was almost without exception to work among Germans, and more specifically, among German Lutherans in need of Word and Sacrament ministry, congregational nurture, and pastoral care. That this was all good and necessary goes without saying. It is unfortunate that other mission opportunities were not even recognized, let alone acted upon, as a result of this strategy focusing on the needs of German immigrants.

In spite of this restricted view of missions, an ecumenical spirit was evident in inter-synod relations. In the 1860s "free conferences" were held with other Lutherans, which finally led to the organization of the General Council. At the end of the discussion process, the LCMS felt unable to join the General Council. But, an encouraging note was struck in 1872 when the Synodical Conference was formed by a group of conservative Lutheran Synods, including The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

This new organization soon vigorously took up the mission challenge by beginning work among Black Americans in 1877. Technically, this was not a Missouri Synod project, but the Synod was vitally interested and contributed men and money willingly and generously. This project was no doubt an important factor in helping to keep alive in the Synod the memory of the Lord's words "Go into all the world. . . ."

However, tensions were developing among Lutherans. Differences of opinion concerning the issues of the Civil War were not forgotten, even when the war was over. Later the differences became even more serious when the doctrine of election (predestination) became the main issue. Polemics then became the main occupation of many individuals on both sides of the question, and the big challenge was no longer focused outward—to go out and win new peoples for the Savior—but was bent inward—to defend the fortress of pure doctrine against attack from without and to cleanse it within.

That there were vital issues involved and that the truth had to be defended, no one would deny; but the emotional violence with which the flames of discord flared throughout the Synodical Conference during the 1880s did untold damage to the spirit of mission. For decades the ability of either side to undertake any mission work on a sizable scale was crippled.

There was, however, one staunch spirit who kept on throughout the turmoil of these times to focus on the words “Go into all the world. . . .” This man was Georg Ernst Ferdinand Sievers (1816–93), the father of the Missouri Synod’s foreign missions. When many lamps were hidden under bushels, his burned brightly on the stand; when other visions narrowed, his did not.

The big challenge was no longer focused outward—to go out and win new peoples for the Savior—but was bent inward—to defend the fortress of pure doctrine against attack from without and to cleanse it within.

Sievers had been associated with the old American Indian missions. When this work was closed, the commission or board was kept intact, because there were mission properties to be disposed of. Between conventions, Sievers sold the mission properties, and at conventions he never tired of bringing before the Synod the need of bringing the Gospel to those without Christian faith. We find him year after year trying to stir up interest and arouse his brethren to the challenge. Sometimes the reply was that there was no open door. In response, Sievers pointed out that the major nations of the Orient had just been opened to foreigners.

Synodical inertia was finally overcome by pressure from the individual districts, many of which put forward urgent pleas that foreign work be started. An enlarged and reorganized foreign mission board was mandated by the Synod convention of 1893, and Sievers was elected its chairman; but he died before the Board’s first meeting, set for Oct. 4–5, 1893.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, however, the Board of Foreign Mission was instructed to make a study of foreign fields and to bring recommendations to the Synod. The Board was also instructed, however, to pay particular attention to the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), because it was reported that there were many Lutherans there. The Synod

accepted that it needed to be involved in foreign mission work, but it was not yet confident that it knew how to cross boundaries of language and culture.

Finally, an opening presented itself when a Japanese student, Henry Shigetaro Mizuno, at the Springfield seminary, was identified in 1893 as ready to go back to Japan as the Synod's first missionary. This young man, Mizuno, pleaded unsuccessfully for a co-worker but left American shores alone. Before long, differences with Pastor Mizuno and changes in government policy in Japan led to the shelving of all plans for Japan, and Mizuno was turned loose to shift for himself.<sup>3</sup>

The Synod's attention then turned to India and to two missionaries who had been working under the auspices of the Leipzig Mission but had felt constrained to leave that body because of differences about the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. One source states that upon the suggestion of some Missouri Synod friends in Germany, these men, Theodore Naether (1866–1904) and Franz E. Mohn (1867–1925), were sent to America, where they were commissioned at Immanuel Lutheran Church, St. Charles, Missouri, October 14, 1894, and sent back to south India as Missouri Synod missionaries. A beginning had finally been made in foreign missions, but seven more years were required before anyone from within the ranks of the Missouri Synod's clergy could be found and sent to India, in spite of urgent pleas throughout the Synod.

Shortly thereafter, just at the turn of the century, work was begun in South America. A German Lutheran immigrant pastor active in Brazil had requested help from the Missouri Synod for work among German Lutherans. The challenge was accepted. Christian J. Broders (1867–1932) went to Brazil to explore the field and to make contacts. His mission method was probably typical of conventional Missouri Synod mission strategies of the time. His tactic was to find German Lutherans without a pastor, organize them into a congregation, and encourage them to call a Missouri Synod pastor from the United States. Then his work of beginning Lutheran mission work in a new area was finished.

It is interesting to note that the Missouri Synod, after only a few years of work in South America, urged the newly formed Lutheran churches to form a district of the Synod as soon as possible, enabling them to become a part of the structure of the LCMS. This was not regarded as difficult, since this early mission work in Latin America had focused on finding German immigrants in those lands, just as had been done in the United States; and the churches in the United States and in Latin America were, for the most part, not divided by language and culture. When it became apparent in the twentieth century that Latin American mission work needed to become more Latin and less German, other governance models were adopted.

Meanwhile, interest was growing within the Missouri Synod to start foreign mission work, not like in India—with missionaries who were formerly attached to an outside mission society, but with the Synod's own personnel—and not like

mission in South America—focused on Germans, but rather mission work among people of a different language and culture who had no understanding of Jesus and the Christian faith.

This movement in Synod, led by Dr. Edward L. Arndt (1864–1929), culminated in the organizing of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission for China (1912), the mission society—not a part of Synod structures—which in 1913 sent him to China. Rev. Arndt began the work with his own strategy and without direction from the Missouri Synod, establishing missions and schools in Hankow in 1913. He made it a point to learn the Mandarin language, and under God’s blessing his work prospered. In response, but with considerable hesitance and reluctance, the LCMS took over this work officially in 1917. Thus began the Synod’s first effort in foreign missions, crossing barriers of language and culture with its own ordained missionaries.

After the Synod took over the China field in 1917, the workload increased, and in 1920 a full-time director of foreign missions was called, namely, Dr. Frederick Brand (1863–1949). This decision led to the beginning of greater centralization in foreign missions, on the one hand, but also to greater emphasis on Missouri’s part in God’s mission, on the other. Unfortunately, the work in China did not immediately produce a large number of converts. At the same time, controversy on how the name of God should be translated into Chinese also arose. Disagreement about whether a generic name for God or a personal name should be used led to divisions in the missionary community.

Into this period falls also the redoubled effort of the Synodical Conference in the field of African missions. In 1936 work in Nigeria was begun. This mission was, again, not strictly Missouri Synod work, since the Synodical Conference made the decisions about the work; but since the LCMS was the largest of the participating church bodies, it lent the chief support for the project.

After the appointment of Dr. Brand as full-time Director of Foreign Missions, an old dream of Sievers was again revived, namely the plan to found a School of Missions for the training of foreign missionaries. During the presidency of Dr. Louis J. Sieck (1884–1953), a missionary orientation program was begun at Concordia Seminary in 1944. Rev. E. C. Zimmermann, a missionary repatriated from China, was called to head the program.

Others contemplated a bigger dream. Dr. Roy Suelflow, a veteran missionary to China and Taiwan, strongly advocated the importance of having a Mission School in support of the Synod’s mission and beyond. In 1954, he said at Concordia Seminary: “Start immediately to build up a mission school at the Seminary. A good staff of about a dozen men here in the mission school would attract missionaries from many other churches, and our biblical and confessional standard would thus permeate many missions all over the world.”

With World War II, however, the Synod was reminded that foreign mission programs dare not be geared to the slow pace of planning by centuries, but that urgency is required in the King's business. The Synod discovered from the reports of chaplains and service pastors that there were heavily populated lands that no one had ever considered as potential mission fields. Through contacts made by service pastors, chaplains, and regular soldiers—and often as a result of their nudging and prodding—the Synod began mission work in the Philippines and Japan. Post-War expansion included work in New Guinea (now called Papua New Guinea), Guatemala, as well as in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea.

With the overriding expansion of Communism in Asia, particularly in China, the Board for Missions in Foreign Countries was forced not only to evacuate its workers but also to reevaluate its whole mission policy and strategy. After the collapse of LCMS work in China, serious questions were raised about the wisdom of centralized planning under conditions where the center of the planning is far removed from the center of the work. Indeed, this subject has been an ongoing topic for reflection and critical assessment ever since.

As we look back on more than a hundred years of Missouri Synod mission history, there are several points that cry for attention. It might well be noted in this period of centralized aggressiveness that major LCMS mission advances have never resulted from mission board initiative or centralized planning. Rather, considerable, consistent pressure from the outside has been required from the bottom up, as evidenced particularly by the beginning of foreign work in 1894–95 and in the case of China, 1913–17.

As we look back on more than a hundred years of Missouri Synod mission history, there are several points that cry for attention. It might well be noted in this period of centralized aggressiveness that major LCMS mission advances have never resulted from mission board initiative or centralized planning.

There can be no question the LCMS mission work has been richly blessed. Different organizational structures have been utilized and different strategies pursued. Yet, the Gospel was preached and taught. God's Word, as promised, did not return without results. Many blood-bought souls for whom Christ died and rose again were brought into the Kingdom of God. All glory be to God alone!

This article is but a brief overview of the first mission efforts of the LCMS. Much more could have been said, just as another article is needed to describe and evaluate the developments and directions of LCMS mission work since 1945.

For more background on this early period, the following references may be helpful:

William J. Danker, *Two Worlds or None*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964.

Herman H. Koepfmann, "Missouri Synod Undertakes Foreign Missions," in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, August 1951, 552–566.

F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964.

Luther W. Meinzen, *A Church in Mission: Identity and Purpose in India*, Vantambadi, India: IELC Concordia Press and Training Institute for MELIM, 1981.

Carl S. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964, 2nd printing, 1986.

Won Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea: A Personal Account* (Concordia Seminary Monograph Series, No. 1), St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1988.

Richard H. Meyer, *The Missouri Evangelical Lutheran Mission to China* (Unpublished Thesis [M. A.]), Washington University, 1948.

Roy A. Suelflow, *The Mission Enterprise of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Mainland China, 1913-1952* (Unpublished Dissertation [Ph.D.]), University of Wisconsin, 1971.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revision of "Missouri Synod Approach to Mission in the Early Period," appearing in the first issue of *Missio Apostolica* in 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See A. R. Suelflow, "The Life and Work of George Ernst C. F. Sievers," in *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, issues in 1947–50.

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Danker, "Henry Mizuno, Samurai without Support," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Oct. 1992, 339ff. Also Arthur Strege's Thesis [B.D.] on Japan Mission, at Concordia Seminary, 1952.

# The New Religious Context in the North Atlantic World: God's Mission in a Secular Age

Chad Lakies

**Abstract:** In our modern, so-called “secular age,” religion in the North Atlantic world continues to flourish unabated, yet its shape and character seem undoubtedly to be changing. This essay aims to articulate the nature and character of our secular age in order to help the pastor, professional church worker, or missionary gain a better grasp of our contemporary religious milieu. The scope is not comprehensive, but it is broad enough to give the reflective practitioner some resources to help map and navigate our present moment, especially in terms of anticipating mission efforts, reflecting on faith formation in the lives of the youngest to the oldest, and attempting to give a helpful description about how we came to be the kinds of religious people we are in the North Atlantic.

Making sense of our age is becoming more and more challenging for pastors and professional church workers. The most easily accessible resources usually are “click-baity” headlines from arm-chair Christian culture critics that deride America for not being Christian enough or Christian in the “right” ways. If we dig deeper for more nuanced accounts of our time, we are often faced with a more complicated reading. This challenge is compounded with the problem of not quite knowing what one should read in order to find the most helpful wisdom.

Deciding what to read tends already to be predetermined by what we think is going on in our current cultural context. It also presupposes what the possible solutions already are. While the contemporary apologetic publishing industry exerts a strong pull on the attention of American ministry practitioners, I suggest that its construal of our cultural context is insufficient for comprehending the gravity and complexity of the contemporary situation.<sup>1</sup> The usual account is that Christians are embattled, forced to play defense against the march of the secular in a winner-take-

---

*Dr. Chad Lakies (MDiv, PhD, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) is Assistant Professor of Theology at Concordia University—Portland. His work investigates the intersection of Christian faith and Western culture. He is particularly interested in understanding our secular age, what it means to be religious in the twenty-first century, how millennials are shaped to be religious (or not), and the role of the church in this new frontier. He lives with his wife, Bethany and daughter, Anabel in Vancouver, WA. You can be in touch with him via email: [clakies@cu-portland.edu](mailto:clakies@cu-portland.edu).*

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

all culture war. This story is too simplistic. Giving an account of our context requires more attention to the complicated stories and influences that have brought us to our current place.

The goal of this essay is to complicate our picture that gives us an understanding of our present religious context. Rather than make a sustained argument, I intend to sketch out a clearer image of how religion is situated within Western culture, how it's perceived, how it's engaged. I want to describe our "secular age," especially in terms of how it affects the experience and perception of religion by nearly everyone. Having a better sense of the way the world is allows us to see anew what kinds of action are possible in this world. Once I've sketched this new picture, I'll point out a few responses that might reach/engage the people in this context who need the lifesaving message of the Gospel.

## **Our New Religious Context**

Our world is progressively more pluralistic. At every turn, we meet people who live according to a story different from ours. Christians perpetually interact with people who view the world otherwise. Each view makes the claim of being the right view of how things are in the world. Each is vying for authority. Among these views are traditional religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. Joining them since the mid-1800s are various new religions: Mormonism, Scientology, and others. Many of these have gained significant social traction. In our emerging age with the growth of "nones," others have hybridized their faith by cobbling together various views from amongst the doctrines, tenets, practices, philosophies, and beliefs of the traditional religions along with faiths such as Wicca, pagan druidism, voodoo, deism, etc., resulting in unique spiritualities that might be specific to a single individual.<sup>2</sup> Creation of *sui generis* religions or spiritualities happens within the context of a pervasive attitude held by religious and irreligious people alike: the highest good in life is to pursue what makes people happy, feel good, get along together, and not hurt anyone else. Furthermore, few people feel comfortable saying someone else's religion is wrong or that persons and/or their actions are immoral in some way. Rarely is someone even so bold to say that the religion with which he/she identifies is the right one, the exclusively right one, the Truth with a capital T. How do we make sense of this?

## **Secularization? No, but We Are Secular**

Since the 1960s, it has been proposed that in the North Atlantic world, religion would continue to experience regular decline as a result of various sorts of social, economic, philosophical, and scientific progress. Eventually, it was believed, we would see religion die out completely. This "secularization thesis" was very quickly recanted by those scholars who initially proposed it, such as the eminent sociologist

Peter Berger,<sup>3</sup> and a more nuanced theory about how religion is undergoing significant change was proposed. In more recent years, it has become fashionable to discuss our age as “post-secular.” Another way of articulating this is to say that religion is experiencing a “new visibility.”<sup>4</sup> While there is wide disagreement about what it would mean to describe our age as post-secular, there does seem to be greater clarification emerging about what it means to call our age “secular.” In using this language, it is most important to point out that it does not refer to an age in which religion has disappeared (or is progressively disappearing). These more nuanced proposals have only become more complicated.

Taking stock of this complicated story, James K. A. Smith has written a very accessible book aimed in many ways at ministry practitioners and professional church workers. Smith’s *How (Not) To Be Secular* is based upon and can function as a companion volume for wending one’s way through philosopher Charles Taylor’s monumental tome *A Secular Age*. Each can also be read on its own.<sup>5</sup> Either way, Smith breaks Taylor’s argument down into consumable chunks. Taylor asks a basic question: How is it possible to go from “a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others”?<sup>6</sup> Thus begins his quest to trace the unique cultural and social phenomena of the North Atlantic world that have produced the radically different religious context that pervades our time. Smith highlights Taylor’s argument that being religious, especially in a Christian sense, is no longer something we can take for granted. Rather, it is merely optional, a choice among many other choices (I’ll return to this point below). One of the main clarifications Smith offers is to the idea of what “secular” means for Taylor. Smith highlights the three different ways Taylor uses “secular.” His second use is most important for us in this essay. Smith borrows from Taylor’s sense that *belief* in our secular age is “fragilized.” He continues, “What Taylor describes as ‘secular’ [means that we inhabit] a situation of fundamental contestability when it comes to belief, a sense that rival stories are always at the door offering a very different account of the world.”<sup>7</sup> To think of our world as constituted by a plurality of views that are contestable, and thus contested, is to move away from the simple assumption that *we* have the Truth and all we need to do is convince people that Christianity is right. The challenge for us is to reorient our understanding of the world away from a story that suggests that people have a

The challenge for us  
is to reorient our  
understanding of the world  
away from a story that  
suggests that people have  
a God-shaped hole  
in their heart  
and that we have  
the message to fill it  
(or arguments to convince  
them it’s there).

God-shaped hole in their heart and that we have the message to fill it (or arguments to convince them it's there). Rather, a prominent feature of this new religious world is that people actually find it quite easy to get along without religion at all. In other words, they don't even assume that they have a hole in their lives. Those with whom we engage might adhere to such a perspective and seemingly experience fullness of life without Jesus and the trappings of religion.

### **The Diminishment of Religious Authority**

While the secularization thesis might have been quickly withdrawn in light of nuanced proposals by philosophers such as Taylor, it does seem clear that something about religion and its influence on everyday life has indeed *diminished* in the last half-century. One might frame this issue in terms of a loss of religious authority, especially in terms of identity-creation within particular communities.<sup>8</sup> As practitioners, we often want to pinpoint exactly why this has happened. The fraught accounts typically offered by apologetics or worldview scholars lead many to point fingers at the unabated advancement of a scientific worldview, assuming that, especially in the age of the New Atheists, there is some sort of battle between science and religion and that religion is losing.<sup>9</sup> Others point to “postmodernism,” which is usually considered synonymous with “relativism.”<sup>10</sup> Additional options include globalization, technology, urbanization, industrialization, etc. While all of these are probably contributing factors that work together to compound the problem, Taylor would critique these suggestions because, standing alone, they function either too simplistically or as “subtraction” stories.<sup>11</sup> Instead, he is convinced that we must adopt a more complex picture, one that engages social theory, sociology, history, philosophy, science, religious studies, economic, politics, theology, and cultural theory to bring all these factors into a grand, historical narrative. In other words, we cannot point to just one phenomenon and lay blame for the diminishment of religious authority at its feet. Lack of space and time prohibits dealing with these myriad elements (for a fuller treatment, please carefully peruse either Taylor or Smith). However, I will highlight two factors not listed above that intersect in a complicated manner and which directly impinge on our ministry in the twenty-first century.

### **The Inextricable Relationship between Family and Religion**

Mary Eberstadt pens a convincing essay in her book entitled *How the West Really Lost God*. She advances the hypothesis that the new contestability of religious and other stories about reality, often called secularism, is to be found in the decline of the family.<sup>12</sup> She names her proposal “The Family Factor.” Elaborating, Eberstadt writes the following:

The causal relationship between family and religion—specifically the religion of Christianity—is not just a one-way, but actually a two-way

street. . . . I will argue that family formation is not merely an *outcome* of religious belief. . . . Rather, family formation can also be, and has been, a causal agent in its own right—one that potentially affects any given human being’s religious belief and practice.<sup>13</sup>

Her argument adds to the portrait that scholars such as Charles Taylor offer. Her examination of the relationship between family and religion—which she calls a double-helix connection—claims that whatever affects the one inevitably also affects the other. She suggests that the decline of religion is a product of, among other things, the decline of the family. This conclusion alone ought to get our attention, since families and family ministry are often at the heart of our work. One of the major tasks of the Christian church is to form faithful disciples and pass down the tradition of the faith. The decline of the family has erected significant roadblocks to fulfilling this mission. There is, however, some sociological work, based on long-term research, that has shown what sorts of families are most likely to form lifelong faith amongst their youngest members. Vern Bengtson’s *Families and Faith* describes how religion is successfully passed down through the generations.<sup>14</sup> Do keep in mind that reading such research promises nothing in terms of developing lifelong faith. While the knowledge is helpful for understanding how God might be using our material realities to do His work (He is a God of “means” after all), it is ultimately the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to generate and sustain faith.

### **Passing on a Therapeutic Faith?**

While the home or family—and not the church—is the primary location for faith, we should notice another trend that helps us understand why religious authority and its identity-shaping effects have waned, especially in recent decades.<sup>15</sup> Related to what the late sociologist Philip Rieff called “the triumph of the therapeutic”<sup>16</sup> is the observation that the typical faith of modern American teenagers is “moralistic therapeutic deism.” Through the ongoing work of the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NYSR), Christian Smith, a sociologist at Notre Dame, argues that “what appears to be the actual dominant religion among US teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people.”<sup>17</sup> He goes on to say—using the words of the interviewees themselves—that the source of this faith amongst contemporary teenagers comes predominantly from the very faith communities in which they participate. In other words, this religious worldview is significantly modeled by their parents. These teenagers are merely *mimicking the faith of the adult world* as they experience it. Another scholar involved in this study, Kenda Creasy Dean, sharply articulates a major problem that we are facing:

The problem does not seem to be that churches are teaching young people badly, but that we are doing an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe: namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God

requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people focused primarily on “folks like us”—which, of course, begs the question of whether we are really the church at all.<sup>18</sup>

Dean’s words are a substantial indictment of the church that should cause us to pause and reflect. It echoes other analyses which call upon the church to take responsibility for the very nature of our modern secular age, arguing that the seeds of the secular are latent in the church’s theological past—seeds that are germinating and taking root in the present.<sup>19</sup>

### **The New Shape of Religion in American Life**

Based on what has been noted above, we can conclude that religion looks and feels remarkably different in our present North Atlantic context than perhaps even a few generations ago.<sup>20</sup> Particularly within America, religion is treated instrumentally—it is used for particular purposes. We regularly hear demands for religion to be relevant. I often engage a person whenever I hear this, trying to probe what they mean by this term. “Relevant” functions almost like a Master-Signifier,<sup>21</sup> as if it is some kind of banner under which all of us who want the “right” things can gather, but about which almost all of us are rather inarticulate and cannot be sure we really agree with one another.<sup>22</sup> The term “relevant,” from what I can surmise, seems to refer to a religion that’s practical, that is, having immediate applicability to everyday life, concerned with worldly experiences about which religious knowledge can speak and advise, and concerned with immanent realities and experiences. D. G. Hart is helpful in tracking how this particular understanding of religious relevance has come to be dominant. Rather than ascribing relevance on the basis of the timelessness of religious truth—an assumption that might theologially seem more likely—relevance has to do with timeliness. It is about me, my needs, concerns, wants, desires, problems, etc. Hart argues that this understanding of relevance is derived from three common elements in American Christianity: a Pietist focus on religious experience “in the heart,” an Evangelical focus on changing the world in practical ways as a consequence of the Christian worldview, and mainline Christianity’s concern with transforming social realities for those suffering injustices.<sup>23</sup> Relevance then, as Hart might conclude, emerges against not just the historical development of Christianity in America, but particularly in the early twentieth century against the backdrop of the conflict between fundamentalism and modernist theology. As a response, regular efforts were made to prevent the public from presuming the inferiority of religion (in this case, Christianity).

The efforts to present religion as relevant only became more expansive as the twentieth century progressed. They were more than endeavors at denying the inferiority of religion. Indeed, they were an attempt to make religion *attractive*. Relevance came to refer to something much closer to the meaning of “religion as useful” that I intimated earlier. Examining the phenomenon of how religion was

being used to meet the specific ends and goals of adherents led Peter Berger to discuss how religion was sustaining itself on the basis of plausibility structures.<sup>24</sup> Writing in the 1960s, Berger tried to account for how religions maintained a clientele as a means—in some respects—even for survival. He would go on to describe how these plausibility structures tended to work:

The religious institutions have accommodated themselves to the moral and therapeutic “needs” of the individual in his private life. This manifests itself in the prominence given to private problems in the activity and promotion of contemporary religious institutions—the emphasis on family and neighborhood as well as on the psychological “needs” of the private individual.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century, sociologist Wade Clark Roof observes that Americans had simply come to expect such things from religion. Religion as “useful” had become a dominant part of the American social imagination. “What was once accepted simply as latent benefits of religion, for example, personal happiness and spiritual well-being,” Roof tells us, “we now look upon more as manifest and, therefore, to be sought after and judged on the basis of what they do for us.”<sup>26</sup> The establishment of plausibility structures has produced our contemporary spiritual marketplace in which countless varieties of religions (including *versions* of Christianity) compete with others for adherents.

Religion has become merely optional in our time as a result of this ubiquitous plurality (among other causes).

This massive change in the shape and perception of religion in America both resulted from and continued to produce what Taylor calls our secular age. One of the defining features of an age in which religious and other grand stories are contestable, and thus contested, is that it is an age of a plurality of views. The presence of such a plurality is something that contemporary Christians seem to be grappling with still. As James Davison Hunter notes in his powerful analysis of Christian cultural engagement, there is a ubiquity of plurality:

For the foreseeable future, the likelihood that any one culture could become dominant in the ways that Protestantism and Christianity did in the past is not great. An irresolvable and unstable pluralism—the conflict of competing cultures—is and will remain a fundamental and perhaps permanent feature of the contemporary social order, both here in America and in the world.<sup>27</sup>

Religion has become merely optional in our time as a result of this ubiquitous plurality (among other causes). To be religious is no longer to be born into a particular people. Nor is it to be “claimed by the Almighty” and made a member of

his people. Rather, it is to make a choice.<sup>28</sup> Picking and choosing seems natural and obvious. Peter Berger argues that making a choice is what is demanded of us now. He calls this “the heretical imperative,” drawing on the Greek verb from which we derive “heretical” or “heresy,” which means “to choose.” He notes regarding our secular age, “Whatever other causes there may be for modern secularization [this age in which every view is contestable, not where there is less religion], it should be clear that the pluralizing process has had secularizing effects in and of itself.”<sup>29</sup> Joining with Taylor’s description of our secular age, Berger continues:

In premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation. . . . For premodern man, heresy is a possibility—usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity. [In other words,] modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative.<sup>30</sup>

As a result of all this, rather than conceiving of religion traditionally as communal and identity-giving—something which the premoderns experienced as a kind of fate—our contemporaries (and probably many of us) now conceive of religion as private, up to the individual, personal, often unnecessary, or merely a part of life. When it is present, it usually functions instrumentally.

## **The Shape of Ministry and Mission in a Secular Age**

So how might we respond to what has been described above to carry out our role as participants in God’s mission? The old responses are to fight (engage in culture wars) or to withdraw (be sectarian) or to surrender (passively accept second-class status). One response that will absolutely fail is to maintain a glib attitude of criticism that still expects everyone outside of the church to realize they need the religion we have to offer. This is an attitude summarized in a cliché: since we have built it, they will come. Nor will it be right to suggest that the Christians who exist just proliferate amongst themselves, for we have already pointed out the problems that exist in passing along the tradition of faith to the youngest members of our population. I suggest that we engage intentionally, but with a sensitivity to the new picture I have sketched above. Here are two forms such an engagement might take.

### **1. Tapping into the Desire for Enchantedness**

If what has been presented here is an accurate picture of our contemporary religious context in a secular age, it seems clear that strongly apologetic approaches—as conceived of and performed as some kind of philosophical or evidentialist argumentation—will not be broadly effective for accomplishing God’s mission. Rather, perhaps a better approach would be to listen to the culture around us and recognize when it indicates the inevitable sense that it is haunted by the

transcendent—even in a reality imagined to be closed in by a brass ceiling. One might notice this sense of the transcendent in contemporary obsessions over fictional worlds that exhibit an “enchantedness” that our own imagination of the world lacks. *Narnia*, *Middle Earth*, the *Star Wars* galaxy, Harry Potter’s world, the *Twilight* series’ world of vampires, the reality of zombies in *The Walking Dead* and elsewhere, the expansion of enchanted virtual realities (think: video games).<sup>31</sup> The widespread interest in these imaginative fantasy lands might be indicative that, as James K. A. Smith has observed, “the secular is haunted.”<sup>32</sup> We want back what we have lost. Here is where Christians might influentially speak into the lives of those who live in our secular age without aiming to fill a God-shaped hole. Perhaps they don’t experience life as empty but full. Yet they may find themselves strangely filled with gratitude for it all, but without someone (someOne?) to thank. There is an Acts 17 moment if there ever was one.

## 2. Reflecting on how Faith is Passed Down

Passing down the faith is a vitally important concern, especially in light of what we’ve learned about the religious faith of American young people and how that faith came to be engendered in them. Churches and their leaders ought to be extremely concerned with faith formation and catechesis. Yet, the Christian faith is not merely a matter of intellectual ascent or figuring out how to do Sunday School better. Human beings are not merely input/output mechanisms, such that installing the right *beliefs* or *knowledge* in their minds produces the right kind of living (a critical, but faulty assumption of contemporary apologetics or worldview scholars). Catechesis and faith formation will have to take into account not just the head (mind), but the entire body of the human being. Human beings learn not only—or even primarily—with their minds, but with their bodies.<sup>33</sup> It is in the body that one comes not just to know, but to be able to act in the world in particular ways. The Christian narrative has the resources for understanding a human being more holistically than many of the modern anthropological assumptions of the twentieth century, especially those presumed amongst Christians. Worship, catechesis, and faith formation more often than not involve mimicry, such that what is seen and participated in is reproduced. The body knows and remembers in ways the mind does not. Pastors implicitly know this when they visit parishioners suffering from dementia who do not know the names of their own children but can still recite the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, Psalm 23, or various hymns. These pillars of faith are inscribed in their bodies, are part of the fabric of their being, and linger timelessly in their bones. This sort of bodily knowledge is exhibited by people in countless ways: athletics, the arts, technical skills, or simply making one’s way through his/her hometown without a map. Our awareness of how bodily knowledge is influential in establishing one’s identity ought to imply that our practices of catechesis and faith formation aim at shaping humans on every register to be faithful followers who trust Christ in all things.

## Conclusion

Perhaps you can think of more creative ways to engage with others that might fan the flames of faith in our contemporary culture. There is, as always, much work to be done—the harvest is always ready. But the work is challenging, frightening, and frustrating. Yet at times, it is mind-bogglingly miraculous and energizing. That is because no matter what (or how much) we “know” about our cultural context, God the Holy Spirit still uses feeble souls like you and me to present Jesus to others. For “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20b, ESV). May the world meet Him when they meet us.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> There are various helpful resources that highlight the critique of contemporary apologetics and worldview studies. See for example William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); Philip D. Kenneson, “There is No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and It’s a Good Thing, Too,” in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 155–70; Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> This is reminiscent of what Robert Bellah calls “Sheilaism.” See Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985), 221. For more on the “nones” (people who identify as non-affiliating with major religious traditions), or the so-called “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR), see Linda Mercandante’s excellent and very informative book, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014). See also Kaya Oakes, *The Nones Are Alright: A New Generation of Believers, Seekers and Those in Between* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015). Also of interest in terms of do-it-yourself religion, Oprah Winfrey’s *Belief* series on the OWN network (see here:

<http://www.oprah.com/app/belief.html>) has been analyzed as contributing to the practice of hybridization observable amongst SBNRs. See Diana Butler Bass, “Oprah’s new ‘Belief’ series shows how dramatically the nature of faith is shifting,” *Washington Post*, October 18, 2015. Accessed October 18, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/10/18/oprahs-new-belief-series-shows-how-dramatically-the-nature-of-faith-is-shifting/>.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence of Berger’s retraction of the “secularization thesis” comes most obviously in a book he edited more than thirty years after it was proposed. See *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Graham Ward has noted this in various places. See *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 132–135. See also Graham Ward and Michael Hoelzl, *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics* (London, Continuum, 2008), 1–11.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University, 2007). Taylor’s book is probably the most critically acclaimed argument regarding how to understand our secular age. And it is indeed a monumental tome, at 874 pages with text and notes. James

K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Various works concerning authority—whether religious or not—are worth paying attention to. For example, a classic text attending to this topic is Jeffrey R. Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981). Others that deal more currently with an explicitly American religious context include Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013) and, tangentially, George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basis Books, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> There is no such battle. The conflict between science and religion is an invention, a myth. For a very readable guide that undoes this presupposition that many of us “think with,” see Peter Harrison’s *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2015). The entire book is worthwhile as it re-situates our understanding of both “science” and “religion” as well as traces the history within which the “myth” of the conflict began.

<sup>10</sup> Making these synonymous betrays a deep misunderstanding of them both. For some help at understanding the difference, and even drawing the conclusion that postmodernism can be “good” for the church, see James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) and *Who’s Afraid of Relativism?: Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Taylor defines subtraction theories as narratives that describe the secular as “what’s left” when religion and superstition are taken away. For example, naming “science” as the explanation for what happened to religious authority is a subtraction story—one told regularly by such figures as the New Atheists, e.g., Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Eberstadt, *How The West Really Lost God* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>14</sup> Vern L. Bengtson, Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013). Another helpful text (because it is practical and more accessible overall) is Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the home as the central location of faith formation has long been a presupposition of the church. Consider the description of “households” that were converted in the New Testament and that Luther’s *Large Catechism* was meant to be a tool for fathers. While not a comprehensive argument, this point nevertheless recognizes that Sunday School classrooms and Confirmation classes led by pastors are much later inventions.

<sup>16</sup> See Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (1966, repr., Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 162.

<sup>18</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 12.

<sup>19</sup> See for example these selected works: Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Belknap, Harvard University, 2012); Mark Allan Gillispie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Ross Douhat argues that the 1950s were a heyday in American religion. The post-WWII era saw some of the greatest growth of Christianity in the US in the twentieth century. It made way for the influence of religion in politics and created the conditions of possibility for what James Davison Hunter has called the “culture wars.” Douhat traces a very substantial downhill decline in the character of American Christianity beginning immediately after this spike. Not only does he sketch the reasons for decline in a concrete (if incomplete) manner, he also sketches four images that are definitively visible in American Christianity today in the form of what he calls “heresies.” *Bad Religion: How We Have Become a Nation of Heretics* (New York: Free Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> I borrow this term from David Fitch (who in turn, borrows it from philosopher Slavoj Žižek) in his book *The End of Evangelicalism: Discerning a New Faithfulness for Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011). He offers a helpful definition in the accompanying Glossary: “A Master-Signifier is a conceptual object to which people give their allegiance thereby enabling a political group to form. It represents something to believe in. Yet it is an enigma for the members themselves because nobody really knows what it means; but each of them proposes that all the others know. Concepts such as Obama’s ‘Change We Can Believe In’ or Bush’s ‘Freedom’ are examples of Master-Signifiers in recent history” (203).

<sup>22</sup> I often think the same is true for the term “confessional,” especially as it has been applied within intra-Lutheran debates of late. For a little help through the mire on this term, see Joel P. Okamoto, “Making Sense of Confessionalism Today,” *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 4 (2015): 34–48.

<sup>23</sup> D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). While the entire book is excellent, I’m drawing here on the first chapter, “The American Way of Faith.” What makes Hart’s book particularly valuable is the discernment evident in his distinction of confessional bodies (like the LCMS and some Presbyterians) from the rest of Evangelicalism and Mainline Christianity in the United States. Rather than focusing on the “here and now” as those traditions predominantly do, confessional bodies, Hart argues, aim to shape lives that are prepared for the world to come and in view of the presence of a transcendent order that organizes our sense of life in this world, allowing the consequences of such formation to affect life in the present.

<sup>24</sup> Some sociologists refer to “plausibility structures” to point out that the socio-cultural context is what makes things meaningful for its members.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967; repr. New York: Anchor, 1969), 147.

<sup>26</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1999), 78.

<sup>27</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 201–202.

<sup>28</sup> The reader is advised not to understand this as a reference to Decision Theology. That would be to hear what I am not saying, and to draw too simplistic of a conclusion.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor, 1979), 27.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Graham Ward is fond of noticing this trend. See for example, *The Politics of Discipleship*, 147–154.

<sup>32</sup> James K. A. Smith, “The Future of Religion in a Secular Age,” *Slate*, n.d. Accessed October 28, 2015. <http://www.slate.com/bigideas/what-is-the-future-of-religion/essays-and-opinions/the-future-of-religion-in-a-secular-age>.

<sup>33</sup> The Greeks knew this well. So do contemporary marketing agencies. The church has known this for quite some time (i.e., liturgy does more than *inform*), but it has been eclipsed by the perspective of faith as doctrine, or cognitive-propositionalism, that dominates much of orthodox Protestantism.

# Category Error, Common Sense, and the Office of the Public Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Dust Kunkel

**Abstract:** The report by Synod Task Force pursuant to Resolution 4-06A of the 2013 LCMS Convention on Licensed Lay Deacons is used as the starting point to explore assumptions and the application of The Office of the Public Ministry within the secular context of the twenty-first century. On the eve of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, with the Western church destabilized by vast cultural change, a founding community practice built on Scripture and congregation polity is offered as a qualitatively Lutheran way forward.

In July 2015, the Task Force for 2013 Resolution 4-06A (TF 4-06A)<sup>1</sup> recommended ending the role of supervised Licensed Word and Sacrament Lay Deacon in the LCMS—a leadership function authorized by the 1989 Synod Convention—by directing all Licensed Lay Deacons (LLD) to cease practice or become ordained. Licensed lay deacons over 55 can choose to be “grandfathered” into ordination as pastors through a regional colloquy process, and deacons younger than 55 must enter the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program, or other routes to ordination. The recommendations “fix” what the task force considers a theological problem by phasing out non-ordained, trained, and supervised laymen administering the Sacraments and preaching. Though theologians of the LCMS should examine the soundness of the theological assumptions made by TF 4-06A<sup>2</sup>, there is a more foundational issue at stake: one of faulty logic.

It is a form of incorrect thinking to apply a reductive view, that is, oversimplifying an issue until it distorts, to the Office of the Public Ministry (hereafter, The Office). Even more detrimental is the impact of this reductive view when applied to congregations embedded in the secular settings of the twenty-first

---

*Dust Kunkel is the Executive Assistant to the President of the NOW District, LCMS. He grew up in Ghana, West Africa, in an LCMS missionary family that started schools, planted congregations, and equipped leaders in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana. He has served in the LCMS for twenty years in leadership roles including youth and family ministry, outdoors ministry, campus ministry, leadership research and design, and mission network and leader support across the NOW district. He holds a Master’s degree in Education by research from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. [dustk@nowlcms.org](mailto:dustk@nowlcms.org)*

century. Logicians call it a fallacy; the rest of us would call it lack of basic common sense. With due respect to the task force and its formidable task, this essay will show that TF 4-06A's reductive view of The Office inadequately addresses the common-sense challenges present in LCMS congregations, and will present an alternative course built on LCMS polity, Lutheran reformation practice, and the template for The Office provided by the New Testament.

### **Introducing Category Error, the Common Sense Logic**

In logic, category error is “the error of assigning to something a quality or action that can properly be assigned to things only of another category, for example, treating abstract concepts as though they had a physical location.”<sup>3</sup> If I wrote, “My anger was a skittle in my pocket,” it might provoke thought in my reader as a metaphor, but in logic it would be an error. For most people, this is basic common sense. Imagine a visitor to a university campus<sup>4</sup> who sees all the colleges and buildings and then at the end of the tour asks, “But where is the university?”<sup>5</sup> The visitor's error is assuming the university belongs to the category of buildings (as if it were an extra building) instead of the category of institutions: all of these buildings, plus the people who carry its values, make up the “university.”

Category error causes confusion, particularly in systems of people working together. Here is another example: Imagine a person who has never seen or participated in a sport. This person watches a game for the first time and assumes “team spirit” is a specific role enacted by someone, like a batter, fielder, or pitcher on a team.<sup>6</sup> “Where is the ‘team spirit’ person?” he asks. That is category error. Anyone who has played a team sport knows team spirit is an “other” category shared by all players. A coach might create a role for team spirit—imagine how awkward!—but that could in no way fulfill the activity of team spirit. Again, basic common sense. Furthermore, not only would the “team spirit person” be unable to fulfill the job, the team members' minds would be confused about team spirit.

Authority for ministry  
in the LCMS rests  
not in a single person,  
episcopate, or Roman  
hierarchy, but in the local  
congregation gathered  
around God's Word and  
His Sacraments.  
Instead of “top-down,”  
LCMS polity is  
“grassroots-up.”

In a similar way, authority for ministry in the LCMS rests not in a single person, episcopate, or Roman hierarchy, but in the local congregation gathered around God's Word and His Sacraments. Instead of “top-down,” LCMS polity is “grassroots-up.” Each community of gathered believers identifies ministry needs and “calls” workers to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments.<sup>7</sup> The Word and Sacraments, similar to team spirit,

do not rest in one person's role but in the authority of the local congregation. The Office of the Public Ministry is a single public office always originating in a local congregation context—at its heart, a ministry of service—with wide application through a variety of functions.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, practice through the centuries among Lutherans has been marked by a specialized pastorate with extensive graduate training.<sup>9</sup> This is understandable, considering the context of Western culture (“church buildings on every corner,” “Sabbath Sundays” on which even the few non-Christians did no work, an abundance of denominations and sects, etc.). Congregations needed “experts” to explain how they were different from other Christians. In fact, the very term “layman,” inherited from these past centuries of specialization, has become interchangeable with “not an expert.” The industrial revolution's focus on specialization only amplified this approach.

Within this milieu, or category, the next step was logical: *the pastor became the only one at point of contact* with parishioners allowed to preach and administer the sacraments. For many Lutherans today, “ordained pastor” means the same thing as “The Office,” although the first term is loaded with a variety of structural arrangements that reduce the role (boxes to check) to a single person, while the latter, as a concept that connects the dots across the New Testament, is wider and deeper. Again, this is logical for the sixteenth-century era (and succeeding centuries of specialization) in which the church was primarily *the insider* to authority structures and culture.<sup>10</sup>

### **Category Error in the LCMS**

Research over the last few decades (most notably the 2014 Pew Research report quoted by TF-406A, and Barna Group's 2015 assessment of church trends)<sup>11</sup> increasingly suggests we now live in a secular era at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Its closest resemblance is to the first century, when the church was *the outsider*. To assume today that the institutional church (and its theological representatives) is an insider to Western secular culture is to embrace category error. More importantly, to assume any stance that seeks to regain this former position as insider is a category error. It is also poor common sense. Most of us learned, looking back on junior high, that trying to move from outsider to insider is a waste of time and energy.

Or, picture a house breaking apart in a 9.5 Richter-scale earthquake. The house is the Western church, and the earthquake is culture shifting from Christendom to secularization. One evidence of trying to “fix” the structural fracture in the LCMS house is the attempt to remove (trained, examined, supervised-by-pastors, licensed-by-district-presidents) laymen from serving as Word and Sacrament deacons. The fix is, essentially, “cease ministry, or be ordained through existing channels.” This

attempt is like nailing a two-by-four over a widening crack in the foundation. It is also ironic, since these very LLDs are already the most “Lutheranly vetted:” they arise from within a congregation and are only licensed on an annual basis by district presidents in response to that congregation’s determination of need.

Other evidences of trying to fix the structural fractures in the Western church or respond to the cultural earthquake include regularly-published “statements” by national church leaders on secular issues, reactive stances taken in the public square, funds channeled to organizations engaged in political influence, and policies and legislation focused on centralization (for example, the recent national LCMS opinion by its Committee on Constitutional Matters that requires congregation mission activity to be passed through its national mission board).<sup>12</sup> Aftershocks from a changing culture batter the institutional Western church. It is easy to become disoriented, caught in the initial stages of the grief-cycle (denial/isolationism, anger, and bargaining) and lose focus on the primary issue, faulty logic. Then, habituated to category error, Western church bodies become increasingly isolated from common-sense needs in congregations.

To expect one role that grew from a foundation of being *the insider* to culture in the sixteenth to twentieth centuries to *personally* enact all functions of The Office in a church now existing as *the outsider* in a secular culture is to make a category error.

It is crucial to the purpose of this essay that we share common ground in high regard for The Office found in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions (also Walther’s *Church and Ministry*).<sup>13</sup> The question at hand regarding category error is not The Office, itself, but rather its application within different eras. To expect one role that grew from a foundation of being *the insider* to culture in the sixteenth to twentieth centuries to *personally* enact all functions of The Office in a church now existing as *the outsider* in a secular culture is to make a category error.

New Testament (NT) roles and functions of leadership in the first century existed in a church that was *the outsider* to the authority structures of Roman, Greek, and even Jewish culture. In the last two thousand years, this is the closest-matching category to our era. It is fascinating that TF 4-06A uses Philip the deacon as the case for the role of evangelist, yet disregards a robust discussion of the facts explicit in the text: under the supervision of the Apostles, he proclaimed the Word of God in Samaria, and then taught and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. So, Philip was an evangelist, but, somehow not extending The Office in proclaiming the Word or administering the Sacrament? This strong-arming of the text by TF 4-06A is the result of category error in thinking: Philip does not match our sixteenth-twentieth century reductive model for The Office, so we lay him on a procrustean bed and lop off any bits that do

not fit.

Furthermore, though the leadership types from Ephesians 4 are noted by TF 4-06A, they are not unpacked. Nor are the following examples of roles and functions from the first century identified as legitimate means for proclaiming the Word of God: the preaching and Sacraments that must have been celebrated in all the of the house churches<sup>14</sup> by leaders of those churches (for whom we have lists in most of Paul’s letters), the travelling preacher function of Apollos, the husband-wife leadership team of Prisca and Aquila, the supervision practiced by Paul and the other apostles and leaders of the Early Church, even the cryptic mention of Philip’s four prophesying daughters. The lack of transparency by TF 4-06A in its biblical sourcing should raise concern. The central issue is this: category error underneath TF 4-06A’s recommendations informs a reductive application of the Office of the Public Ministry. Our inherited, stratified forms for The Office do not fit the manifold expressions for The Office, or functions under The Office, found in the New Testament.

We now live in a secular age, not a Christian one. The church does not need an “office of evangelist” in the twentieth-century mold, as TF 4-06A recommends. This is too little, too late. That would be Philip with his arms and legs cut off. “Don’t preach or baptize—just ‘do outreach’ and bring them to the church building.” Let the pastor “do” the preaching and Sacraments. This only strengthens the clergy-laity divide. The very nature of the model—which seeks to attract people to a pastor and worship service—does not fit the demands and context of secular culture.

Instead, each local congregation requires many and various team-spirited leaders who, *under supervision, responsibly extend The Office* like Philip—the first-century evangelist, deacon, preacher, and baptizer—proclaiming the Good News and carrying the means of grace into every culture and people group. As Philip and Stephen so aptly demonstrate, it is not so much the title of “deacon” that matters; it is local vetting and spirit-led service while under supervision.<sup>15</sup>

Some suggest that NT roles and functions were for their time and do not exist now, except the pastor role which is the same as The Office. Not only does this

“Don’t preach or baptize—just ‘do outreach’ and bring them to the church building.”  
Let the pastor “do” the preaching and Sacraments.

This only strengthens the clergy-laity divide. The very nature of the model—which seeks to attract people to a pastor and worship service—does not fit the demands and context of secular culture.

perspective disregard the ramifications of its own assertion (after all, if the NT roles do not exist now, then the LCMS pastor may also not exist in the future), but it also does revisionist violence to the structure of the Bible if we apply it to our lives today. What would be left in Bibles if all the roles and functions of leadership were removed except the pastoral role, and it was defined as “sole provider of Word and Sacrament?”

Others suggest that The Office subsumes the NT roles and functions within itself. This seems closer to an NT understanding, and yet the LCMS shows little application in training systems and authority structure. Nowhere does the LCMS provide for training or certification for “pastor-apostle,” or “pastor-evangelist,” or “pastor-prophet,” and so forth. This solution has its own limiting issues, but the point still stands: Why is the concept of The Office being presented as “all ordained-pastor or nothing at all”?

Others suggest that NT roles or functions for The Office are “non-trainable” and exist as gifts in all pastors-in-training. If this were so, then LCMS would have an effective process to identify and amplify these gifts through training and mentoring and other means, and it does not. LCMS training systems were received from the sixteenth century and refined in the modern-industrial centuries that followed. The LCMS mass-produces a specialized expert in theology, with an over-reliance on the residential model. When it comes to training, the few “alternate routes to ordination” that exist have the same goal as MDiv programs, albeit with fewer “specialized theological expert” requirements, leading some (not me) to term them “MDiv lite.” Category error is the reason: The LCMS has embraced a reductive role for The Office that does not match the requirements of our era, nor the broad, multi-roled concept of The Office portrayed in the New Testament.

Having specialized theologians is not the issue; the Church will always need leaders who divide Law and Gospel well. However, *too many of one kind* of leader is an issue. The tendency, when gathering plumbers at a plumber’s convention is for all the talk to be about toilets and pipes, and one might believe a house was just toilets and pipes.

The LCMS has a blind spot flowing from category error. It is an over-attention

TF 4-06A sets up  
a straw man  
of “discord in the Synod”  
over the issue of LLDs.  
Why straw man?  
The discord is raised  
exactly by those who  
are not served by LLDs,  
nor impacted  
by their ministry.  
It would be true discord  
if congregations served by  
LLDs were asking  
for a change  
and not being heard.

to clergy-focused questions, rather than to common-sense, field-based needs. TF 4-06A sets up a straw man of “discord in the Synod” over the issue of LLDs. Why straw man? The discord is raised exactly by those who are not served by LLDs, nor impacted by their ministry. It would be true discord if congregations served by LLDs were asking for a change and not being heard. LLD congregations and their supportive districts do not think this way, and neither did Luther. He encouraged Melancthon, a layman and the writer of a large portion of the Lutheran Confessions, to preach. Nor were the pastors of Luther’s day always the recipients of an MDiv or extensive academic training. Many had two-year degrees or less, and were often immediately in the field serving under some form of supervision.

One might assume that TF 4-06A’s recommendations provide for a less rigorous, more amenable, path to ordination through the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) distance education program, allowing men to “not move” to seminary. However, it is concerning that in this age of information delivery and localized training, the SMP program suggests a budget of \$8,000/year to \$10,000/year, which on the low side costs \$32,000 in total and on the high side (more likely) costs \$40–\$50,000. Week-long, on-site intensives and travel twice a year to the seminary add to the financial burden on congregations, new starts, and leaders least able to bear it.

The following scenario illustrates category error in the application of The Office today: In the United States and Europe, as Western culture destabilizes, the “people group” tag used by foreign missions now legitimately covers not only traditional ethnic immigrants but also myriad subcultures created out of the breakdown of traditional forms, the marriage of technology and globalization, and the human need for community. Within many of these emerging communities, the church is viewed with distrust, and professional church workers with an MDiv or the title of “Pastor” face overt rejection.<sup>16</sup>

There are no shortcuts to gain credibility among the people groups of the twenty-first century. Those seeking to proclaim the Good News of Jesus must be prepared to build relational trust over years, even decades, for the right to be heard (both by individuals and in the public sphere).

Paul in Athens comes to mind. There are no shortcuts to gain credibility among the people groups of the twenty-first century. Those seeking to proclaim the Good News of Jesus must be prepared to build relational trust over years, even decades, for the right to be heard (both by individuals and in the public sphere). Often the proclamation and baptizing will be by those embedded within a particular group. These leaders will have “street cred,” not as church-workers or pastors, but as quality human beings first.

The qualifications for leaders outlined in 1

Timothy 3—almost all of which are behavior traits proven over time—take on enhanced meaning in this secular context. (Paul does not include “seminary training” or “ordination” in the list. Instead, he expected the local church to vet these leaders—again, a practice occurring naturally in the case of all LLDs.) TF 4-06A uses well-defined rubrics for The Office, but these rubrics are too rigid for this real-life, twenty-first-century scenario.

By now, “category error” should be flashing like a caution light. The LCMS is no longer philosophically and structurally equipped to be the “mission-oriented” church it says it is. Nor is “the foreign mission field” across an ocean, if it ever was. If they won’t take “our kind of leader,” will entire people groups be removed from Christ’s command to “as you go, make disciples, baptizing and teaching”? In 1927, the world had two billion people; today we sit at around seven billion, and projections suggest at least nine billion by 2050. With no other options provided by TF 4-06A (remember, TF 4-06A’s “evangelist” is basically an “expert lay person” only allowed to “bring people to church where the pastor can preach/baptize/commune them”), the unspoken inference is that TF 4-06A expects a community to be partial to Christendom in order for LCMS congregations to do ministry there.

If a group of Christians embedded within an anti-Christian or secular community or people group needs a locally vetted and supervised leader to preach and administer the Sacraments, will the LCMS (using the underlying philosophy of TF 4-06A) block it? Trends suggest that more and more congregations find themselves in hostile, or ignorant, environments. These congregations require flexible support for Word and Sacrament ministry, not excessive legislation or idealistic expectations for the community to be partial to Christianity.

TF 4-06A’s recommendations are concerning because they destabilize the Lutheran position on *where* the call comes from by severely limiting the type of leader allowed. This essentially removes the authority for Word and Sacrament from the local church and reverts it within a specialized clergy. It becomes “logical” to assume that only where a pastor is, there are the Word and Sacraments.

If a church is too old (small congregations are often elderly), too poor, too remote, or too young (new starts are too small to afford a full-time ordained pastor), it is restricted from Word and Sacrament ministry because only full-time MDiv

Trends suggest that more and more congregations find themselves in hostile, or ignorant, environments.

These congregations require flexible support for Word and Sacrament ministry, not excessive legislation or idealistic expectations for the community to be partial to Christianity.

pastors or SMPs are qualified. (However, if one is ethnically non-Anglo in the LCMS, it is another matter). Underlying TF 4-06A's recommendations is the colonial assumption that ethnic groups can have "sub par" theological training for their leaders, but Anglos must have MDiv pastors or at least \$32,000 to \$50,000 salaried SMPs. Misunderstanding our category error, we do disservice to both.

The assumptions underlying the recommendations of TF 4-06A lead us into a shrinking Christian fortress<sup>17</sup> protected by a specialized elite. For example, TF 4-06A recommends that Synod pick up the bill for covering the costs of bringing LLDs into seminary training and ordination, though the LCMS faces dwindling funds and growing numbers of indebted, first-call pastors who could use the financial help.

A recent survey of 28 first-call pastors in the West Coast districts found an average student debt burden of \$55,000, with ten of the pastors reporting debt in excess of \$75,000.<sup>18</sup> Though national offices, seminaries, and pastors and their families face financial crises, a crisis of "being fed regularly" is faced on the ground by congregations. TF 4-06A's options could be construed as an insult by any congregation facing tough questions: "If you don't have anyone who will sign up for the SMP program, then 'pipe in' a preacher over the internet and receive the Sacraments when the theological expert can get to you. It might be a few weeks—or months." Unspoken under these limited options is that small congregations, young congregations, old congregations, remote congregations, new starts, and the regional support relationships between congregations and districts are inconsequential.

In the name of doing what's right and proper, the core of the LCMS is jettisoned: congregational self-governance and supervision within and under The Office. TF 4-06A's recommendations lead to a future where the dwindling local church is held hostage by demands from a top-heavy structure and a specialized clergy class. For Lutherans steeped in Reformation history, this sounds sadly familiar.

Nor does TF 4-06A prepare in any way for the congregational future toward which trends point: rising costs for benefits, healthcare, and salaries coupled with plummeting funds. Information technologies available through district training networks and the Concordia University System already exist that could provide high-level training at low cost for more leaders (and more kinds of leaders). Instead, if category error is embraced, congregations will be asked to face increasing requirements for The Office, while simultaneously bearing the burden of the changes required.<sup>19 20</sup>

At the district level, where accountability is closer to the ground, initial licensure as a deacon costs \$3,000 or less for training developed collaboratively by districts and seminaries and taught by graduate-level instructors. Supervision is always required, mentoring ongoing. In a number of districts, continuing education must be completed prior to each annual re-licensing. It was here, in the trenches of ministry

at the local congregation, where an effective and confessional definition emerged: *Licensed Lay Deacon is a function that extends The Office in a responsible way under supervision.*

It was here, in the trenches of ministry at the local congregation, where an effective and confessional definition emerged: *Licensed Lay Deacon is a function that extends The Office in a responsible way under supervision.*

In the Northwest District, conservative estimates predict close to one thousand Lutherans would be without regular Word and Sacrament ministry if supervised laymen were no longer authorized to extend The Office in a responsible way. In each of the four states in the Northwest, congregations once too small to be served by anyone other than a LLD are now grown over time by the service of the LLD to call a full-time pastor. Data suggests LLD programs in districts are a “farm system” drawing 10% of the men on to seminary training and ordination. The other 90% *do not want to be pastors*; they serve their local congregation with humility and grace for a specific time and need.

Not only is the function of the LLD fiscally responsible, and centered on the local congregation’s authority and accountability (a calling card of the LCMS), but the deacon function also highlights and strengthens the pastor as overseer in team ministry rather than as a “lone ranger.” Since LLDs are licensed by district presidents annually, it can be suggested that they receive trans-parochial affirmation by the LCMS within their region of service. Finally, and maybe most importantly, LLDs have “street cred” as spiritual leaders in their secular communities because they typically are not paid,<sup>21</sup> and all of them emerge from their local community.

This essay cannot cover all the bases. Others may highlight the scriptural, confessional, and historical support for LLDs or other functions that, under supervision, extend The Office responsibly. Whatever these functions are titled, Philip and Stephen would remind us that it is not the title, but the faithful service extending The Office—preaching, baptizing, communing, forgiving—that matters. TF 4-06A assumes that ordaining LLDs “fixes the problem.” That is a titular solution. Legislating ordination for all LLDs within the context of the colossal challenges faced by the Western church is like shooting a charging elephant with a Red-Rider BB gun. To the neophyte hunter, the gun looks like a fix, handles like a fix, and carries all the essential elements of “gun-ness.” Yet, when the elephant charges and the hunter fires, there is a click, and the BB moves so slowly the hunter can see it leaving the gun. *If* the BB reaches the target, it bounces off, and the elephant keeps coming.

By focusing on recommendations that place the burden for change on congregations and laymen, TF 4-06A effectively keeps the spotlight off the real issue. The real issue is a reductive assumption regarding The Office that does not meet the massive challenges of our secular-centric age, the broad application of The Office evident in the New Testament, and the needs (and emerging crisis) on the ground in congregations. The conversation must move from “removing supervised laymen doing Word and Sacrament ministry” to one more crucial: *how The Office of the Public Ministry is structured in training and function to serve this era’s congregations embedded as outsiders in a secular culture.*

The conversation must move from “removing supervised laymen doing Word and Sacrament ministry” to one more crucial: *how The Office of the Public Ministry is structured in training and function to serve this era’s congregations embedded as outsiders in a secular culture.*

TF 4-06A is correct in this: The LCMS must make a choice and sacrifices must be made. However, TF 4-06A misses the crux of the choice: Shall the burden for sacrifice and change be on the local church and laypeople, on aging congregations and fledgling starts struggling to grow in secular contexts, or on our leadership and systems? We know the answer, because we see it best displayed in Jesus. Leaders bear the burden. Systems can, and should, be changed.

## **The Lutheran Founding Community Practice**

This essay has identified philosophical assumptions, rather than engaging in theological discourse. First, because assumptions are the primary issue.<sup>22</sup> Second, because theological dialogue is a process that requires time, I have chosen to not provide detailed recommendations for the issue of Licensed Lay Deacons. That would be counterproductive to the goal of this essay, which is to guide the reader to reconsider assumptions. The reader may have reached the conclusion, as I have, that this is the worst of times to rush to action on this issue.

Yet, it may be the best of times to engage in the Lutheran founding community practice. At its most practical, the Reformation was an event *and* a process of discernment under the Word of God during an era of stress and change. Luther, seeking to practice reform, was cast out by Pope Leo. As part of its Reformation heritage, the LCMS retains a specific article in its constitution, Article VII, guarding against such abuse and centralization of power. Some call it “The Leo Article:”

*In its relation to its members the Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to the individual congregation’s right of self-government it is but an advisory body.*

*Accordingly, no resolution of the Synod imposing anything upon the individual congregation is of binding force if it is not in accordance with the Word of God or if it appears to be inexpedient as far as the condition of a congregation is concerned.*<sup>23</sup>

Translated for the present concern, the ministry of supervised LLDs serving the need identified by local congregations is not an aberration; and if Synod adopts a protocol that removes the function of LLD, *each congregation can and should decide for itself if it needs this function, or any other function supported by the Word of God for the Office of the Public Ministry to meet its ministry needs.* The issue goes deeper than LCMS polity. It strikes to the heart of God for the last, the least, and the lost, preached by Old Testament prophets and lived by Christ Himself. Will the LCMS disregard the poor, the old, the small congregation, the geographically challenged, the emerging new people groups, and the young churches in favor of propping up a training and certification system that does not match the field needs of this era?

It is by embracing confessional Lutheran heritage that people of the LCMS find a way forward, practicing reformation. Scripture (“Sola Scriptura”) + Congregation Polity (the “Leo article”) = Reformation. To be confessional is good, to be reformationally confessional while holding to congregation polity keeps the full counsel of LCMS heritage.<sup>24</sup> Rushing to “fix the deacon problem” does not fit this rubric. It is a critical time for each congregation to assess its God-given authority for Word and Sacrament ministry, its common-sense needs, and determine what kind of leaders it wants for this *church-as-outsider* era. Each new era requires courageous theologians guided by the Holy Spirit, who, like Luther, identify their conceptual baggage, their inherited assumptions, and return to the springs of Scripture for a house-cleaning.<sup>25</sup>

The LCMS exists in a secular era, a new category for the institutional church. With respect for the theological acumen of each of the members of the task force and for the integrity with which they faced their daunting task, TF 4-06A’s recommendations are not a way forward; they are a red flag at a crossroads. It is

If Synod adopts a protocol that removes the function of LLD, *each congregation can and should decide for itself if it needs this function, or any other function supported by the Word of God for the Office of the Public Ministry to meet its ministry needs.* The issue goes deeper than LCMS polity. It strikes to the heart of God for the last, the least, and the lost, preached by Old Testament prophets and lived by Christ Himself.

category error to apply The Office of the Public Ministry in a reductive manner to congregations struggling to proclaim Christ in their secular communities. The report by TF 4-06A takes a rigid model that emerged when the church was the insider and presents it as a monolithic office to be defined, defended, and ultimately imposed through a convention vote. It may be more helpful to compare the needs of the local church in this secular era with the needs of the local church in the New Testament. Believers gathered around Word and Sacrament were outsiders to culture then, and are outsiders today. One does not need the concept of category error to understand this alone; it is also basic common sense.

That is why this essay used the example of team spirit, a phenomenon anyone involved in a team sport has experienced. Team spirit resides in each, yet transcends all, as we practice together. To be clear, it is not the same as the work of the Holy Spirit through God's Word and Sacraments, but it *is* one picture that may renew a broader vision for The Office. This Office of Public Ministry is deep. It is wide. It is flexible. It is the gift of authority for ministry given by Christ to every local body of believers: Lutheran reformers practice returning to the springs of the faith for guidance forward. Here, at the eve of the Reformation's five hundredth anniversary, will the congregations and leaders of the LCMS follow Luther's example, return to Scripture, and recover a faithful application of The Office of the Public Ministry for the secular category of our time?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The report can be found here: <https://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3559> in cached format, or on the LCMS 2016 Convention Website here:

<http://www.lcms.org/convention>. The "Executive Summary," a separate shorter document that overlooks some key issues in the report, is not used as a resource for this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Reflexivity (transparency about one's assumptions) is a requirement in any research, especially that focused on human relationships, faith systems, and culture. One way to measure transparency is to ask, "Does this person speak as if for God on this issue, or as one of many finite beings discerning God's wisdom in His community, the Church?"

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/category-mistake](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/category-mistake)

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1949). Ryle was clear in his goal: to dissolve what he considered the Cartesian myth of the duality of mind and matter. Ryle's diagnosis of the impact of Cartesian thinking on all Western thought—and therefore, Western Christianity—is helpful, and his description of category error is a useful tool for unveiling our assumptions. However, I find that his prescription lacks impact on the whole human condition. Those with a Lutheran and, therefore, sacramental, perspective have a more holistic prescription for Cartesian duality: First, Jesus in His flesh brings together Spirit and material for Good. In Christ, all things hold together (Col 1:17). Second, Spirit and material are united by God's promise through the means of grace for our good. Both examples used for category error in this essay are taken from Ryle.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> The abundance of sources on this aspect of Lutheran theology suggests no need to provide references here. The author commends to the reader the other essays in *Missio Apostolica* and now *Lutheran Mission Matters*.

<sup>8</sup> Most notable in CTCR's *The Ministry, Offices, Procedures, Nomenclature, 1981*, accessible on the LCMS website here: [http://www.lcms.org/Document\\_fdoc?src=lcsm&id=423](http://www.lcms.org/Document_fdoc?src=lcsm&id=423).

<sup>9</sup> The exceptions relate to moments when the church functioned for a time as outsider, or saw a pressing need, as during Westward expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the first-language-German Lutherans were immigrant outsiders, and geography and the need for workers saw creative and active methods at play. For more on this topic, see Michael Newman's excellent presentation on *The Real LCMS: Strands of DNA from the Movement Called Missouri* here: <http://www.lsfm.global/media.html>.

<sup>10</sup> The author is indebted to Rev. Dr. Robert Newton for providing the concept of *insider/outsider* to the leaders and participants in Ministry Applied Practice (MAP)—West Coast, a partnership between the three western districts for orienting first-call LCMS pastors in a post-Christendom culture.

<sup>11</sup> For the printable PDF version, see [www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-05-08-full-report.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-05-08-full-report.pdf). The most recent report, *Five Trends Among the Unchurched*, from Barna can be found here: <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/685-five-trends-among-the-unchurched#.VJSOqC5AA>.

<sup>12</sup> This opinion by the CCM came at the request of the leadership in the national office, not from the field, and can be found here: <http://blogs.lcms.org/2015/faq-regarding-ccm-opinion-14-2724-regarding-by-law-3-8-3>.

<sup>13</sup> The author assumes knowledge by the reader of the Lutheran concept of The Office of the Public Ministry. There is not enough space in this essay to cover category error *and* expound The Office of the Public Ministry. Instead, consider C. F. W. Walther's *Church and Ministry* as one starting point.

<sup>14</sup> Lutheran theology affirms that faith comes from hearing the Word and receiving the Sacraments: How else did faith grow in all of the numerous locales during Paul's missionary journeys and afterward, unless the church identified leaders locally, and proclamation and sacraments occurred regularly?

<sup>15</sup> It would be incorrect to assume there are no models that might help in understanding "many functions/roles, one office." For example, multiple health-care roles with specialized responsibility deliver the same care under a doctor's supervision. Many of us have experienced excellent care at our point of need by lab technicians, pharmacists, nurses, nurse practitioners, and physician's assistants rather than doctors.

<sup>16</sup> Some people groups retain a Christendom worldview, and the "pastor-as-sole-provider" application of The Office may be appropriate in their case, for example, cultures strongly influenced by Catholicism and a few urban enclaves on the Eastern seaboard. This solution does not engage the enormous financial challenges faced by pastors.

<sup>17</sup> This is not the fortress Luther referenced in his hymn.

<sup>18</sup> The anonymous survey was conducted by the leadership of the three districts—PSW, CNH, and NOW—in partnership with the Center for Applied Lutheran Leadership (CALL), Concordia University, Portland.

<sup>19</sup> The response process by the Task Force for Resolution 4-06A is indicative of a perspective that believes it is "meeting the church halfway" and "achieving consensus," as can be seen in the remarks by Rev. Vogel, the Task Force chair, in reply to comments here:

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

<http://blogs.lcms.org/2015/task-force-report-on-licensed-lay-deacons-available>. What is problematic is the very notion of consensus in this case: The burden of change suggested by TF 4-06A's recommendations is placed primarily on the leaders and congregations who did not ask for it.

<sup>20</sup> The author has been told by a representative of an LCMS seminary that “we only enact what Synod in convention tells us to do; we can't be involved.” Though technically this is correct, it can be avoidance of responsibility. Those most equipped to have influence on the process, and speak for reforming structures to reduce category error, should not be on stand-by during a crisis. Seminary leaders' vested interest in their institutions makes their motives suspect if they do not advocate for those in the field, whom they exist to serve.

<sup>21</sup> The Northwest District's guidelines for the deacon identification, training, supervision, and annual continuing education requirements are publicly available in the resource section of [www.nowlcms.org](http://www.nowlcms.org) by typing “Guidelines for Licensed Deacon Ministry” in the search bar.

<sup>22</sup> The LCMS has a disconcerting “blind spot.” It is primarily a monocultural church led by older Anglo men of German heritage. It may be troubling for some to consider the last time German men were highly effective was in World War II. The LCMS leans towards systemization, centralized power, and “elite theological training.” While the German nation was forced to face its dark side after WWII, the LCMS has not finished this work. How much Germanic cultural baggage must others carry before they are allowed to walk with the LCMS?

<sup>23</sup> The constitution can be found in the LCMS Handbook here: <http://www.lcms.org/handbook>.

<sup>24</sup> I use “congregation polity” in the broadest sense here, as the process of discernment that happens in any group gathered regularly to hear the Scriptures and receive the Sacraments and thereby grow in faith. This is exactly how the service of LLDs came to be: It grew from a robust discussion launched first at the local level in congregations that had a need, or saw a need, and was supported and refined by districts who saw their role as supportive of congregations, seeking to walk together in ministry as “Synod in this place.”

<sup>25</sup> Opposites (sinner-saint, word-water/wine/bread, law-gospel) held together by the person of Christ are part of what it means to “think like a Lutheran.” This is paradox, or dialectical tension. Yet, Lutheran thinkers may transpose the dialectical tension perspective onto concepts that do not need it, such as the Priesthood of Believers and The Office. It may be helpful to see The Office as deferential to the locally gathered priesthood of believers, as an office of service and encouragement. Then, under the authority of the local church and guidance of the Holy Spirit and Word of God, The Office practices a supervisory capacity over multiple proclamation and sacramental functions. This “congregation-first” accountability for The Office is in keeping with Article VII of the LCMS constitution.

# Rehabilitating the Doctrine of the Call: Building Strength and Agility for Mission

**Michael T. Von Behren**

**Abstract:** The great mission that Christ has given to His body, the Church, to proclaim the Gospel to all nations necessitates the strength and agility that only a fully developed understanding of the divine call publicly to preach His Word and administer His Sacraments can provide. Unfortunately aspects of that call have atrophied from disuse in some confessional Lutheran circles, thus hampering the ability to flex and reach as mission contexts require. As rehabilitation restores the body's health by exercising underused muscles, a bit of rehabilitation of the doctrine of the call may be just what the Great Physician has in order.

Physical therapy was listed among the top ten fastest growing career fields in CNN's 2015 list of the best jobs in America. Physicians recognize that before resorting to chronic pain medications or reconstructive surgery, many aches and pains can be taken care of by strengthening the muscles of that area of the body. With lack of use, muscles atrophy. Physical therapy rehabilitates muscles atrophied from underuse.

In Ephesians 4:11–12, the apostle Paul speaks of the ministry as an institution of Christ and sets forth its purpose saying, “he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Paul continues in verses 15–16, “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”<sup>1</sup>

In those passages Paul not only describes the Church as a body but describes the work of the ministry as a physical therapy of sorts. When the ministry is in balance and functioning properly, every part of the body is correctly joined and held together. The whole body is built up in love.

Aches and pains have repeatedly surfaced among Lutherans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries surrounding this topic of the ministry. Arthur Carl Piepkorn

---

*Rev. Michael T. Von Behren is a 2005 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He, his wife Jennifer, and their two children live in Spokane, Washington, where he serves as Pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, LCMS.*

[mvonbehren@holycrosslcms.net](mailto:mvonbehren@holycrosslcms.net)

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

gives three typical ways that confessional Lutherans have interpreted *The Lutheran Confessions* on this subject. One view holds that “the sacred ministry is only the activity of the universal royal priesthood of believers, the public exercise of which the Christian community has committed to certain persons merely for the sake of good order.”<sup>2</sup> Another holds, “the sacred ministry is a contemporary form of the primitive apostolate.”<sup>3</sup> The third he describes as a mediating position that “incorporates elements of both.”<sup>4</sup> Piepkorn acknowledges that “the modifications on these views are many,” and “each theologian believes he has the authority of the Symbolical Books for his view.”<sup>5</sup> Piepkorn had set out in that particular article, first published in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* in 1969, to clarify a correct interpretation of the sacred ministry in the Lutheran Confessions. The aches and pains surfacing in American confessional Lutheranism at the time of its writing were related to a surge in the use of laymen for ministry to carry out functions of preaching and administering Sacraments.<sup>6</sup>

Piepkorn’s explication of the Lutheran Confessions on this matter gave further support to an article published a year prior in the *Concordia Theological Monthly*. That article was a response by the entire systematics faculty at Concordia Seminary, of which he was part, entitled, “Lay Workers in the Church.” It read:

It may be suggested that if the situation in our church is so grave anywhere that it appears necessary to have ‘lay workers’ perform the functions of the sacred ministry, the proper solution would be so to modify the terms of the synodical handbook such that ‘lay workers,’ provided they meet the requirements that the Pastoral Letters set up for bishops, be ordained to the sacred ministry.<sup>7</sup>

While this approach builds strength in a particular expression of ministry, the aches and pains that have grown up around it in the church, such as the contentious back-and-forth synodical resolutions of the last quarter of a century in that very church body on the same topic,<sup>8</sup> suggest that this may not be a balanced approach for the Body of Christ. While Piepkorn is highly respected, and his article is quite helpful in offering a robust theology of the office of the ministry, it did not eliminate the soreness around the fringes of that doctrine. Piepkorn defends the position that there is a divinely established office of the sacred ministry to which God has given the responsibility of carrying out the dynamic functions of ministry, namely, preaching and administering the Sacraments.<sup>9</sup>

Returning to Paul’s metaphor of the body, these are the primary muscles of ministry. Could it be that there are other legitimate

Could it be that there are other legitimate expressions of a divine call to publicly preach the Word of God and administer the Sacraments that still respect this confessional theology of the office of the ministry?

expressions of a divine call to publicly preach the Word of God and administer the Sacraments that still respect this confessional theology of the office of the ministry?<sup>10</sup>

It is the diagnosis of this article that the answer to that question is, “Yes, there are.” While these other expressions of “call” are not the dominant muscles for ministry, they are supporting muscles, sorely needed, that have unfortunately been allowed to atrophy through years of disuse in the Body of Christ, particularly among confessional Lutherans. This atrophy gives rise to the aches and pains that appear whenever the church is stretched beyond its comfort zone for the sake of the mission of Christ. Without these supporting muscles, we lose our flexibility and agility to meet ever-changing and often challenging contexts for mission and ministry. The urgency of Christ’s call for workers in the harvest fields where “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”<sup>11</sup> necessitates such agility.

While these other expressions of “call” are not the dominant muscles for ministry, they are supporting muscles, sorely needed, that have unfortunately been allowed to atrophy through years of disuse in the Body of Christ, particularly among confessional Lutherans.

### **Rehabilitation Starts with the Core**

In order to identify those ancillary ministry muscles and begin to build them up, this article will work with three of the core doctrines behind the divine call to the office of the ministry: the priesthood of all believers, the office of the ministry itself, and the divine partnership and relationship between them.

### **The Office of the Ministry and the Priesthood of Believers: Mutually Supportive Muscles**

All three of these doctrines were introduced already in the words of the apostle from Ephesians 4 above. Scripture witnesses that it was Christ who “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the office of the ministry is a divine gift to the Church. Yet, this divine office was not given to procure ministry unto itself, but as follows in Ephesians 4, it exists for the sake of the priesthood of believers to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”<sup>13</sup> Johann Gerhard is quoted by C. F. W. Walther in his volume *Church and Ministry*, speaking of Jesus, saying “After His session at the right hand of God, He still grants to His church pastors and teachers in order that His saints may

be perfected for the work of the ministry, by which His mystical body [the church] is edified (Ephesians 4:11–12).”<sup>14</sup> Until Christ returns, the office of the ministry is that divinely established office that God has given His Church to equip and lead through Word and Sacrament the great mission of proclaiming the Gospel so that the Spirit may turn hearts to faith “where and when” it pleases Him.<sup>15</sup>

Within the doctrine of vocation, namely, that God calls His people into vocational service for Him, the office of the ministry is a particular vocation and divine calling not common to every believer. Every believer, as an essential participant in the priesthood of believers, is given the privilege and responsibility to proclaim the Gospel in an individualized (as opposed to public) sense within his or her own vocations, such as mother to her children or neighbor to his neighbor. Thus the apostle Peter who affirms our priesthood reminds us that we “proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness”<sup>16</sup> and that we ought to be “prepared to make defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us].”<sup>17</sup>

Until Christ returns,  
the office of the ministry  
is that divinely  
established office  
that God has given  
His Church to equip  
and lead through  
Word and Sacrament  
the great mission  
of proclaiming the Gospel  
so that the Spirit  
may turn hearts to faith  
“where and when” it  
pleases Him.

That said, even the public exercise of the Means of Grace is a right and power that God has bestowed upon the priesthood of believers as well. This is the foundational truth expressed by the Lutheran Confessions in *The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, which says, “the keys do not belong to any one particular person but to the church . . . . For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18, Christ goes on to say, ‘where two or three agree on earth’ . . . . Thus he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church.”<sup>18</sup> *The Treatise* is objecting to the claim that the power of the keys was given to Peter alone and subsequently to those who succeeded him as pope. Instead it argues that since this power belongs to the church, it certainly has the right to choose and ordain ministers. The term “power of the keys” is being used here by *The Treatise* in the broad sense to refer to the power to “proclaim the gospel, forgive sins, and administer the sacraments.”<sup>19</sup>

That this power of the keys is not only given to the Church as a whole, but that it is given to each individual believer, is seen in writings of Luther already in 1520 in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Here he states, “Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments.”<sup>20</sup>

Walther in *Church and Ministry* includes several other quotations of Luther on this same point. For example, speaking of the pope, Luther is quoted saying, “A [baptized] child in the cradle has a greater claim to the keys than he, together with all those who have the Holy Spirit,”<sup>21</sup> and again, “Christ gives to every Christian the power and use of the keys,”<sup>22</sup> and again, “He not only grants [to every Christian] the right and power [of the keys], but he orders and commands their use and administration,”<sup>23</sup> and again, “the keys belong to the whole communion of Christians and to everyone who is a member of that communion, and this pertains not only to their possession but also their use and whatever else there may be.”<sup>24</sup>

It is this power and ability given to the priesthood of believers to use the Word and Sacraments that allow individual believers to exercise them publicly in an assembly of unbelievers. Some are fond of Luther’s statement, “Necessity ignores all laws.” That phrase is true, not because it allows one to step outside of the God-given theology that defines the distinction between the priesthood of believers and the office of the ministry, but rather because God has fundamentally given the ministry of Word and Sacraments to the priesthood of believers. Thus, in the presence of unbelievers, a believer needs no call other than that of necessity, as Walther quotes Luther on this saying,

‘If he has not been called to do so, as you yourself have often taught, he dare not preach.’ To this I reply: Here you must place a Christian in two places. First, if he is where there are no Christians, he needs no other call than that he is a Christian, inwardly called by God and anointed. There he owes it to the erring heathen or non-Christian to preach and teach them the gospel, moved by Christian love, even though no Christian has called him to do so . . . for necessity ignores all laws.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, Luther continues in that very quote to address the God-given distinction between the office of the ministry and the priesthood of believers. While every Christian has the right and ability to publicly use the Word and Sacraments, to do so among others who likewise have that same right amounts to one Christian’s esteeming himself above others instead of using the gifts to edify the entire body. Therefore, the quote above from Luther continues, “In the second place, if he [the Christian] is where there are other Christians who have the same power and right as he, he should not put himself forward but let others call and put him forth so that he might preach and teach in the place at the command of others.”<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther also completes his comment about the power of the Word and Sacraments given to individual Christians:

Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments. However, no one may make use of

this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior. (For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he is called.)<sup>27</sup>

Thus, among believers, propriety and humility prevail. So when a Christian is in the presence of other believers, even when as few as “two or three” are gathered, he should not arrogate such a calling to himself; rather, in Christian love, he should wait until he has been called by others to do so.

## **The Concept of Call in Augsburg XIV**

A common interpretive move among confessional Lutherans today is to understand *Augsburg Confession* Article XIV solely in light of subsequent discussion in the *Apology* and the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, such that *rite vocatus* as used in the *Augsburg Confession* is said to entail three aspects: that one is chosen (examined and certified), called, and ordained.<sup>28</sup> This view limits all public preaching of God’s Word and administration of the Sacraments to the office of the ministry, that is, the pastoral office, alone.

While the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* follows *The Confutation’s* rebuttal concerning canonical ordination and therefore narrows the discussion at that point specifically to the call and ordination to the office of the ministry, as also does the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* when it addresses the Roman bishops who withhold ordination of pastors, the *Augsburg Confession* is written more broadly. In a beautiful stroke of Gospel-inspired wording, it does not limit itself to discussion of the office of the ministry but picks up the broader theology of the relationship between the priesthood of believers and the office of the ministry when it says, “concerning church order . . . no one should publicly preach, teach, or administer the sacraments unless properly called [*rite vocatus*].”<sup>29</sup>

*Augsburg Confession* Article XIV is written against those who would use a misguided theology of the priesthood of believers to undermine the office of the ministry. In particular, it distinguishes the Lutherans from Anabaptists, enthusiasts, and other radical reformers, who take the concept of the priesthood of believers too far. These neither respect the office of the ministry nor acknowledge the need for a call to preach. Just a year and a half after the *Augsburg Confession* was first presented, Luther wrote a letter to Eberhard von der Tannen that shows the kinds of mischief this article of the *Augsburg Confession* was written to prevent:

I have learned, my dear lord and friend, how the Anabaptists are seeking to infiltrate also in your vicinity and to infect our people . . . . If they came from God and were honest, they would first of all repair to the parish pastor and deal with him, making clear their call and telling what they believed and asking for his permission to preach publicly. If then the parish pastor would not permit it, they would be blameless before God and could then

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

wipe the dust off their feet, etc. [cf. Luke 10:11]. For to the pastor is committed the pulpit, baptism, the sacrament [of the altar], and he is charged with the care of souls. But now these want to dislodge the pastor secretly . . . . I have been told how these infiltrators worm their way to harvesters and preach to them in the field during their work, as well as to the solitary workers at charcoal kilns or in the woods. Everywhere they sow their seed and spread their poison, turning the people from their parish churches . . . . the people must be constantly instructed . . . so that they admit no infiltrators, considering them truly as sent of the devil, and learning to ask of them, whence do you come? Who has sent you? Who has bidden you to preach to me? Where are your seals and letters of authorization from persons who have sent you? . . . If the interloper can prove that he is a prophet or a teacher of the church to which he comes, and can show who has authorized him, then let him be heard as St. Paul prescribes. Failing this let him return to the devil who sent him to steal the preacher's office.<sup>30</sup>

It is the concept of the proper call, "*rite vocatus*," that protects against these types of "interlopers" who would attempt to infiltrate the church as preachers sent by God when they do not have a call from either God or man to do so. Respecting the office of the ministry and the responsibility given to those who have been legitimately called to that office is a significant aspect of the matters under discussion, but not the only aspect as this article will demonstrate.

### **The Mediate versus Immediate Call**

While in apostolic times this call from God occasionally came immediately, that is, directly from God to the person, the New Testament also clearly witnesses that God calls people to this public exercise of the Word and Sacraments mediately, that is, through other believers as well. Even in the New Testament church, this mediate call was the norm and the immediate call exceptional. While the possibility of God's calling someone immediately today is not denied, Luther explains in his same letter regarding the infiltrating preachers that if God does call someone immediately it will be exceptional, and God will, as He did in the New Testament, "demonstrate this by signs and deeds."<sup>31</sup> Thus for the normal order of the church, which *Augsburg Confession* Article XIV addresses, God's people exercise the use of mediate calls. Such mediate calls came in a variety of ways in the pages of the New Testament, yet without explicit directives.<sup>32</sup>

Even so, there is in the New Testament clear witness that the divine call sets apart some from the priesthood of believers to exercise publicly Word and Sacrament ministry on behalf of others. This principle is exemplified in the words of Paul, "How are they to preach unless they are sent?"<sup>33</sup> and in his direction to Titus "I

left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town.”<sup>34</sup> The variety of ways in which such calls occurred in the New Testament witness is reflected in the writings of the ancient Church Fathers and of the Lutheran church fathers, where different types of legitimate mediate calls into the public ministry of Word and Sacrament may be discerned.

## **The Call to the Office of the Ministry**

First and foremost among these legitimate types of mediate calls to public Word and Sacrament ministry is the formal call into the office of the ministry. Not all are qualified to hold this office, and the qualifications are outlined in scriptures in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The priesthood of believers confers the authority of the keys upon a man when it chooses (examines or certifies) him, calls him, and places him into this office. These acts are what are addressed and enumerated in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*. This office is referred to in various ways in the Scriptures: pastor/shepherd, overseer/bishop, or presbyter/elder. In some scriptures, such as 1 Peter 5, all of these terms are used in that one passage to refer to the same office. Ordination is the customary means of placing one into this office. Walther’s Thesis IV on the Ministry clarifies what ordination is and the purpose it serves: “[It] is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise in this section of his volume *Church and Ministry*, Walther quotes Johann Gerhard’s affirmation that ordination is an “adiaphoron.”<sup>36</sup>

This affirmation also reflects the confessional witness, such as these words in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*: “In times past the people chose pastors and bishops. Then the bishop of either that church or a neighboring one came and confirmed the candidate by laying on of hands. Ordination was nothing other than such confirmation.”<sup>37</sup> Because Roman ecclesiology argued for a dispensation of grace and an indelible character imputed through ordination that gave members of the office of the ministry the power of the Means of Grace apart from the laity, this clarification of the nature of ordination was significant to the Reformers’ presentation of the Gospel. A decade before the first official Lutheran confession, Luther addressed the matter in his treatise on *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*: “The sacrament of ordination can be nothing else than a certain rite by which the church chooses its preachers.”<sup>38</sup>

Confessional Lutherans have agreed that ordination should be retained, used, and reserved for the placement of pastors into the office of the ministry. Gerhard makes the argument in his *loci* on the ministry:

We say that the rite of ordination should by no means be omitted; rather outside a case of necessity it should always be used in establishing the ecclesiastical ministry. This we say because of the ancient custom of the

apostolic church and of the church nearest to the time of the apostles, in which the presbytery would, through prayer and imposition of hands, ordain ministers selected by the church.<sup>39</sup>

This practice of choosing (by examination or certification), call, and ordination was the primary means for placing men into Word and Sacrament ministry as pastors among the churches that first confessed the *Augsburg Confession*. Piepkorn witnesses to this as he recalls the ordination register of St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, in which more than one thousand men were recruited from other professions, even uneducated laborers, and were ordained into the ministry with minimal theological education between 1537 and 1560. Lutherans in the sixteenth century exercised this doctrine of the divine call to the office of the ministry in order to bring the Word of God and Sacraments to the Body of Christ across Reformation lands.<sup>40</sup> This is the call that still does the heavy lifting among confessional Lutherans and which was considered by Piepkorn and many others to be the only valid call to public Word and Sacrament ministry.<sup>41</sup> Yet God has not left it to such called men to carry out these functions alone.

### **The Call to Subordinate Offices of Ministry**

A second type of mediate call from God, which places some from the priesthood of believers into a public office to assist in Word and Sacrament ministry, is the call to what Walther in *Church and Ministry* referred to as “subordinate” or “auxiliary” offices. These are offices that take part, and assist, in the functions of the office of the ministry. Walther writes, “Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry. . . . For they take over a part of the ministry of the Word and support the pastoral office.”<sup>42</sup> Again Walther writes, “Therefore, in scripture the incumbents of the ministerial office are called elders, bishops, rulers [Vorsteher], stewards, and the like, and the incumbents of subordinate offices are called deacons, that is, servants, not only of God but of the congregation and the bishop.”<sup>43</sup> In support of such offices, Walther quotes Luther:

John 4:2 tells us that Christ did not baptize but that he only preached and Paul boasts that he was not sent to baptize but to preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). Therefore, the one to whom the ministry is entrusted is entrusted with the highest office in Christendom. After that he may also baptize, administer the sacrament, and minister to souls. Or if he does not desire these duties, he may adhere to preaching, letting others baptize and administer the minor offices as did Christ and all his apostles.<sup>44</sup>

These offices are not equated to the office of the ministry, itself. Rather, they carry out their ministry under the “oversight” of one in the office of the ministry.<sup>45</sup> This practice is acknowledged in Walther's *Church and Ministry* by Luther, who said of bishops (pastors), “They are the ones who are placed over every office . . . that

should be the business of the bishops; for this reason they are called overseers or *antistites* (as St. Paul here designates them), that is, presiders and rulers.”<sup>46</sup>

The use of subordinate or auxiliary offices is first evidenced in the Scriptures. Seven men known to be “full of the spirit and wisdom” were chosen by the church and then placed into such offices in Acts 6:1–6. In other scriptures, such as 1 Timothy 3:1–12 and Philippians 1:1, the subordinate office of deacon is clearly differentiated from that of overseer or bishop. While the Scriptures do not enumerate lists of such subordinate offices, the Lutheran church fathers have understood from the Scriptures and the witness of the church through the centuries that the church is free to establish them according to need and context for the sake of the Gospel. These offices support the office of the ministry and provide agility for mission. In support of this practice, Martin Chemnitz is quoted in *Church and Ministry* in regard to the New Testament witness:

Because many offices pertain to the ministry in the church that in a large assembly of believers cannot be well attended to in whole and in part by one person or a few, the church, as it began to increase, began to distribute these ministerial offices among certain grades of servants in order that all things might be done orderly, decently, and in an edifying way. . . . When the number of disciples increased, they entrusted the part of their ministry dealing with alms to others, whom they called deacons or servants . . . . This origin of ministerial grades and orders in the apostolic church shows the cause, reason, purpose and use of these grades and orders. According to the size of the congregation, the various ministerial functions thereby were to be performed more readily, more rightly, more diligently, and with greater order and becoming dignity to the edification of the church.<sup>47</sup>

Again, Walther supports this idea of subordinate offices by quoting Chemnitz: “Those grades and orders of which we have spoken above were not above and outside of the ministry of Word and sacraments; the very functions of the ministry itself were divided into these grades.”<sup>48</sup>

It has been the practice among some confessional Lutherans to define limits on the extent and functions of such subordinate offices, while others even question whether it may be said that those who serve in such offices are divinely called.<sup>49</sup>

Yet these limitations are not inherent in the offices themselves. The principle prevailing in the Early Church concerning these subordinate offices is evidenced in this quote from Ignatius in his *Letter to the Smyrneans*:

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Christ Jesus does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles. Do ye also reverence the deacons, as those that carry out [through their office] the appointment of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or

by one to whom he has entrusted it. . . . It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize, or to offer, or to present sacrifice, or to celebrate a love-feast. But that which seems good to him, is also well-pleasing to God, that everything ye do may be secure and valid.<sup>50</sup>

Ignatius is clear that even the subordinate role of deacon is an office to which men are appointed by God. The principle regarding the particular functions of the office of the ministry in which the subordinate offices participate and administer appears to be established by the delegation of the one who has oversight of such offices through his call to the office of the ministry in that place, here the bishop. The same principle is seen in the following quote from Tertullian, who said in his treatise *On the Power of Conferring Baptism*:

Of giving it, the chief priest (who is the bishop) has the right: in the next place, the presbyters and deacons, yet not without the bishop's authority, on account of the honour of the Church, which being preserved, peace is preserved. Beside these, even laymen have the right; for what is equally received can be equally given. Unless bishops, or priests, or deacons, be on the spot . . . . But how much more is the rule of reverence and modesty incumbent on laymen—seeing that these *powers* belong to their superiors—lest they assume to themselves the *specific* function of the bishop!<sup>51</sup>

Both of these quotations are used by Walther in *Church and Ministry*, although not in support of his thesis discussing auxiliary offices.<sup>52</sup> Instead, it's apparent from the list of auxiliary offices that Walther describes in *Church and Ministry* that he does not have in mind these offices' carrying out the functions of preaching or public administration of the sacraments. He describes Christian day school teachers, almoners (persons who distribute alms), sextons (persons who look after the church grounds), and precentors at public worship (people who assist in singing and prayers).<sup>53</sup> Yet the New Testament shows that some of the first holders of such a subordinate office, Phillip and Stephen, participated in both public preaching and administration of Baptism in Acts 7 and 8. So also Johann Gerhard, as he carefully enumerated the confessional Lutheran perspective on the ministry, noted the following in regard to the subordinate office of deacons:

Those deacons were commissioned also with the ordinary duty of teaching (from which also those whom Acts 6 mentions were not simply excluded, though they were chiefly in charge of the tables), so that they, joined to the presbyters, preached the Word together with them, administered the Sacraments, visited the sick, etc. In this way, they were made teachers of a lower order in the church. Accordingly, in Phil. 1:1 deacons are joined with bishops or presbyters; and in 1 Tim. 3:8, after the apostle had described the virtues of a bishop, he adds the things that are required of deacons, that is, in ministers of a lower order.<sup>54</sup>

Later in his same treatment of the office of the ministry, he writes again of those in the office of deacon that “some had been joined to the bishops or presbyters in the office of teaching and of administering the Sacraments in order to take their place and alleviate their labors.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Informal Yet Legitimate Calls to Public Use of Word and Sacrament**

Just as this formal call to a subordinate office supports the office of the ministry, there are informal calls to publicly exercise Word and Sacrament ministry that do not place one into an office of the church, but rather support and strengthen its ministry muscles. This is a call that comes from a fellow Christian in a time of need for temporary public exercise of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Here temporary means not “one time,” but as long as the need persists. This is the case that is often referred to as an emergency situation. *The Lutheran Confessions* quote one such example from Augustine about two men stranded in a boat: one baptizes the other and then the latter absolves the former. By this simple request and act, according to *The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, “one becomes the minister or pastor of another.”<sup>56</sup> This does not mean that such an act placed these two men into the office of the ministry with tenured calls that should be confirmed by the church at large with ordination in the event that they be rescued. No, the point *The Treatise* is driving at is laid out before the story, “wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel.”<sup>57</sup>

At times, Luther speaks so strongly of this right to preach the Gospel that he says in such emergency situations a Christian might rightly use his power to publicly exercise the Means of Grace even without a mediate call. Walther quotes Luther in *Church and Ministry*: “There is a difference between administering a common right by the command of the congregation and using that right in an emergency. In a congregation, in which everyone has the right, none should use that right without the will and appointment of the congregation. But in an emergency anyone may use it who so desires.”<sup>58</sup>

So also Walther quotes Polycarp Leyser, a professor of theology at Wittenberg in the sixteenth century: “Although the public ministry ordinarily belongs only to those who have been duly called by the church and who in the name of God and the power of the church exercise the power to loose and bind, nevertheless, in an emergency this power reverts to the next best Christian.”<sup>59</sup>

It might be argued that while necessity does sometimes require an exceptional approach, it does not make such an informal request a proper or legitimate call. However, Luther at times still speaks of the propriety of an informal call in such circumstances. Thus, Walther also quotes Luther: “He should not put himself forward but let others call and put him forth so that he might preach and teach in the place at the command of others.”<sup>60</sup> In keeping with this principle, Walther also

quotes Johann Gallus, professor of the *Augsburg Confession* and pastor at Erfurt during the days of the Reformation: “Therefore, not only ministers but, in most urgent and extreme emergency (that is, when no pastor can be obtained and a Christian is asked by a fellow believer), laymen are also permitted to administer Holy Communion, to baptize, and to pronounce absolution.”<sup>61</sup> Tilemann Hershuisius, a professor of theology at Rostock and Heidelberg in the time of the Reformation, is quoted by Walther as affirming the propriety of this practice. He writes, “In such emergencies a Christian should not be troubled about being a busybody in another’s business, but he should know that he is performing a true and due call of God and that his ministry is as efficacious as if it were ratified by the laying on of hands for the office of the ministry in the whole church.”<sup>62</sup>

Thus, there is a “true and due” call that is informal and is simply the request of a fellow Christian; yet it, too, is at the same time divine in nature. The question, however, remains: What type of necessity, or emergency, makes such a call legitimate? At times some speak of life or death situations as being such emergency needs, and they most certainly are! Yet, hear how broadly such emergency situations are defined by Tilemann Hershuisius, as Walther cites him in *Church and Ministry*.

There can be no doubt that in an emergency, when no duly called pastor can be obtained, every Christian has the power and is permitted, according to God’s Word and out of Christian love, to attend to the ministry of the Word by preaching the divine word and administering the sacraments. . . . But here we speak of what a Christian may do in an emergency when no godly and sincere minister of the church may be obtained, for example, when some Christians are in a place where no appointed pastor is to be had . . . or when some Christians are among Calvinists, Schwenckfelders, Adiaphorists, or Majorists, whom they must avoid as false teachers.<sup>63</sup>

The very circumstance referred to in this example is a geographic issue, not a life or death issue, and it is a common experience of many small gatherings of confessional Lutherans across America and around the world.

It may be this type of informal and yet mediate call of necessity that Luther is advocating for in his letter to George Spalatin regarding Philip Melancthon. Melancthon was not ordained to the office of the ministry, nor does Luther argue in his letter that he ought to be; nevertheless, Luther writes,

I really wish Philip would also preach to the people somewhere in the city on festival days after dinner to provide a substitute for the drinking and gambling. This could become a custom which would introduce freedom and restore the form and manners of the early church. For if we have broken all laws of men and cast off their yokes, what difference would it make to us that Philip is not anointed or tonsured but married? Nevertheless he is truly a priest and actually does the work of a priest, unless it is not the office of a

priest to teach the Word of God. In that case Christ himself would not be a priest, for he taught now in synagogues, then in ships, now at the shoreline, then in the mountains. In a word, [Christ] was always and everywhere all things to all people at all times. Since, therefore, Philip is called by God and performs the ministry of the Word, as no one can deny . . . . Therefore he has to be called and driven [to preaching] by the order and pressure of the whole congregation. For if the congregation demands and requests it, he ought not and cannot say no.<sup>64</sup>

One might view this as an expression of this mediate call of necessity. On the other hand, since Luther actually appeals to this in another letter dated the same day to the nobleman, Nicholas von Amsdorf, encouraging him to push Melancthon to do the same,<sup>65</sup> it may instead be an example of the call of a superior with the consent of the community, as Luther wrote in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*: “Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this . . . we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments. However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior.”<sup>66</sup>

In that case, one might view this as another type of informal but legitimate mediate call to public Word and Sacrament ministry. This type of call doesn’t depend simply on necessity, but rather on the call of one in an office of God-given authority; and yet, as with the call of necessity, it also does not place one into an ongoing office of the church. Walther cites another such example in *Church and Ministry* where he is discussing the doctrine of ordination. He writes:

In place of dogmatic statements from the writings of the ancient church teachers we here repeat what Dannhauer reports of the ancient church: ‘Origen was not ordained, but when persecution set in, he went to Jerusalem, where he was permitted to preach and administer the sacraments. But Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria disliked this, because thereby the canons of the church were not observed. However, Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, answered him very aptly that nothing is done against custom if anyone teaches and administers the sacraments without ordination, as long as he has been called.’<sup>67</sup>

The situation that Walther references is discussed in more depth by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius describes how this instance occurred while Origen was just a young layman. The bishop of Jerusalem, Alexander, and the bishop of Caesarea, Theoctistus, were in agreement on inviting Origen to preach in Jerusalem without ordaining him to an office in the church. Eusebius tells us that they together wrote back to Demetrius replying to this matter concerning Demetrius’s complaint:

He has stated in his letter that such a thing was never heard of before, neither has hitherto taken place, that laymen should preach in the presence of bishops. I know not how he comes to say what is plainly untrue. For whenever persons able to instruct the brethren are found, they are exhorted by the holy bishops to preach to the people. Thus in Laranda, Euelpis by Neon; and in Iconium, Paulinus by Celsus; and in Synada, Theodorus by Atticus, our blessed brethren. And probably this has been done in other places unknown to us.<sup>68</sup>

These bishops from the church in Caesarea and Jerusalem at the turn of the third century are pointing to a practice that has, so far as they know, been longstanding in the church prior to them. It's a practice that bishops, under the authority of their own call to the office of the ministry, invite capable laypersons to preach on occasion, even in the presence of other bishops, without ordaining them into the office of the ministry. They cite examples from places beyond Jerusalem and Caesarea for further support. It appears to be another example of the Early Church principle cited above from Ignatius, "Let no man do anything without the bishop . . . but that which seems good to him is pleasing to God as well."<sup>69</sup> Walther uses this example to demonstrate that ordination is not absolutely necessary, and in so doing he quotes from a seventeenth-century confessional Lutheran scholar who views this as an example of a legitimate and proper mediate call.<sup>70</sup>

It may be argued that Walther does not intend to draw from this example a practice of informally inviting laymen to preach in public assemblies.<sup>71</sup> Yet his citation of this situation and Dannhauer's reference to it as a legitimate call demonstrate that within confessional Lutheran theology there is recognition that a divine call to preach God's Word publicly, even among believers, may legitimately take place without placing a man into an office of the church.

### **Returning to *Augsburg Confession XIV***

Even if the reader chooses not to acknowledge that last example (of laymen's occasionally preaching at the request of a superior or with the consent of the congregation) to be a legitimate expression of the call to publicly exercise the Means of Grace, the previous examples demonstrate that the concept of call in *Augsburg Confession* Article XIV has not always been so narrowly defined among confessional Lutherans. The formal call to the office of the ministry was by far the one most commonly put into practice among the Confessors and has continued to be so such that, as stated when this article began, the others have even been allowed to atrophy over the centuries.

However, these broader understandings of the word "call" (that validate a person's public practice of Word and Sacrament ministry, whether in the office of the ministry, in a subordinate or auxiliary office, in situations of necessity, or

possibly even in the informal or occasional request of a competent layman to preach) are in view in the Confessors' choice of words in *Augsburg XIV*: "*rite vocatus*." Even if never placed into regular practice, the Lutheran Reformers and those first adhering to the Lutheran Confessions after them saw situations that required a response outside of the norm of ordaining men to be pastors. In their theological reflections on this matter, they recognized these additional valid understandings of a proper call, "*rite vocatus*."<sup>72</sup>

## The Mission of Christ Drives toward a Fully Developed Understanding of Call

Limiting the concept of the mediate call to Word and Sacrament ministry to the office of the pastor weakens the church at a time when it needs strength and agility to carry out the mission of Christ. Lutherans recognized that in this country already 150 years ago.

All this theology was hotly debated in the early days of confessional Lutheranism's arrival in America and in the early 1850s, when Walther's *Church and Ministry* was accepted as the statement of the Lutherans in Missouri on such matters. Yet the ongoing struggle over the free course of Gospel proclamation continued. Within ten years, it cropped up again, brought to the fore by mission efforts farther to the west. Central to the discussion were the unordained traveling Lutheran preachers being used for mission work, the *Reiseprediger*. These men were used by that same synod of Lutherans to bring the Gospel to people on the frontier where there were few churches and even fewer pastors. Walther himself participated in helping the Western District of his synod produce twenty-eight additional theses to address the *Reiseprediger* that were subsequently adopted for use.<sup>73</sup> Instead of mandating that these men be certified, called, and ordained into the office of the ministry in order to continue what they were doing, the theses made provision for their continued ministry specifically under the concept of necessity, similar to that outlined above.<sup>74</sup> Then, when enough people were gathered to become a congregation, the theses encouraged that these traveling preachers be called, ordained, and thus become pastors of these new congregations.

Limiting the concept of the mediate call to Word and Sacrament ministry to the office of the pastor weakens the church at a time when it needs strength and agility to carry out the mission of Christ. Lutherans recognized that in this country already 150 years ago.

The use of the *Reiseprediger* is an example of the mission of Christ's causing the church to have a healthy understanding of the call of necessity. The mission of Christ also stretches the church toward a healthy concept of subordinate offices of Word and Sacrament ministry, as well. It is for this reason that churches in blossoming mission fields, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and the Gutni Lutheran Church in New Guinea, make use of such subordinate offices in this way. Both of these confessional Lutheran church bodies make significant use of evangelists for preaching and sacramental ministry, in addition to ordained pastors. The historic Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, which traces its founding back more than four hundred years to 1611, has now found itself in a new and expanding mission field since the fall of the Soviet Union and makes significant use of deacons to meet its ministry needs. Likewise, the relatively new Evangelical Lutheran Church of Siberia does the same.

## Conclusion

The Body of Christ is in dire need of a fully developed concept of the divine call to public ministry of Word and Sacrament. Only with the full strength and agility of what God has given to His people in the blessed partnership between the priesthood of believers and the office of the public ministry can we meet the challenges of the mission He has given to us all. It's time to start exercising some of these underused muscles for ministry that have been allowed to atrophy over time. The church situated in our rapidly changing culture desperately needs to recover this God-given flexibility. Rehabilitation is sure to come with some challenges of its own, but the restored ability to reach farther and accomplish more is always worth it, not only in regard to our physical bodies, but to the Body of Christ as well.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations in this article not contained within other quotes are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), © 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church" in *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, ed. Michael P. Plekon and William S. Wiecher (Dehli: ALPB, 1993), 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> August R. Suelflow cites a variety of articles that indicate the increased use of laymen in Word and Sacrament ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the latter half of the twentieth century. He cites: Robert Just, "Laymen Can Preach—If," *Advance* (November, 1954): 6–7; Henry G. Hartner, "District Experiments with Full-Time Lay Workers," *Advance* (March, 1956): 18–19; and Eldor Bruss, "Laymen Conducts Services during Pastoral Vacancy," *Advance* (October, 1958): 17–18. August R. Suelflow, ed., *Heritage in Motion*:

*Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1962–1995* (St. Louis: CPH, 1998), 78, endnote 33.

<sup>7</sup> “Lay Workers in the Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 39 (December, 1968): 772–75, in *Heritage in Motion: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1962–1995*, ed. August R. Suelflow (St. Louis: CPH, 1998), 68–70.

<sup>8</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 1989 Convention Resolution 3-05B made provisions under certain conditions of need for laymen to be trained, licensed, and supervised at the District level for Word and Sacrament ministry. 1992 Convention Resolution 3-08 recommended the ordination of certain lay workers performing such ministry. 1995 Convention Resolution 3-07A required the laymen performing such ministry to apply for admission into the pastoral ministry of the Synod.

<sup>9</sup> Piepkorn writes, “The Symbolical Books see the sacred ministry chiefly but not exclusively in dynamic and functional terms . . . proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments.” Later he adds, “God gave to the church the concrete persons who discharge these functions, the ‘pastors and doctors.’” Further, he writes, “The Symbolical Books, however, see the sacred ministry both as an office (*ministerium*; *Amt*) and as an order or estate (*ordo*; *Stand*) within the church.” Piepkorn, *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, 55–56.

<sup>10</sup> The term “office of the ministry” will be used here forward in this article to refer to that same office in the church, otherwise known as the “predigtamt,” “the pastoral office,” “the office of the pastoral ministry,” “office of the public ministry,” “office of the holy ministry,” or “office of the sacred ministry.”

<sup>11</sup> Lk 10:2 and Mt 9:37.

<sup>12</sup> Eph 4:11.

<sup>13</sup> Eph 4:12–13.

<sup>14</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), 185.

<sup>15</sup> The full expression of this quotation is familiar from the *Lutheran Confessions, Augsburg Confession* Article V: “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the word and sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel.” Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 41.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Pt 2:9.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Pt 3:15.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 334.

<sup>19</sup> *The Treatise* in this section on “The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops” explicitly references the *Augsburg Confession* and *Apology* to define what it means by this power. See Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 340. Often in the *Augsburg Confession* the term, “power of the keys,” narrowly refers to absolution or retention of sin in the context of confession and absolution. *Augsburg Confession* Article XXVIII, however, which corresponds to this particular topic, defines the term more broadly as the public use of the means of grace (God’s Word and Sacraments) saying, “Our people teach as follows. According to the gospel the power of the keys or of the bishops is a power and command of God to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, and to administer and distribute the sacraments.” Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 92.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 116.

<sup>21</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 56.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 163–164.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>27</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, 116.

<sup>28</sup> This is the view of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s study, *Theology and Practice of “The Divine Call,”* which says of the *Treatise*, “After addressing the unitary character of the office and the equality in authority of pastors with bishops (Tr 60-65), Melancthon turns to the issue of obtaining pastors for the churches (Tr 66-78). Repeatedly he uses several terms in order to describe the process: the right of calling (*ius vocandi*), the right of choosing (*ius eligendi*), and the right of ordaining (*ius ordinandi*) . . . taken together, the terms used by the *Treatise* constitute and explain the “rightly called” (*rite vocatus*) of AC XIV.” CTCR, *Theology and Practice of “The Divine Call”* (St. Louis: LCMS, 2003), 13.

<sup>29</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, *Letter to Eberhard von der Tannen, Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 40, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 383–385, 388.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>32</sup> A recent study within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod acknowledges that “the biblical writers give us several pictures of how the church actually went about selecting pastors in ‘normal,’ settled situations. . . . In any case, however, they do not provide any explicit directives regarding the practice of the call. Any guidance drawn from these examples, therefore, will have to be inferential.” CTCR, *Theology and Practice of “The Divine Call,”* 10.

<sup>33</sup> Rom 10:15.

<sup>34</sup> Ti 1:5.

<sup>35</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 219.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>37</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 341.

<sup>38</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, 113.

<sup>39</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On the Ministry: Part I*, in *Theological Commonplaces: XXVI/2*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: CPH, 2012), 209.

<sup>40</sup> Piepkorn, *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, 61.

<sup>41</sup> Piepkorn writes of *Augsburg Confession* Article XIV, “Only persons who are duly chosen, called, and ordained (*rite vocatus, odentlicher Beruf*) are competent publicly and responsibly to proclaim the Gospel and to administer the sacraments (AC 14).” Piepkorn, *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, 63.

<sup>42</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289–290.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>45</sup> For this reason, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has chosen to reserve the nomenclature of “ordination” for confirmation of the call to the office of the ministry itself,

not to the auxiliary offices. Thus the CTCR study *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* states, “As a matter of uniform nomenclature and in accordance with common understanding, the term ‘ordination’ should be reserved for a man’s entry into the office of the public ministry. The initial acceptance by the church of the gift also of those who are to serve in the vital auxiliary offices should be carried out with solemnity befitting the office. Tradition, common expectations, and the uniqueness of the pastoral office speak against using the term ‘ordination’ for other than the office of the public ministry.” CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (St. Louis: LCMS, 1981), 22.

<sup>46</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 293.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 296–297.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>49</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has limited “auxiliary” or “subordinate” offices in this way as indicated in this statement: “Reference to auxiliary offices in the New Testament indicates that some of the actual functions of the office of the public ministry may be performed by others under his guidance and direction . . . Functions that are essential exercises of the ministry of Word and sacrament should be performed by those who hold the office of the public ministry. Thus preaching in the worship service, leading the public prayer, celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar, baptisms, wedding and funeral services should be carried out by those who hold the office of the public ministry.” CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, 35. Even beyond this statement, Robert Preus argues that “Walther does not say that those who held any of these positions were ‘called’ to their position, and it is my understanding that they were not . . . Luther and the Confessions and the dogmaticians . . . do not envisage ‘auxiliary’ offices in the sense in which this type of thing has been multiplied.” Robert David Preus, *The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and in Lutheran Orthodoxy* (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 1991), 25.

<sup>50</sup> Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrneans*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library) 232, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> Tertullian, *Of the Power of Conferring Baptism*, in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Allan Menzies, vol. 3 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 1510–1511, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> The citation of Ignatius may be found under Part II, Thesis III, in Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 196–197 and the citation of Tertullian under Part II, Thesis VII, in Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 288. Walther deals with auxiliary offices under Part II, Thesis VIII, which states that “the pastoral ministry [Predigtamt] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church.” Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>54</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On the Ministry: Part 1*, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On the Ministry: Part 2*, in *Theological Commonplaces: XXVI/2*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes (St. Louis: CPH, 2012), 47.

<sup>56</sup> Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 341.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 162.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 280–281.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Martin Luther, “Letter to George Spalatin, September 9, 1521,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 48, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 308.

<sup>65</sup> In his letter to von Amsdorf, Luther suggests that if people do complain, Melancthon could always do this under the auspices of the university by inviting people to a lecture hall. *Luther’s Works*, vol. 48, 311.

<sup>66</sup> Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, 116.

<sup>67</sup> Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 267.

<sup>68</sup> Eusebius Pamphilius, *Church History*, in *Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wade, series 2, vol. 1 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 667–668. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrneans*, 232.

<sup>70</sup> Johann Dannhauer is less known for his theology than for his student, Phillip Spener, who became the father of Lutheran Pietism. Perhaps that caused Dannhauer’s voice to hold less weight in confessional circles; yet Walther appreciates his scholarship, at least in regard to this situation.

<sup>71</sup> Ken Schurb argues that, despite his high regard for the priesthood of believers, to say that Walther would have supported occasional lay preachers is an inaccurate caricature of Walther. In support, he shares quotes from Walther such as, “Moreover, no one dare think, ‘I am a spiritual priest, therefore I am also a public preacher.’ Not at all! For that you have to have a specific, regular call.” Ken Schurb, “Was Walther Waltherian?” *Concordia Journal*, 37:3 (Summer, 2011): 189–200.

<sup>72</sup> Piepkorn, in *The Church: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, 62–64, offers convincing evidence that “*rite vocatus*” in the writings of the reformers most often referred to call and ordination. Yet, he does not consider these outlying examples, which give evidence of a broader view in use among the Reformers as well.

<sup>73</sup> John C. Wohlrabe, Jr. discusses these theses in a conference presentation quoting them from Karl Wyneken, “Missouri Molds a Ministry for Mission,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 45 (May 1972): 69–88. Among them, he cites these: “9. Love is the queen of all laws, more so than all regulations, i.e., in cases of necessity it knows no commandment. 10. There are cases of necessity in which also the regulation of the public office of the ministry cannot and should not be observed. Exodus 4:24–26. 11. A case of necessity occurs when, by legalistic observance of the regulation, souls would be lost instead of saved and love would thereby be violated.” John C. Wohlrabe, Jr. “Practical Implication of the Relationship between Theology and Polity in the Missouri Synod” (paper presented during the Texas Confessional Lutheran Free Conference XX, Brenham, TX, September 12, 2009), 21, <http://concordtx.org/tcl/conference/2009/>. Even with this concession for preaching and administration of Baptism by the *Reisepediger*, it was determined that they should not administer the Lord’s Supper. William C. Weinrich cites the reasoning from Thesis 23, “the traveling preacher does not possess the required knowledge of those who come to the Lord’s Supper (*Abendmahls Gäste*), and since on account of the press of time he cannot prepare them

for the Holy Supper.” William C. Weinrich, “Should a Laymen Discharge the Duties of the Holy Ministry?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 68:3/4 (July/October 2004): 225–229.

<sup>74</sup> While the *Reiseprediger* Theses themselves rely on this concept of necessity, Wohlrabe suggests this fits into the concept of auxiliary offices. See Wohlrabe, “Practical Implications of the Relationship between Theology and Polity in the Missouri Synod,” 22. Whether an example of the call of necessity or the call to an auxiliary office, in both cases the use of *Reiseprediger* for mission supports the conclusions of this article.

## *Encountering Mission*

# **Useless and Bankrupt: Confession and Mission in Light of the Symbols**

**Matthew Borrasso**

**Abstract:** When misunderstood or misaligned, confession and mission are useless and bankrupt. Confession is useless, or without purpose, when it exists only for its own sake. Mission is bankrupt, or empty, when it fails to bring the content of the Gospel to the life of one in need of receiving it. This article seeks to learn from the Symbols the nature and purpose of confession and mission. Specifically, it seeks to understand and suggest how Lutheran confession shapes Lutheran mission, not just for those who first confessed, but for those who by God's grace continue to live in accord with that same confession.

### **A Little White Package**

There is only so much for which seminary can prepare a pastor. Courses cover a wide range and depth of topics related to ministry and are designed to form within a candidate the heart and head necessary for life in the parish. But what about those unanticipated situations and events that seminary cannot predict and prepare a student to face? What about those events and situations that arise in the normal course of events in the twenty-first century that will undoubtedly impact the life of a parish. For example, the spring of 2015 in Baltimore, Maryland, was marked by social unrest, protests, violence, and, for one parish pastor, the unexpected arrival of a message from the Ku Klux Klan.

It was a Thursday morning. I arrived on our campus in rural Baltimore County to find on the doorstep to the fellowship hall a peculiar package. When I opened it my heart sank; the business card inside this little white bundle came from a local



---

*Rev. Matthew Borrasso is pastor of Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Parkton, Maryland. He is currently pursuing an STM in History and Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. He has a BA from Concordia University—Chicago (2008), an MACM from Northern Seminary (2012), and an MDiv from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri (2014).*

[matt.borrasso@gmail.com](mailto:matt.borrasso@gmail.com)

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Emblazoned with the symbols of the Klan, including the prominent placement of the American as well as the Confederate flag, in my hand was the contact information for an organization known for its violence and hate-promoting activities. To be honest, I didn't know what to do. Were they watching me? Were they waiting to see how I would react? I was not sure. But I did know that whatever I did, I had to do it quickly. Why? Because this particular Thursday was the Thursday after the riots erupted in Baltimore. Although safely away from the riots themselves, our community could still feel the repercussions. And on this day, I, as a pastor, and we, as a congregation, had a decision to make. We had to decide what we would do about this. Would we cower in fear? Would we react altruistically? Or, would we pretend as though nothing had happened?

The seminary cannot predict moments like this. The good news, however, is that the seminary does not need to predict them. Throughout the formation process, I was taught not simply what to think, but how to think. I was given the tools to mine the sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions regardless of the situation into which their truth needed to be confessed and embodied. The moment for me as a new parish pastor appeared to offer a missional, as well as a confessional, opportunity. For, in responding to this challenge, I recognized that the congregation needed to engage a society composed of a growing number of people who have little interest in or connection with the church. It required me to delve into the Symbols<sup>1</sup> and Scriptures to discern what to say and how to act.

Often those two things, confession and mission, are put in opposition to each other, as if a person could be only confessional or only missional. To do so, however, is extraordinarily problematic, as it cuts against the very purpose of the Symbols.<sup>2</sup> When misunderstood or misaligned, confession and mission are useless and bankrupt. Confession is useless, or without purpose, when it exists only for its own sake. Mission is bankrupt, or empty, when it fails to bring the content of the Gospel to the life of one in need of receiving it. This article seeks to learn from the Symbols the nature and purpose of confession and mission. Specifically, it seeks to understand and suggest how Lutheran confession shapes Lutheran mission, not just for those who first confessed, but for those who by God's grace continue to live in accord with that same confession. Simply put, only through an engagement with the Symbols in their own context can one understand that confession exists for the sake of mission. Or, put another way, the Symbols themselves argue that confession exists not for its own sake but for the sake of people in need of hearing the Gospel. By gaining such insight from the Symbols, the church is prepared to engage any and every context, whether it is a normal Thursday morning or not.

## A Specific Time and Place

The church around the world will shortly pause to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. It will be marked by celebrations, intense academic discussion and debate, and a general curiosity about what actually took place all those years ago and what difference that might make today. The world has changed much since the time of Luther and the other reformers. No longer does the church have the same influence in society.<sup>3</sup> This fact is often met in the church with fear and concern, or worse, with a reactionary impulse to disparage the world and all that is in it; but whether we like it or not, the world is not the same as it was fifty years ago, let alone five hundred.

Luther's time is different from ours. This difference means, then, that before one can read or engage the writings of Luther or Melancthon, time must be spent understanding the situation that gave rise to their work. If not, the possibility is greater of misunderstanding, or worse, misappropriating a specific thought or insight. What, then, does that mean for how we approach the Symbols? Simply, that we must understand the events surrounding the time when the Symbols were written if we are to confess them faithfully in our day. This does not mean that the truth confessed in the Symbols is valid *only* for a specific time and situation but that the enduring truth of the Symbols was confessed *in a specific time for a specific purpose*. It is conditioned by its context, not shackled by it. One cannot simply lift a phrase from the sixteenth-century European confessional documents and apply it unmediated to twenty-first-century North America. Repristination is not a useful enterprise precisely because it fails to express adequately the situation that gave rise to the text. When approaching the Symbols, any Lutheran wishing to confess not just the words but the truth encapsulated in them must take account of the situation in life that gave birth to them. To do otherwise is not simply irresponsible or ethically questionable, it is contrary to the Symbols and the truth they confess.

During the era in which the Symbols were codified, a nearly fifty-year period from the Catechisms and Augustana to the Formula, the vast majority of the citizenry of Germany, and indeed of Europe itself, was Christian. Not all were Lutheran or Reformed. On the contrary, the structure of Roman Catholicism still overwhelmingly influenced ideas about the structure and purpose of the church. To combat this, the reformers ushered in a period when the church began to restructure its outward forms

No longer does the church have the same influence in society. This fact is often met in the church with fear and concern, or worse, with a reactionary impulse to disparage the world and all that is in it; but whether we like it or not, the world is not the same as it was fifty years ago, let alone five hundred.

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

to make them conform to its understanding of the Gospel. The work of Luther, Melancthon, and other reformers was an attempt to identify and challenge what they perceived to be broken or flawed within the institutional church, a structure that had served God's people, for better or worse, for well over a thousand years. All of this is to say, that even though the issues about the meaning and purpose of the church were sorting themselves out on the fields of theological, political, and actual battle, the people within the provinces still in large part considered themselves to be part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. "The confessors of the sixteenth century confessed for the sake of other believers."<sup>4</sup> This specific purpose had a profound impact on how the church understood its role, or mission, in society. Robert Kolb suggests, "Insofar as pastors and laity had a mission to share God's word with others, it was a mission of reformation and repentance—reclaiming those within historic Christendom who had little or no concept of the faith which they claimed—rather than conversion."<sup>5</sup> Arand, Nestingen, and Kolb together affirm the reality that, "Luther and Melancthon, and their students as well, seldom met an unbaptized person. They had little opportunity for witnessing their faith to those outside the faith."<sup>6</sup> The reformers clearly lived in "Christian" Europe.

Today, on the other hand, both Europe and America are understood as living in a post-Christian age. This means that although the "church" has influenced societal structure, the effects of which might still be felt, it no longer holds sway for individuals in society. Research by Barna seems to suggest at least a growing number of "unchurched" and "dechurched," as well as "nones."<sup>7</sup> Members of society have either never been to church, went and then stopped going, or understand themselves to hold no religious affiliation at all. While it is true that there have always been people who have never set foot in a Christian community, or even left it once they had, the rates at which people are leaving or ignoring the church are rapidly increasing. The same could not be said of fifty years ago much less five hundred. I am also finding that my own context of northern Baltimore County has a unique set of characteristics, one of which is the kind of racial hatred the KKK tends to inflame among our neighbors. Each segment of society is uniquely affected not just by the role, or lack thereof, that the church plays or has played, but also by other factors that have an impact those segments. Put bluntly, the context of today and the context that surrounded the Symbols are by no means identical. In some ways the ecclesiological and sociological aspects are so disparate as to suggest that the past has little to nothing to say to the present.

## **A Word from Yesterday**

What did the Symbols say in their own time about confession and mission? At the core of the Symbols is their commitment to the Gospel as the unchanging truth and work of God in the life of the Church.<sup>8</sup> The preface to the Book of Concord expresses this succinctly, "It would be our disposition and intention never to accept,

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

defend, or spread some different or new teaching but rather with divine assistance to remain and persist unwavering in the truth once recognized and confessed at Augsburg in the year 1530.”<sup>9</sup> What was expressed at Augsburg? “That human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. God reckons this faith as righteousness.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly Article IV was not the only article of the Augustana, but no Lutheran would suggest that it is not the central one. This is the article upon which the church rises or falls.<sup>11</sup> It is the core of the Augustana and that which the preface of the Symbols holds to unswervingly. It is the central confession of the church.

But, for what purpose is the Gospel confessed? To this too the preface speaks a word:

To this Christian confession, founded upon the witness of the unchangeable truth of the divine Word, we again unanimously subscribed, in order—as much as lies in us—to warn and to protect our descendants in the future from teaching what is impure, false, and contrary to the word of God. . . . We did this in the confidence and hope that thereby not only the adversaries of the pure, Evangelical teaching might be prevented from making up slanders and smears against us, but also that other, good-hearted people might be reminded and encouraged by this our recapitulated and repeated confession to investigate all the more seriously the truth of the divine Word which alone grants salvation, to accept it, and for the salvation and eternal welfare of their souls to remain and persist in it in a Christian way without any further disputation or dissension.<sup>12</sup>

The Symbols are constructed for the sake of the next generation, that they might persist in the truth, but also that the truth might go forth and enliven faith in the hearts of those who hear it. Put another way, the confession is preserved for the sake of the present and future mission.<sup>13</sup> Such an attitude is expressed elsewhere throughout the Symbols. For example, Article XX of the Apology recognizes the effect the Gospel has on people:

Put another way, the confession is preserved for the sake of the present and future mission.

The consciences of the godly will not have sufficiently firm consolation against the terror of sin and death or against the devil’s inciting them to despair, unless they know that they ought to stand firmly upon the fact that they have the forgiveness of sins freely on account of Christ. This faith sustains and enlivens hearts in their most bitter struggles with despair.

Therefore our cause is a worthy one. Because of it we shrink from no danger.<sup>14</sup>

The message is clear, for the confessors of the Augustana and its Apology, and indeed for the entire content of the Symbols, the purpose of preserving the confession of the Gospel was for the sake of the mission. It was so that consciences stuck in the Roman system might be assuaged and freedom in Christ be brought forth. Confession happened for the sake of people in need of hearing the Gospel, not for its own sake. This is not to downplay the content of the confession by any means. For it was the content of the confession that assured the assuaging of the conscience because the content of the Gospel is and will always remain Christ and His work.

As Kolb suggested above, the mission of the church during the era of the composition of the Symbols was not directed at conversion but at reformation and repentance. Not surprisingly, the same Gospel that achieved the latter will also achieve the former. It is only the Gospel that will save the unchurched, nones, and klansmen<sup>15</sup> of today, because it is only the Gospel that saves all sinners. The question today is: How does it do that? For the confessors of Augustana's Article IV, Article V gives the answer. "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted."<sup>16</sup> However, one must not be too quick to insist that such an article refers to the pastoral office itself. Robert Preus has spoken clearly on this issue saying:

Confession happened for the sake of people in need of hearing the Gospel, not for its own sake.

Notice that in this passage no mention of the office of pastor is made, no mention of man, of rank, of *ordo*. Rather an activity is spoken of, a function, a preaching activity (*ministerium docent evangelii*). This is the means whereby faith is created and nourished, the means whereby the church is born and nourished. And thus this ministry becomes the essential work of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, Preus argues that Article V forms the basis of what the church does. It cares for people through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments because these are the means or tools God has given to accomplish the task. This article is about the gifts given to people in darkness, not about the administrators of those gifts. Put another way, a confession about what the church is supposed to do does not exist for its own ends, but for the tasks of caring for people and the calling of all to faith. Confession is preserved and expressed for the sake of mission, both for those who first confessed in Reformation times and those who continue to confess today.

## **A Word for Today**

In Northern Baltimore County, the picture could not have been clearer. To be a Lutheran, to share that confession, was to be concerned about people: the people in the pews and the people outside the walls, the ones who suffer, and the ones who cause the suffering. For me, it meant I needed to tell the congregation what had happened. I needed to preach to the moment, to give Christ to those who would go back into their neighborhoods where hate and hurt lurked in the shadows. It was by no means a final step, but it was the first one. That much became clear.

It seems as though the church today is in a completely different position from the church of yesterday; and to some extent that is entirely true. But the confession of the church, the Gospel, is not bound by time or circumstance. Confession of the Gospel without concern for the people is useless, because it seeks only to defend truth for truth's sake and in doing so ignores the impetus of the Gospel itself. The Gospel is a Word that became flesh, a Word that dwelled with and cared for sinners. Mission, going to people and caring for them, that lacks or compromises the content of the Gospel is bankrupt. It is a Band-Aid on a broken leg. It may feel good, but it accomplishes nothing.

Confession and mission are not antithetical, nor are they only labels; they are inextricably and inescapably bound one to the other, one for the other. Confession exists for the sake of mission, but also mission exists because of confession; without it, there is no work to be done. It is also clear that it is not easy to find the balance between the two, but it does mean the balance must be sought. No longer is it acceptable to use “confessional” or “missional” as an accusation, allegedly emphasizing that a concern for truth is opposed to a concern for people. It is not enough to sit back and repeat a word of truth and not engage the culture that so desperately needs it. It is not enough merely to engage the culture without a real message of hope. The church lives because of the Gospel. The church breathes, is cleansed by, and feeds upon that word of forgiveness; but it does not hoard it. It must go out into the surrounding zip codes and bring that life-giving word of hope to a broken humanity. After all, it isn't every day that those who need it, and may not know it, show up and leave a little white package at your front door.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The term “Symbols” is used specifically to refer to the Book of Concord, also known as the Lutheran Confessions. Because this article seeks to differentiate between confession and mission in general and not the Confessions in particular, the use of the term “Symbols,” while somewhat antiquated, is useful to avoid confusion.

<sup>2</sup> “Preface to the Book of Concord,” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Kinnaman's works, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011); the book he co-wrote with Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012); and the one he co-edited with George Barna, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), document such change.

<sup>4</sup> Charles A. Arand, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kolb, "Late Reformation Lutherans on Mission and Confession," *Lutheran Quarterly* XX (2006), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Arand et al., *The Lutheran Confessions*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Again, the works referenced in note 2 are helpful, as is the seemingly never-ending research by the Barna Group, in particular, on the subject. However, a recent work by Linda Mercandante entitled *Belief Without Borders: Inside the Mind of the Spiritual but not Religious* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014) documents in detail the unique perspective of the "nones" category.

<sup>8</sup> Consider the following: "Confessing in the Wittenberg manner, following the example of those who composed the documents found in the Book of Concord, means (1) confessing the evangel of Jesus Christ at the center of proclamation and theological reflection, and doing so with (2) eschatological sensitivity, (3) ecumenical commitment, (4) evangelistic passion, and (5) the desire to edify God's people for the comfort of their consciences and for the further confession of their faith in word and deed." Arand et al., *The Lutheran Confessions*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Kolb and Wengert, "Preface to the Book of Concord," in *The Book of Concord*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Kolb and Wengert, "Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord*, 39, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Luther famously said of the doctrine of justification, not specifically of Augustana IV but of the doctrine itself in particular that, "On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain victory and be proved right." Kolb and Wengert, "The Smalcald Articles," in *The Book of Concord*, 301.

<sup>12</sup> Kolb and Wengert, "Preface to the Book of Concord," in *The Book of Concord*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> See again note 8.

<sup>14</sup> Kolb and Wengert, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord*, 236.

<sup>15</sup> I recognize that the claim of the KKK to be a "Christian" organization would seem to suggest the need for reformation and repentance, as in a former era, as opposed to the conversion efforts need of the present day. However, to place the Klan within the bounds of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church would be to give them more credit than they are due. The fact that a group claims to be a Christian organization or a church does not make it so. The Symbols themselves affirm this in AC VII & VIII when speaking of the church.

<sup>16</sup> Kolb and Wengert, "Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Preus, "The Confessions and the Mission of the Church," *The Springfielder* 39, no. 1 (Je 1975), 22.

# How Lutherans Have Done Mission: A Historical Survey<sup>1</sup>

Volker Stolle

**Abstract:** “Mission is the one Church of God in motion,” wrote Wilhelm Löhe in his *Three Books on the Church* of 1848. Lutherans have recognized that on the basis of their theology they have an obligation to address the unbelieving world. Their mission efforts have always begun with prayer for missions and missionaries and in the field have included clear catechetical instruction, frequent use of Bible translation into vernacular languages, and an emphasis on holistic mission. The nearly five hundred years of Lutheran mission history demonstrate well how forces and ideas outside the church inevitably shape how mission is organized and done (or not), and how Lutheran people with mission vision, guided and led by the Spirit of God, have found a variety of ways to make a Lutheran contribution to the evangelization of the world.

The mission task is different. When two people or groups of people share the same language and culture, it is likely that they will ask the same kinds of questions and expect similar answers. The questions are easily asked and relatively easily answered. When people come from different cultures, then those who want to communicate the Good News of Jesus must make special efforts to be sure that the message is clearly communicated.

A clear example is the fact that Jesus never once used a description of Roman soldier’s armor to make a point about the way in which God equips His people for service. Paul freely speaks about “standing firm” in Christian life, using the various parts of Roman military dress (Eph 6:14ff.). Paul wants his Gentile hearers to clearly understand how God has equipped His people for service, and so he starts with a picture that they all knew and in many cases had experienced themselves. The point that Paul was making—that God equips His people for service—was not new, but the metaphor that he used to express that point was.

Mission is always like that. Mission is essentially an interaction between two parties—the one who passes on the message and the one who receives it. And, in the course of this event, both are changed. The missionary must think about and find the

---

*Professor emeritus Dr. Volker Stolle was Executive Director of the Mission of Lutheran Churches (Bleckmar Mission) and a professor of New Testament and Missiology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary (Lutherisch-Theologische Hochschule) in Oberursel, Germany. [volker@stolles.de](mailto:volker@stolles.de)*

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

appropriate way of expressing what he knows to be the truth in this new situation, and the one who listens must be prepared to accept the challenge of making sense of a new—and in many cases a totally new and even unimaginable—message of hope, forgiveness, and life.

Mission adapts itself not only to different languages. Mission recognizes the incredible variety of ways of life and particular spiritual situations that human beings have created in various places and times, and mission history tries to put those peoples and situations before us so that we can understand the successes and failures of previous times and places even as we consider what we should do here and now. It emphasizes to us that in spite of many formidable challenges, the Spirit of God has led His people to say exactly what needs to be said (Lk 12:11–12).

Since the perspective of the observer inevitably shapes the historical narrative, I want to be clear that my perspective is German. The Christianization of the Teutons in the German lands began way back in the first half of the history of Christian mission (fourth to ninth centuries), well before the beginning of the Reformation at the beginning of the sixteenth century with its subsequent emphasis on mission. My view is therefore oriented to the sending church and the work of the missionary rather than on the view of those who received missionaries. Moreover, it is focused on the German birthplace of the Reformation. Within these boundaries, I will highlight the most important points for understanding the Lutheran contribution to mission. Readers in a different context will have their own experiences with which they will make their contribution to the history of Lutheran mission.

## **I. A Theological Basis for Mission**

Luther's theology demonstrates from its start an incredible potential for a theology of mission. He emphasizes that the effectiveness of the Gospel is not dependent upon a person's ability to actualize it, but rather awaits God's initiative. Through the preaching of His Word, the Holy Spirit creates saving faith in those who listen to it. Through Baptism and faith, the faithful become members in the one Church under the Lordship of Christ, which extends over all times and places. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, all Christians are equipped and prepared to carry the message of the Gospel further in their own time and surroundings. Luther points to 1 Peter 2:9 as the biblical basis of mission, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you

[Luther] emphasizes that the effectiveness of the Gospel is not dependent upon a person's ability to actualize it, but rather awaits God's initiative.

out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Surprisingly, Lutheran missionary activity and the expansion of Lutheranism is rather small when looked at in worldwide perspective. It is true that the Lutheran church in Africa is rapidly growing and very likely the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, Mekane Yesus (the Lutheran church in Ethiopia), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania will become the two largest Lutheran churches in the world very shortly. Nevertheless, about half of all nominal Lutherans today live in Europe and North America, and most of them are members of historic Lutheran denominations that can trace their roots back to the time of the Reformation.

There are many reasons why Lutheranism has not completely stepped over its original borders. The geographical situation of the Lutheran lands—for the most part away from the coasts and the sea lanes of the Atlantic Ocean—did not allow much contact with the newly discovered lands of the Western Hemisphere nor with the exploration of the coast of Africa.

In addition, the Lutheran churches found themselves in a struggle for survival against the threats of the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation and the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648, involving nearly all of Europe at one point or another), and the Lutheran churches had to employ almost all of their energy simply to maintain their existence.

Furthermore, Lutheran churches (and all other churches) lived under the authority and protection of their territorial governments. The oversight of the church assumed by the secular princes limited the efforts of each church to the territory in which the church was located. Only after the step-by-step dissolution of this union between church and state had been accomplished was a missionary engagement with the larger world possible.

For these social-political reasons, Lutherans developed little missionary initiative at the beginning. However, there are also reasons which are rooted in Lutheran theology itself.

### **A. The Universal Call (*vocatio universalis*)**

The assumption that the Christian church has its origin already in the beginning of human history, in that Adam and Eve believed in the “promised seed of the woman” (Christ) in Genesis 3:15, was united with a certainty that God’s Word could not remain inactive. From this premise, the mistaken conclusion was drawn that for all times there has been and continues to be a Christian church, although at times perhaps only a small one. There was no urgent need to send missionaries into the world because the Word of God had been present in the world since the time of Adam and Eve and had already called people to faith throughout the world (*vocatio universalis*). This meant to those who were influenced by this kind of thinking that

the resources of the Lutheran church should be limited to the task of spreading the faith in the lands in which the Lutheran church was already in existence.

This kind of thinking has much in common with the universalism commonly expressed in the modern and postmodern world, but with an important difference. In early Lutheranism, some held that God has already sent His Word into the world and called people to faith. They are saved; there is no need to send missionaries to them. In the idea of universalism, all are saved because all paths lead to the same God, and God would not condemn anyone. As far as the mission of God's people is concerned, in both cases, mission is not required since all are saved.

The idea of a universal call could be developed in a different, more fruitful way, however. In this way of thinking, the starting point was the existence of many individual Christian cells scattered throughout the world, brought into existence through the universal call of God's Word. These cells would naturally grow and could extend outward into their immediate surroundings. To assist their expansion, these cells might need some level of support as a kind of diaspora mission. A missionary person would not need to be sent, because Christians were already present and committed to sharing the Good News of Jesus; but the cell might need some material assistance to carry out the task.

An early example is the Uracher Circle of Primus Truber (1508–1586) and Hans Ill Ungnad von Weissenwolf (1493–1564). Starting in 1561, the Uracher Circle made the effort to support the Lutherans under persecution by the government in Slovenia (Ljubljana), not by sending a missionary, but by translating and publishing books and pamphlets in Wuerttemberg, a Lutheran territory in South Germany. The distribution of these books supported the spreading of the Reformation by local people as far as Croatia and in spreading Christianity as far as Turkey.

In his significant work, *De Regno Christi* (1597), the Lutheran theologian Philipp Nicolai (1556–1608) made God's words spoken to Christ, "Rule in the midst of your enemies" (Ps 110:2), the basis of his missionary program. God's Word increasingly strengthens and anchors the newly planted faith and thereby preserves the church. At the same time, it presses outward across the borders of the existing church and expands the church. Inner (directed toward lands where there are already Christians) and outer mission (directed toward the non-Christian world) complement each other.

Mission is the expanding life of the church, and the church lives from the Gospel, which steps over every established border.

In more recent mission history, God has used immigrant congregations or entire immigration movements (Australia, North America, South Africa, New Zealand, and

Latin America) for mission work. Mission is the expanding life of the church, and the church lives from the Gospel, which steps over every established border.

## **B. Universal Office of the Apostle vs. Locally Limited Office in the Church**

In the course of the controversies of the Reformation era, Lutheran dogmaticians were compelled to answer Roman Catholic claims that the Pope was the successor of the Apostle Peter and had authority over the church throughout the world. The Lutherans answered that the office of Apostle was given once and for all to the men whom Jesus had called personally into service. This office was given one time, could not be inherited, and could not be a basis for universal authority in the church. Authority in the church now was focused on the office of pastor of a congregation, who served the needs of local people.

This understanding gave rise in Lutheran congregations to the tendency to focus exclusively on the life of the local congregation and to restrict to the pastor and only a few congregation members the commission to proclaim the Gospel. It did not take seriously that mission is God's mission to the whole world and involves the whole people of God.

Admittedly, at this point, there were mission opportunities that could have been grasped, especially by Lutherans working together. Lutherans could have taken up many different tasks, e.g., proclaiming the Gospel face-to-face with Jews, Lapps, Inuit, and Moslems, and they could have been involved in producing theological literature. From this perspective, the importance of the laity in mission work could have been recognized and the laity deployed to testify to Christ through word and deed in their daily lives, but this would have to wait until a later period.

## **C. Church Confession and Personal Confession**

With the strong emphasis on the church's confession as it is set forth in the confessional writings of the Reformation, the richness of the Lutheran faith for life could be reduced to an orthodoxy that existed on a purely intellectual level, i.e., assent to a number of correct statements about the Christian faith. The theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy had already recognized this tendency and warned against it, e.g., Balthasar Meisner (1587–1626), Johann Gerhard (1582–1637).

Personal confession, which is the basic element of all mission, always communicates a personal faith and piety that is transmitted from one heart to another, not just from one head to another. Therefore, it was not by chance that the Lutheran church experienced a missionary explosion first under the influence of Pietism and then later during the period of the Awakening.

## **II. Lutherans in Action in Mission**

### **A. Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

At the beginning of Lutheran territorial church life when Lutheran churches were officially recognized by the German states as official state churches, repeated attempts were made to begin mission to the Jews, e.g., Elias Schadaeus (ca. 1540–1593) in Strasburg and Esdras Edzard (1629–1708) in Hamburg. Other initiatives occurred in places where non-Christians lived in the same land as Lutherans (such as Turkish prisoners of war or the Lapps in northern Scandinavia), or as in the Swedish colony in America (Johann Campanius, 1643), and in small trading posts on other continents (in Gambia, 1654; Ghana, 1662–1670). Of particular significance is the work of the Lutheran pastor Hans Egede (1686–1758) and his son Paul (1709–1789) in Greenland among the Inuit.

### **B. Eighteenth Century**

In the age of Pietism, the first initiatives for establishing special missionary institutions emerged (such as what would become known as the Danish-Halle Mission in Denmark or the mission institutes at the University of Halle, Germany). The call in the mid-seventeenth century for such institutions by Justinian von Welz (1621–1668), the Lutheran missionary martyr who died in Suriname, remained largely ineffective.

Mission as organized and led by institutions led to the first great mission undertakings. Those included the Danish-Halle Mission in Tranquebar/South India, 1705–1825, which sent out about sixty missionaries, including Bartholomew Ziegenbalg (1682–1719), and a most notable missionary, Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1726–1798). The Judaica Institute in Halle, 1728–1792, was organized by Johann Heinrich Callenberg (1694–1760) and developed by missionary Stephan Schultz (1714–1776). Karl Rhenius (1790–1838) was sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in London in 1814 to take over the work of the Danish-Halle Mission in India after Danish rationalism had ended Danish mission leadership in India. After Rhenius separated from the CMS in 1837, he became the first missionary to be supported by a Lutheran denomination in America (General Synod), even though this was only for a very short period.

### **C. Nineteenth Century**

During the Awakening Movement, the first missionary efforts made by Lutherans came from confessional Lutherans in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century, who organized themselves into mission societies. The results of these efforts are still evident today:

- 1836, Dresden Mission under Johann Georg Wermelskirch (1803–1872), relocated in 1848 to Leipzig under Karl Graul (1814–1864), with mission fields in India, Australia, and later east Africa;
- 1841, Neuendettelsau Mission under Wilhelm Löhe (1808–1872), mission to Native Americans and in 1886 in Australia and New Guinea;
- 1849, Hermansburg Mission under Ludwig Harms (1808–1865) and his brother Theodore (1819–1885) in South Africa and later Ethiopia;
- 1871, Leipzig, under the Evangelical Lutheran Central Society for Mission among Israelis (Franz Delitzsch 1813–1890);
- 1876, Breklum Mission in India.

In other Lutheran lands, particularly in Scandinavia, confessional mission efforts were achieved somewhat later: Sweden 1856; Finland 1859; Denmark 1868; and Norway 1891. The missionary movement during this time was possible for two reasons: the emancipation of citizens from state control made it possible to form private societies, on the one hand; on the other, the church was becoming more and more independent from the state.

As soon as churches achieved such independence, they acknowledged mission as a responsibility of the church as such, not simply the responsibility of a smaller mission society or mission committee within the congregation. Church bodies that organized themselves according to this pattern included:

- 1841, Old Lutheran Church, today part of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany;
- 1847/1893, the forerunner of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod;
- 1892, Hanoverian Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, today part of the SELK.

In areas where mission movements developed within the German state churches, they became increasingly confessional in the course of the nineteenth century in that they wanted to be committed to a pure biblical theology unaffected by confessional differences. The emphasis on pure biblical theology quickly led to a commitment to the Lutheran Confessions and a clear proclamation of the Lutheran faith. For these nineteenth-century Lutherans, it was assumed that a non-denominational Christianity would be Lutheran, since the Lutheran faith was based on the clear teachings of the Scriptures. This was a very different perspective from the commonly held belief in the United States that non-denominational Christianity would be some variety of Reformed Christianity.

## **D. Twentieth Century**

The two world wars cut off many mission areas from their home bases with their personnel and financial support. In the field, missionaries from the “wrong side” at

work in the colonies were also often hindered in their work by repatriation to their homelands and even internment.

These historical circumstances led to a strengthening of international cooperation through ecumenical associations in order to assist the orphaned missions: International Mission Council (1921) and the World Council of Churches (1948), as well as confessional federations such as the Lutheran Foreign Missions Conference of North America (1919); Lutheran World Federation (1947)—with its international mission radio program, the “Radio Voice of the Gospel” in Addis Abba 1963–1977). The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod also intensified its cooperation with its partner churches in the ILC (International Lutheran Conference, now the International Lutheran Council).

At the same time, the vast geopolitical developments in the twentieth century led to increasing decolonization. In Asia and Africa, newly independent countries emerged, demanding new relationships between church and state and church and mission.

The Lutheran perspective was largely shaped by the theology of the separation of the two kingdoms: the church, God’s kingdom of the right hand, and the state, the kingdom of God’s left hand. For this reason, most Lutheran missions kept their distance from the imperial governments that ruled the colonies. Their watchword was that the Gospel demonstrates its power not through political might, but rather through the power of the Word of God.

Nevertheless, the Lutheran churches in these areas had to redefine their roles amid the changes within these societies. The role of church and state had to be redefined in many emerging nations as the churches lost the support of colonial governments and needed to work out relationships with new political systems and leaders.

Perhaps the most significant change was the greater independence of the young mission churches from the mission societies or home churches through whose work they had come into being. A new type of cooperation developed with the “mother churches” in Europe and North America, a cooperation that recognized that the “young churches” would make their own decisions in their own ways, and these decisions needed to be respected. The “young churches” were no longer regarded as children but were regarded as “sister churches” on both sides.

In a serious misreading of the signs of the time, the decline of churches in the “Christian West” was not seen as a missionary challenge, but was described as a special and inevitable “post-Christian” development affected by secularization, the ideologies of Communism and National Socialism, and many other socio-political changes.

Christian people became unsure of how to live in relation to these new socio-political phenomena. Many of them, even though they had been baptized as children, distanced themselves from the church or rejected it outright. Under both social and political pressure, the churches struggled more with survival than with mission.

The positive side of these developments was and is that increasing numbers of Lutheran Christians have recognized the close connection between mission and evangelism. Mission is not only something that is done across the sea by a handful of professional missionaries, but the Western churches must be at work at every level in sharing the Good News of Jesus with the masses of unbelieving people around them.

Mission is not only something that is done across the sea by a handful of professional missionaries, but the Western churches must be at work at every level in sharing the Good News of Jesus with the masses of unbelieving people around them.

## **E. At the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century**

As a result of the great migration movements caused by wars, the expansion of modern civilization and industrialization, the globalization of business and trade, as well as far-reaching ecological changes, many Christians have found themselves in ecumenically-mixed and even multi-religious populations. Working in the midst of these changes, the challenges for mission are brought closer to home as Christians must find new ways to express the truth of the Christian faith and the gift of confidence and joy it brings. It will be increasingly important for Christians that they do not give in to faithless fear of all things foreign but rather overcome this fear with the confidence that God gives to Christians whose faith is set ablaze for mission.

The God of the Bible is a God of migrants. He called Abraham out of his homeland on a journey of faith. God led His people Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness into the Promised Land. Jesus did not present Himself to His disciples as a stationary point but said, “I am the way” by which one comes to the Father (Jn 14:6). Christ sent His apostles out into all the world (Mt 28:18–20; Mk 16:15). The Epistle to the Hebrews describes Christians as a wandering people of God on their way to the promised, eternal rest. Before this goal is reached, Christians live as foreigners in a strange land. In this setting, the Great Commission is continually contemporary.

Lutheran churches still have the opportunity to prove themselves in the mission field. From a historical perspective, the missionary situation will decide whether or

not the Lutheran churches can communicate faithfully the pure teaching they have received in new situations. If not, they will shrivel up into an increasingly insignificant minority. Christ establishes His claim on all nations in the Gospel. “The Gospel must be preached throughout the whole world” (Luther, 1539, cf. Mk 13:10). It will certainly happen—with or without Lutherans.

### **III. Methodology in Practical Work**

#### **A. Prayer**

Prayer has always been viewed as the most important practical activity in the service of God’s mission. In Luther’s explanation of the Lord’s Prayer in the Large Catechism, the only explanation that includes a prayer is the Second Petition, “Thy kingdom come,” which is the mission petition.<sup>2</sup> In doing this, Luther demonstrated the spiritual significance of mission prayer.

In 1582, Duke Ludwig of Wuerttemberg introduced an obligatory mission petition within the prayer of the church on Sunday mornings—a practice which should be obvious for Lutheran liturgies. Mission can only succeed as God’s matter. “A true believer bears the missionary and the entire mission endeavor in his praying heart” (C.F.W. Walther, 1878).

#### **B. Teaching the Faith**

Instruction in the Catechism is the traditional manner in which the mission work of the Lutheran church is begun. Mission and schools have always been closely connected with each other. A clear example is the work of the Danish Lutheran missionary, Ziegenbalg, who founded the first school for girls in India within one year of his arrival in 1707.

Instruction for membership was held in the vernacular language whenever possible. The Catechism was often the first book translated and published, and this often paved the way for the creation of a full vernacular literature. The use of traditional local languages was connected with a strong sensitivity to traditional culture and social orders.

At the same time, innovation was always a part of the missionary program. Medical, agricultural, and technical knowledge was shared, and missionaries were committed to improving the lives of the people with whom they worked. Evangelism and development went hand in hand just as faith and life belong inseparably together (cf. Luther’s explanation to the First and Second Petitions of the Lord’s Prayer).

### **C. Biblical Piety**

Luther's program for Bible translation expanded into the mission field as well. Instruction in Luther's Small Catechism was understood to be the introduction to the Bible, and Bible translation was regarded as urgent. To cite only one example: After Ziegenbalg arrived in southern India in 1706, by 1714 he had already translated the New Testament and the Old Testament up to Ruth into the Tamil language, the vernacular of the local people. Having the Bible in their own language promoted the self-confidence of new Christians. They could read God's Word for themselves. In many lands, this new skill led to an independent and autonomous faith. New believers were not dependent solely on the missionary but could learn from the Scriptures themselves.

Accordingly, high priority was placed on the education of local people for service as clergy. Again, a short three years after his arrival in India, Ziegenbalg was ready to deal with questions regarding the ordination of Indian believers.

### **D. Holistic Mission**

The set goal of having a "Volkskirche im Vollwuchs," a people's church in fullest form, a phrase coined by Gustav Warneck (1834–1910), was characteristic of Lutheran mission in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was a church-centered piety. Individual Christians were brought into a congregation through the means of grace and became members of the Body of Christ (Article 3 of the Apostles' Creed).

This conception of God's saving work was combined with a view of mankind rooted in Luther's Small Catechism (Explanation of the First Article), according to which people live with one another in a society based on a created order. Christian faith was experienced as a power that altered the old society and gave people a place in the new order as a people set apart for life in God's kingdom. (See, for example, the work of Bruno Gutmann [1876–1967] in East Africa and Christian Keysser [1877–1961] in Papua New Guinea.) Many large and powerful ethnic churches were established in mission lands through Lutheran mission work: among the Kohls in north India, the Batak on Sumatra, among the Oromo in Ethiopia, the Chagga in east Africa, the Ovambo in Namibia, the Tswana and Venda in South Africa, and the indigenous populations of Papua New Guinea.

Unfortunately, an emphasis on indigenous churches could lead to strong efforts to preserve old structures of society, even when social circumstances had vastly changed and were in need of development and reform. Missionaries and young churches faced the temptation to reject or even demonize urbanization and industrialization as a kind of foreign infiltration under European/North American influence. Even in the Western homelands of Europe and North America, modern civilization was seen as the basis for the decline of the old faith. For this reason,

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

pious young Americans and Europeans who had no chance for a future in agriculture in their homelands were happy to be sent into foreign mission fields, and their desire to work in rural areas encouraged a move away from industrial centers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As a result, many missionary opportunities in the cities remained overlooked as modern civilization spread unhindered around the world.

In addition, their high regard for their mother tongue and traditional culture meant that Lutheran immigrants often held fast to their language and culture in their new homeland and thereby remained cultural islands in their new surroundings. This attachment to one's own culture and culture-bound church often hindered a missionary openness to other population groups and for far too long kept Lutheran churches from serving additional ethnic groups. This high regard for the inherited culture sometimes also enabled a questionable union with nationalistic as well as racist ways of thinking, e.g., not maintaining adequate distance from the ideology of Apartheid in South Africa.

### **E. “Mission is the one Church of God in Motion”**

This beautiful definition, which was formulated by Wilhelm Löhe in his *Three Books on the Church* (1845), is a wonderful vision which has led the Lutheran church through the centuries and should also lead us today. The Lutheran churches have for the most part taken a solitary route in mission because they are bound to an unaltered confession. “Because we in the Lutheran Church have the Word of God in pure unadulterated doctrine and administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper purely according to the institution of our Lord Jesus, we want to urge Lutheran mission” (Ludwig Harms, 1857). But it is exactly for this reason that the Lutheran place in the greater framework of the whole Christian Church cannot be overlooked.

God is one, and Christ is the one Lord of the one Church. All missionary work breathes in its true moving power only from the one Holy Spirit, which unites all Christians with one another in the one single fellowship of service (1 Corinthians 12). Mission is not about the self-promotion of a Lutheran church that wants to hold up its particular form of church life, but rather about the confession of Christ, to whom the Father has given all power in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18–20) and to whom every knee shall bow (Phil 2:9–11). The Lutheran church serves the one Lord Christ and His one church in proclaiming the pure Gospel according to the Scriptures and the Confessions. This ecumenical commitment forms the working

Mission is not about the self-promotion of a Lutheran church that wants to hold up its particular form of church life, but rather about the confession of Christ.

structures that Lutherans need to transcend their own social group in Christian love and missionary openness to increase and strengthen the community in Christ.

How Lutherans have done mission over the past five hundred years has been a journey—not without its bumps and curves. Beginning with the basic theological understanding that doing mission is obeying God’s call to share the Good News of Jesus throughout the world, Lutherans of various times and places have struggled to carry out the task. Mission is all about serving people in the world around us, but that world is constantly changing. In their effort to deliver the true and eternal word of God and to be faithful to the Confessions, Lutherans must be attentive to challenges of the ideologies and worldviews of each new generation and pray for the wisdom to face such challenges in God-pleasing ways. Especially in the present day, Lutherans must see that mission is not only something that is done across the sea by a handful of professional missionaries, but rather something done by all at every opportunity, sharing the Good News of Jesus with the masses of unbelieving people around them.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this article appeared in *Missio Apostolica* 13, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism* in Kolb and Wengert (eds.), *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 447. “Dear Father, we ask you first to give us your Word, so that the gospel may be properly preached throughout the world and then that it may also be received in faith and may work and dwell in us....”

# Vocation in Missiological Perspective<sup>1</sup>

Douglas L. Rutt

**Abstract:** For some, additional ministerial offices in the church would lead to more efficient and effective proclamation of the gospel to the unbelieving world. Yet God’s Word and history teach that it is in vocation, the calling of the common Christian, where the gospel is proclaimed in purity and power. Every believer receives a call to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9). If Justification is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, vocation can be seen in a similar way, for it is a doctrine where all aspects of biblical teaching are brought to bear on the Christian’s life of good works and witness. In vocation God has given the church the commission and method for bringing light to the darkness of unbelief.

In Lutheran theology, biblical teaching is seen as an integrated whole where all the articles of the faith are parts of a unified set. If one piece is missing or incorrectly understood, the rest of the pieces are likely to lose their integrity and true meaning.<sup>2</sup> Yet, for Lutherans, one specific article, the doctrine of justification, is *the* fundamental doctrine, called the “heart and soul of the Reformation.”<sup>3</sup> If we err in this article, it will be quite possible—even probable—that we will become derailed in other aspects of biblical teaching.

## The Centrality of Justification

When considering the theme, “Vocation in Missiological Perspective,” it is essential to remember that our conclusions must be based on a correct and clear understanding of justification—that the believer is saved through faith in Christ, true man and true God, who gave Himself to accomplish the salvation of humankind. Moreover, one arrives at this faith not by one’s own efforts, but by grace. Faith itself is a gift of God, given by the Spirit through the Word of Truth. As Paul says: “Faith

---

*Rev. Douglas L. Rutt, Ph.D., is the international director for Lutheran Hour Ministries, responsible for overseeing mass media proclamation of the Gospel to more than fifty nations worldwide. He was formerly associate professor of pastoral ministry and missions, supervisor of the Ph.D. program, and dean for distance learning at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Upon discharge from the US Navy, he worked as a professional pilot before entering the pastoral ministry serving as a parish pastor, missionary to Guatemala, and area secretary for Latin America for LCMS World Mission. He and his wife Deborah have five children and thirteen grandchildren. [douglas.rutt@lhm.org](mailto:douglas.rutt@lhm.org)*

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17), and “By grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8.9).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the unity of theology and the centrality of justification are held in tension. It might be compared (imperfectly) to a wheel, with justification as the center axis from which the spokes project outwards. Everything depends on the correct understanding of justification.

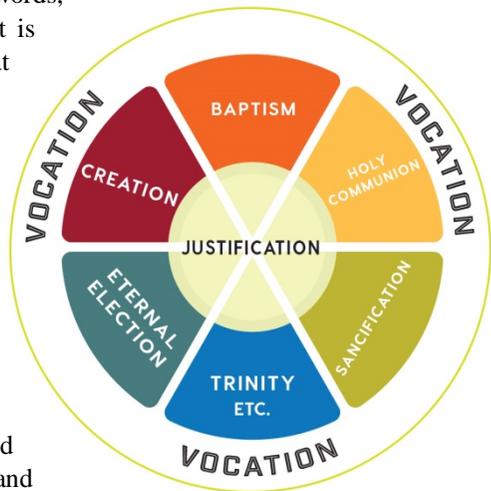
### The Centrality of Vocation—the Theology of Life

Yet the thesis of this article is that the Lutheran doctrine of vocation also ties together all other aspects of theology. One cannot speak of Christian vocation without seeing that it touches upon the doctrines of justification, creation, sanctification, the two ways God rules (the so-called “two kingdoms”), Baptism, Law and Gospel, prayer, etc. Perhaps it is legitimate to say that if justification is where all true doctrine is centered, vocation is the place where all the articles of faith find their expression in the life of the Christian. It is in vocation that every aspect of the faith-life that is guided by justification works itself out in the concrete situations of everyday existence. Vocation could be called the “theology of life.”

[Vocation] is about the core beliefs and values that permeate the believer’s worldview and govern the way he or she lives out the faith.

Vocation is not about mere words, theories, ideas, or mental concepts: It is about the core beliefs and values that permeate the believer’s worldview and govern the way he or she lives out the faith. Thus, if justification is envisioned as being the center axis of the wheel, perhaps vocation can be seen as the outer rim, which is connected to all doctrine, but which is oriented toward the outside, like the proverbial rubber that hits the road.

This understanding of the role and relationship between justification and vocation brings to light a fundamental



difference between Lutheran and other theological systems. In Lutheran theology, every doctrine has practical application. There is no such thing as a doctrine that only should be recognized and accepted as true but that does not have practical significance. It was an oft-repeated maxim of Dr. Robert Preus: “What is not practical is not theology.”<sup>5</sup> All theology is to be lived in tangible circumstances, and vocation is the environment or arena where everything we believe and confess as Christians becomes palpably manifest for the benefit of others. It is thus all the more unfortunate to hear, as has been said, that the biblical teaching of vocation is a “lost treasure” in the Lutheran Church.<sup>6</sup>

*Vocation* means “call” or “calling.” In Greek the word is *klesis*. It is God Himself who calls. It is true that Lutheran theology uses the word “call” or “calling” technically to speak of the profession or office of the ordained pastoral ministry, those who have received a call or calling to exercise the pastoral office. However, the word *klesis* is used in Scripture as much for believers in general as for the office of the holy ministry. The two uses can be seen clearly in First Corinthians, where Paul writes: “Paul, *called (kletos)* by the will of God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ . . . to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus and *called (kletois)* to be his holy people” (1 Cor 1:1–2). In the former instance, Saint Paul is talking of his call to apostleship, but in the latter he is speaking of the legitimate calling that is extended to all God’s people.

All theology is to be lived in tangible circumstances, and vocation is the environment or arena where everything we believe and confess as Christians becomes palpably manifest for the benefit of others.

The word in Greek that in English is (perhaps unfortunately) translated *church*<sup>7</sup> is *ekklesia*, which simply means “those who are called out,” for example, to meet together in the central plaza or another specified location. It is an assembly. In this sense, all Christians are called by God. We cannot know God outside of this call, as Dr. Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* says: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

We have, then, this doctrine of vocation by the calling of God. Part of this call, but only a part, has to do with the profession or the work that we do in life—the way we earn our daily bread. The reformers, both Calvin and Luther, taught that one can serve God, not only by being a monk or hermit or priest or bishop in the Catholic

Church, but also in any legitimate “secular” (so to speak) profession. Gene Veith described the insights of the reformers on vocation: “Medieval Catholicism taught that spiritual perfection is to be found in celibacy, poverty, and the monastic withdrawal from the world, where higher spiritual life is found. But the reformers emphasized the spiritual dimension of family life, productive labor, and cultural engagement.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the reformers’ understanding, God calls each believer to various tasks and relations. The workplace is one place where the Christian can serve both God and neighbor. One does not need to dedicate oneself to a monastic life to arrive at spiritual perfection; rather, perfection is found in Christ, who is with us in our secular occupations and relations also. One can readily see the great influence that this idea has had in the Western world. The famous sociologist-philosopher, Max Weber, wrote about the “Protestant work ethic” in 1904, arguing that one’s dedication to work, to apply oneself vigorously to his or her work, has its roots in Luther’s doctrine of vocation. Many sociologists and historians have argued that the great advances in medicine, technology, science, and capitalist commerce that have arisen in the Western world—largely Protestant—have been realized because Protestants saw that it was possible to serve God by dedicating themselves to their work with diligence, prudence, seriousness, and honesty. Perhaps Weber and others were correct in part in this assessment, although Weber did not completely understand Luther on vocation, nor does his work provide a more basic understanding of the rationale for hard work.<sup>10</sup>

Vocation, however, is not simply our profession or work, as is commonly understood. It is not only that one can serve God through how one earns one’s daily bread, even though it does have to do with and includes that. Vocation is much broader in Luther’s understanding, because it begins with the call to faith and has implications for every aspect of life and how believers live their entire lives.

For Luther, vocation is the calling that every Christian has, not only to worship God, but also, and even principally, to serve the neighbor in the station of life where the believer is found. Primarily, it has to do not so much with one’s occupation or work, but rather with the relationships one has with other human beings as experienced in daily life.

Luther believed that there were three arenas for the exercise of spiritual life: the family, civil society, and the church. We can see this in the “Table of Duties” in the *Small Catechism*, where Luther provides guidelines regarding how the Christian should live according to these three general categories.

The family for Luther includes the area of work, occupation, or employment. Here he points to biblical passages that show how husbands, wives, parents, male and female servants, hired men, laborers, masters and mistresses, young persons in

general, widows, etc., should live. In summary, Luther ends with a point entitled, “For All in Common,” citing Romans 13:8–10.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (ESV)

We can see, therefore, that for Luther vocation has to do fundamentally with how believers live the Christian life and, more specifically, how Christians are to serve their neighbor. The Christian is called by God, not to withdraw from the world, but rather to live a life of service to neighbor—to serve and “love your neighbor as yourself.” This service is carried out by being in the world, not by isolating oneself in the monastery, figuratively or literally.

One can argue that the call is to serve God *and* neighbor, but Luther maintained that when it comes to vocation, God does not need anything from us. What is important is to serve your neighbor. It is the neighbor who needs our service; God, not so much. For that reason, he criticized the hermits and monks saying that that they did not serve anyone outside their own community. For Luther, the most perfectly spiritual arena is the world, and we can exercise our vocation of love and service to our neighbor in the station where we find ourselves in that world. As Veith rightly points out: “Luther stressed that our vocations are not works that we perform ‘for’ God. The monastics talked that way, as if the Lord of the universe needed or was impressed by our actions. ‘God does not need our good works,’ Luther said. ‘But our neighbor does.’”<sup>11</sup>

The Christian  
is called by God,  
not to withdraw  
from the world,  
but rather to live a life  
of service to  
neighbor—to serve  
and “love your  
neighbor as yourself.”

## The Priesthood of all Believers and Vocation

An understanding of the priesthood of all believers is fundamental for a right understanding of vocation. Luther began to delineate this priesthood and its significance in 1520 in his open letter “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian State.”<sup>12</sup> In the first part, Luther indicates that he wrote this document “in the hope that God would help his church through the laity.” The problem that Luther confronted was that the officials (priests, bishops, etc.) of the church maintained that the position they occupied was a higher

estate than the rest and that they did not need to subject themselves to the civil authority or the authority of the rest. One example of the argument that Luther makes shows how radical his thinking was in that time. After demonstrating that the ordination of a priest done by a bishop is in reality done in the name of the church, that is, in the name of common believers, Luther makes this statement:

From this argument, it follows that there is no true and fundamental difference between laity and priests, princes and bishops, between the religious and secular, except by the office and work, but not in terms of its status. All are the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. . . . We are all one body of Christ, the head, and we are all members one of the other. Christ does not have two different bodies, one temporal and one spiritual. There is only one Head and only one body.”<sup>13</sup>

Luther’s argument is aligned with the teaching of Scripture. Saint Peter (1 Pt 2:9–25) demonstrates the significance of the priesthood of all believers in all of its richness. He makes clear that common Christians, in a real sense, have been called. Believers have been called by God to experience certain excellencies. Peter indicates that those who have been called are a “chosen race,” a “royal priesthood,” a “holy nation,” and “a people for his (God’s) own possession” (v. 9). Each of those titles would have had a very rich meaning for Peter’s original hearers, as the terms all have their roots in the Hebrew Scriptures. Christians are chosen, or elected. As the Israelites were a people chosen by God, today all believers are elected to be a special race in the eyes of God. As the Psalmist says, they are “the apple of His eye” (Ps 17:8).

Those called by God are a “royal priesthood,” which means that the entire body of Christ is a part of this priesthood. It is a fundamental biblical and Lutheran teaching that leads to a correct understanding of vocation. All believers are priests. The idea of the royal priesthood of all believers is fundamental to understanding their way of living as daughters and sons of God. Dr. Robert Kolb asserts that many Lutherans today have defined the priesthood of all believers as the privilege to approach God directly as individuals, i.e., that common Christians do not need to depend on any other person whatsoever (a priest, for example) to draw near to God. While this is true enough, if we limit the priesthood only to direct prayer to God, we have an incomplete vision of the universal priesthood, for it includes matters of the horizontal relationship among human beings as well.<sup>14</sup>

Peter says, also, that believers are a “holy nation.” The significance of *holy* is “separated out,” “perfect,” “dedicated to God.” To be a holy nation means that the body of believers has been cleansed by God, declared holy and good, and also that the body reflects this holiness by its way of living. “A people for his own possession” demonstrates the love that God has for His people. It is He who has taken the initiative to establish the relationship that the Christian enjoys. It is He who

has redeemed believers from the chains of death. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

To summarize this passage in the context of vocation, in the first place Christians have been called—called to experience these excellencies. In the second place, the purpose for which Christians have been called is clear: “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” As has been mentioned, an overemphasis on the privilege of going to God directly to the exclusion of the other dimensions of this calling presents us with an incomplete framework for vocation. A very essential aspect of our calling, perhaps the principal purpose, is to announce the wondrous works of God. As Kolb puts it:

There can be no doubt that God wants His Christian people to speak His Word; above all, to bring that Good News of new life in Jesus Christ to those who are writing their own bulletins and guidelines for a life which is dying. This living voice of the Gospel in our mouths is the very power of God for the salvation of fallen human creatures (Romans 1:16), and He has placed this power into the hands of all His disciples (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23). The 16<sup>th</sup>-century reformers spoke of this commission as the “priesthood of all believers.”<sup>15</sup>

## Vocation and Bridge Building

Dr. Kolb illustrates the believers’ calling as priests by making a comparison with a Latin word for priest: *pontifex*. For those who understand Spanish, it is not hard to understand the roots of the word *pontifex* as “bridge maker.” According to this definition, the Christian task as priests is to construct bridges between the Word of God and people in the contemporary world. This task or calling is not merely to bark out words, although they may be true in themselves, but to build bridges. Undoubtedly, Dr. Kolb makes an important point because he emphasizes the need to know and understand people, their way of thinking, their opinions, their worries, their dreams, their hopes, their suppositions, their worldview, their passions and sins.

The only way to understand these things is to live among those people, to develop relationships with them, and to become a friend—in short, to become interested in the lives of others. To build a bridge, one must construct upon the firm ground on both sides of the gap. Normally, when a bridge is built, the builders don’t begin on one side and simply keep building until they reach the other side; rather, builders begin on both sides of the river, and the two sides meet in the middle. That is the way a bridge is built, and it provides interesting instruction for the task of Christian witness (recognizing that all analogies limp).

For those who intend to bear witness to the Gospel, it means that they are willing to put in the hard work of trying to demonstrate the connection between the

message of the Word and the world of the person who has no understanding of that Word. As Dr. Kolb has written, the bridge-maker, by studying the text and his own context, seeks “contemporary implications and applications” of God’s Word.<sup>16</sup> A knowledge of the text alone is not sufficient for Christian witness. The task of building bridges demands also that one has an adequate knowledge of one’s neighbor.

Giving witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus is not chiefly to share information but to introduce one person to another. In this sense, common Christians even can have an advantage over “professional” church workers in that they are likely to be more immersed in the world of those outside of the church.

A knowledge  
of the text alone  
is not sufficient  
for Christian witness.  
The task of building  
bridges demands also  
that one has an  
adequate knowledge  
of one’s neighbor.

### **The Testimony of Life**

In the third place, the Apostle Peter presents a fundamentally important facet of the priesthood that belongs to all believers, because the *how* of announcing the excellencies of God is also specified. Here Peter elaborates on what that means: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles (non-Christians) honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).

Peter points out the connection with our relationship between the Christian’s way of life and the result of his or her witness. Those called by God are to keep their conduct honorable among non-believers so that through their way of life those who are lost will see the good works of Christ’s followers, join the believers in their faithful lives, and on the day of judgment will glorify God.

Even if people treat believers badly, as happens so often today in a world where Christians are singled out for rape, pillage, enslavement, murder, beheading, etc., the response of Christ’s people is to be blameless, innocent, and enduring, because the believer has the long-range objective in mind, that is, that finally our persecutors will take note of our patience and honorable conduct, will begin to reflect on it, will take the opportunity to hear the Word, and finally, by the grace of God, will come to the true faith.<sup>17</sup>

A couple of years ago, Lutheran Hour Ministries changed its logo. In a staff meeting, bumper stickers with the new logo were distributed as a way of publicizing the ministry. Upon reflection, the executive director warned, “Look, put these stickers on your bumpers only if you are going to behave yourselves on the road. If you drive like a crazy maniac, and you are likely to get angry and make obscene

gestures to other drivers, it's better not to identify yourself with the Lutheran Hour. Don't use the sticker." In other words, there must be a congruence between words and actions, and to bear the insignia of an organization that espouses Christian values brings with it a corresponding behavioral expectation.

Indeed, the world is watching every Christian believer to see what difference the Gospel makes in his or her life. Therefore, Peter adds the entire section in his first letter (2:13–25) exhorting Christians for the love of God to behave honorably, to respect all, to love the brethren, to fear God and honor the king, and to live justly, having tolerance and patience with all, etc. It is evident what Christians have been called to, the purpose of this calling, and how this calling is to be lived out, that is, how the believer will conduct himself or herself in order to truly announce the excellencies of God.

The world is watching every Christian believer to see what difference the Gospel makes in his or her life.

Vocation, the calling to which Christians have been called, is the plan or the program for life *in concreto*. It is the Christian life, how it is lived, how it is understood, and how it is put into operation. Vocation has everything to do with the extension of the Kingdom of Christ, and thus it is vital that a proper understanding of this doctrine be recaptured and put into practice. More precisely, it is *essential* that the church recapture a healthy understanding of vocation.

## Vocation—Life and Words

How does the Church grow? How is the Kingdom of Christ extended? The honorable life of Christians is highly significant. It builds the necessary credibility to be heard, and it demonstrates the transformative power of the gospel. Scripture also clearly states that “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17, ESV). The clear proclamation of the Gospel, in verbal form, is what must be heard. But how does it become possible for a person to hear?

William Weinrich described many years ago, in an article titled “Evangelism in the Early Church,”<sup>18</sup> how the Church grew during those formative years. What is described about that period is relevant for today. The Early Church existed in a multicultural, religiously pluralistic world, much like today. The Early Church did not benefit from a privileged place in the world, but rather was an object of ridicule and persecution, much as it is today. While the Early Church existed in a “pre-Christian” world, today the church exists in a “post-Christian” environment. There is something to learn from the lives of the first Christians—and it has to do with vocation.

Weinrich speaks of the “who” of evangelism in the Early Church, elaborating a list of five different categories of people who had parts in announcing the Good News to the world. He lists (1) the Apostles, (2) itinerant missionaries, (3) local pastors, (4) the philosopher-theologians, and (5) finally he approvingly quotes Adolf von Harnack, who wrote: “The most numerous and successful missionaries of the Christian religion were not the professional teachers, but Christians themselves, in virtue of their loyalty and courage.” Thereafter, Weinrich cites the testimony of a pagan of the second century, Celsus, who commented:

We see, indeed, in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and persons often of most uninstructed and rustic character, not venturing to utter a word in the presence of their elders and wiser masters; but when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements, to the effect that they ought not to give heed to their father and to their teachers, but should obey them.<sup>19</sup>

The point is that simple and common Christians were evangelizing their contemporaries wherever they were to be found—in the synagogues, in the streets, in the market, in homes, during business transactions, in the courts, in the military. In the same article Weinrich cites the role of women, concluding that “without question women played an important part in the church’s expansion.”<sup>20</sup>

The book of Acts states that Christians met in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); the Christians of Laodicea met in the house of a certain Nympha (Col 4:15); Dorcas was known for her acts of charity (Acts 9:36–39); Priscilla was an important helper to Paul (Acts 18:12; Rom 16:3). Weinrich points out that, according to one apocryphal document from the second century, a woman, Thecla, supposedly converted by Paul, baptized herself and dedicated herself thereafter to evangelism and was even called an “apostle.”<sup>21</sup>

## **Vocation Necessary for the Extension of the Kingdom**

Many theologians and missiologists argue that if the Word of the Gospel is to spread in our contemporary pluralistic, materialistic, secular, and post-Christian climate, the activity of common Christians is essential, just as it was in the Early Church. It is the doctrine of vocation that indicates that believers have this possibility and responsibility, and better yet, the privilege and commission, as common Christians (who are not in any way common in reality). God, by the call that He has extended to His people, has made them His own, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, etc., so that this priesthood would announce His excellencies.

This privilege belongs to those who are called through Baptism. Martin Luther, commenting on the priesthood of Melchizedek in relation to Psalm 110:4, uses the occasion to expound on duties of the royal priesthood:

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.

View *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

But after we have become Christians through this Priest and His priestly office, incorporated in Him by Baptism through faith, then each one, according to his calling and position, obtains the right and the power of teaching and confessing before others this Word which we have obtained from Him. Even though not everybody has the public office and calling, every Christian has the right and the duty to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke his neighbor with the Word of God at every opportunity and whenever necessary. For example, father and mother should do this for their children and household; a brother, neighbor, citizen, or peasant for the other. Certainly one Christian may instruct and admonish another ignorant or weak Christian concerning the Ten Commandments, the Creed, or the Lord's Prayer. And he who receives such instruction is also under obligation to accept it as God's Word and publicly to confess it.<sup>22</sup>

Here Luther shows the relationship between the faith to which Christians have been called in Baptism; vocation, which is exercised through various relations in life; and the duty and privilege of all believers, of announcing the Gospel continually, in daily life, in every moment when necessary.

### More Offices or Vocation?

There are some who believe that what the church needs are more officially recognized and authorized or ordained offices in the church in order to effect the expansion of the church. Some speak of the necessity for a special office of "evangelist," or "teacher," or "missionary," or some other office with an evangelistic and missionary responsibility. However, it seems clear that God gave to the Church everything it needs when He gave the royal priesthood so that each believer can do his or her part in the extension of the kingdom by exercising his or her vocation/calling. Vocation is about word and deed, proclamation and demonstration, to the end that lost sinners may "glorify God on the day of visitation." To quote Gene Veith again: "The doctrine of vocation charges our everyday lives and our mundane activities with spiritual significance, and it is indeed a powerful motivator to perform them with excellence."<sup>23</sup>

It seems clear that  
God gave to  
the Church everything  
it needs when  
He gave the  
royal priesthood so  
that each believer can  
do his or her part in  
the extension of the  
kingdom by exercising  
his or her  
vocation/calling.

A proper and full understanding of Christian vocation is possible only when its

missiological dimension is taken into account. The calling of Christians to faith includes with it the calling to make God's message of salvation known in every context of life. It is the calling for every Christian to do his or her part in the extension of God's kingdom. It involves the believer's way of life, the good deeds, a demonstration of fruits of the Spirit, but it also involves speaking the Word of life boldly and confidently "in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). A recovery of this "lost treasure" in the church could lead to incredible consequences as God's Spirit moves powerfully through His word, whether spoken from the pulpit by the pastor or at the workplace by the lay-believer.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article is an extensive revision of a paper presented at the IV Hispanic Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, held June 19–22, 2012 at Concordia University, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians 1535" in American Edition *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5-6; 1519, Chapters 1-6*, eds J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 36–39. Luther famously compared Christian doctrine ("the gospel in all of its articles") to a "golden circle," which, if it is destroyed or damaged, even partially, becomes totally useless. He recognized that the teachings of the Word of God are a unity and that all doctrines go together; that is, it is not possible to isolate one doctrinal point and change it without affecting the whole of doctrine. "Therefore, doctrine should be a circle of gold, round and eternal, in which there is no crack; if even a tiny crack appears, the circle is no longer perfect. . . ." See also Robert D. Preus, "Luther and the Doctrine of Justification," accessed December 29, 2015, <http://www.christforus.org/Papers/Content/Luther%20and%20the%20Doctrine%20of%20Justification.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene F. A. Klug, *Lift High This Cross: The Theology of Martin Luther* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2003). The entire fourth chapter of this book is dedicated to the theme, "The Heart and Soul of the Reformation—Sinners' Justification," 57–70.

<sup>4</sup> The understanding of the place and prominence of justification is where a fundamental difference (albeit often overlooked) between Lutheran theology and Roman Catholic theology becomes obvious. While Roman Catholic theology concedes that justification is "an indispensable criterion" in a correct theological system, for Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, justification is *the* integrating center of all faith and theology. This difference became abundantly clear during the development of the *Joint Declaration on Justification* affirmed by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999. Indeed, it was a point that Rome found necessary to highlight as a significant difference between its view of theology and the Lutheran perspective. "Another difficulty arises in n.18 of the Joint Declaration, *where a clear difference appears in the importance, for Catholics and for Lutherans, of the doctrine of justification as criterion for the life and practice of the Church*. Whereas for Lutherans this doctrine has taken on an altogether particular significance, for the Catholic Church the message of justification, according to Scripture and already from the time of the Fathers, has to be organically integrated into the fundamental criterion of the 'regula fidei', that is, the confession of the one God in three persons, Christologically centered and rooted in the living

Church and its sacramental life” (*Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification*, paragraph 2, accessed October 31, 2015, [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_01081998\\_off-answer-catholic\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_01081998_off-answer-catholic_en.html), (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> Author’s reminiscences from his time as a student at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1981–1986. Preus makes the same point in his book, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970). “Calov’s emphasis on the practical aim of theology, an emphasis that antedates the works of the pietists and goes back to Luther and Gerhard, is most important. He is following the old adage that what is not practical is simply not theological. He is linking inseparably doctrine and life. All theology is for concrete living” (194).

<sup>6</sup> See John Pless, “Vocation and Evangelism,” (2001) accessed December 28, 2015, <http://www.ctsfw.edu/document.doc?id=280>.

<sup>7</sup> The English word “church” has its roots in the Greek *kyriake*, implying “the Lord’s house.” Could the domain of meaning have subtly shifted from an emphasis on the *people* of God, to the building where God’s people meet? In Spanish, Portuguese, and even Bahasa Indonesia, the connection to the original Greek is more readily apparent where *Iglesia*, *Igreja*, and *Gereja* are direct descendants of *ekklēsia*.

<sup>8</sup> *Small Catechism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article.

<sup>9</sup> Gene Edward Veith, “The Protestant Work Ethic,” accessed October 31, 2015, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/protestant-work-ethic>.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Veith asserts that Weber saw Protestants as “ascetics,” which he identifies as a weakness in Weber’s model. One might also mention that for Weber vocation was primarily related to work, whereas clearly in Luther vocation has to do with all one’s relations, in work, family, civil life, and church. Moreover, hard work alone does not explain that which is needed to explain the technological advancement of the Western world. Lesslie Newbigin is no doubt right when he sees it as a worldview issue. He argues that the advancement of technology was made possible because of the Protestant biblical worldview, which saw the world as both rational and contingent, thus paving the way for scientific experimentation: “For to put it briefly, if the world is not rational, science is not possible; if the world is not contingent, science is not necessary” (Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 71). Without this worldview, diligence at work would be superfluous. An even more pernicious thought is when the “Protestant work ethic” is used to somehow justify self-glory, for example, that if one is blessed by God with material possessions it must be due to his or her hard work.

<sup>11</sup> Veith, *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian State” in American Edition *Luther’s Works, Vol. 44: The Christian in Society I*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 129–130.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> The response of Christians to the ongoing suffering they have experienced in the Middle East is said to be a most powerful testimony in the region. One example is the tract, produced

by the Bible Society of Egypt, *Two Rows by the Sea*, which is said to have an astounding effect on non-Christians who see Christians responding with mercy and forgiveness in the face of unimaginable persecution (<http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/bible-society-egypt-responds-love-enemy-message-christians-killed>, accessed November 1, 2015). Another is the witness of a young Iraqi refugee by the name of Myriam, who, in spite of having to flee her home to escape possible torture and death, tells a SAT7 reporter that she can only pray for those who are persecuting her in the hope that they too might find the light and freedom of the Gospel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ige6CcXuMg>, accessed November 1, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> William C. Weinrich, "Evangelism in the Early Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (January–April, 1981), 61–76.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–68.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther, "Psalm 110" in American Edition *Luther's Works, Vol. 13: Selected Psalms II*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House 1999), 333.

<sup>23</sup> Veith, "The Protestant Work Ethic."

# Did you know?

There are about 76 million members in all parts of the Lutheran family.

- About 72.5 in the Lutheran World Federation
- About 3.5 million in the International Lutheran Council

Lutherans by continent:

- Europe – 35 million
- Africa – 21.5
- Asia – 11.5
- North America – 6.5
- Latin America 1.5

The Church of Sweden is still the largest Lutheran denomination at 6.7 million members, but two churches in East Africa each have about 6 million members and are rapidly growing:

- The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

(All numbers approximate)



- ❖ *Renew your membership for 2016.*
- ❖ *Urge a friend to join.*

## **Lutheran Society for Missiology**

*Enter the conversation: "Why Lutheran Mission Matters."*

**Sharpen and challenge your mission understanding!  
Share your missional insights!**

**Visit us at: [lsfm.global](http://lsfm.global)**



- ❖ *Online articles,*
  - ❖ *educational videos,*
  - ❖ *make a gift,*
  - ❖ *Join LSFM*
- [lsfm.global/joinlsfm](http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm)**



**Like us on Facebook:**

**<https://www.facebook.com/LutheranSocietyforMissiology>**

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.  
View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

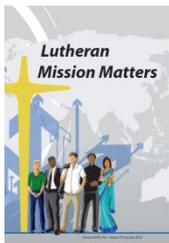
## Become a Member of LSFM!

Go directly to <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.html>  
or Click on “Join LSFM.”



Join in the mission of LSFM: through excellence in scholarship, to **inspire** and **challenge** Christians to **missional entrepreneurship** and **faithful practice**.

Become a member with a minimum gift of \$5.



Those who wish to receive **paper copies** of LSFM’s missiology journal, *Lutheran Mission Matters*, (2 issues per year) must contribute **a minimum of \$30**.

Gifts above the \$30 level enable LSFM to research and adopt new technologies that assist the Society in reaching and involving a broader and more diverse international audience.

Lutheran Society for Missiology is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service Code and donations are tax-deductible.

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.  
View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.  
Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.  
E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.

# Lutheran Mission Matters

Find the articles online. <http://lsfm.global>



Everyone may download either a PDF of the entire journal or individual articles for use at conferences, workshops, or in the classroom. These articles already have copyright permissions provided in the footer to help promote good missiology within the church.

The News tab is a link to the LSFM Facebook page, where posts impacting the mission of Christ along with news items are shared. Mission Work around the world and in the United States probably has never faced greater challenges or greater opportunities.

If you like the articles in this journal, be sure to visit the LSFM Web site to learn more about the challenges and opportunities for sharing the Good News of Jesus, and to join with a growing number of Lutherans committed to the missionary task God has given to His people.

Copyright 2016 Lutheran Society for Missiology. Used by permission.  
View Lutheran Mission Matters 24, no. 1 (2016) at <http://lsfm.global/>.

Membership in LSFM is available at <http://lsfm.global/joinlsfm.htm>.

E-mail [lsfmissiology@gmail.com](mailto:lsfmissiology@gmail.com) to purchase a print copy of a single issue.