

PASTOR AND PEOPLE: TOGETHER IN SERVICE

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on behalf of the Lutheran Church-Canada, East District

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Good day; and welcome to this first in a series of forums (or “fora” if you’re a purist) on “Pastor and People ...,” this one, “Pastor and People: Together in Service.” Three (3) more will follow: “Pastor and People: Together in Worship,” “...at the Table (Holy Communion),” and ... “in Missions.” I will try desperately to stay within the parameters of my assignment; and with your diligent guidance I am sure I will!

I am going to start talking and you are going to start listening -- if you are finished before I am, please let me know! Not much of what you hear today will be news to you. Pastors and people have been around for a long time; and for just as long they have been closely associated with one another in service -- to their God and Lord first and foremost, and to each other on intimate terms. The difficulty that arises in considering this relationship is the seeming familiarity we all have with the “status quo” -- while at the same time realizing that the “status quo” isn't! (Status quo: “the state in which” or the “existing state” keeps shifting!) And in recent times, the shifting has accelerated with uncommon haste! Some people think the shifting has accelerated out of control, while others see no need for alarm; and the varying perceptions appear among the clergy and the laity alike.

One of the consequences of a perceived shifting of the “status quo” led to a meeting dubbed “concern for Synod.” In order to be well prepared to meet changes and challenges that will be facing our District in the next years, a group of ten (10) pastors and one (1) deacon met in Scarborough on June 28, 2005 for an informal discussion about areas of common concern and how these concerns might be addressed. The meeting was held with the knowledge and consent of the District President, with one (1) of the District Vice Presidents in attendance. Others present were selected to represent the geographic areas of our District. This was done, in part, to facilitate a dissemination of the results of the meeting with the hope that it would

form the basis for a larger discussion at the Circuit and Congregational levels of our Church as it moves to meet the future needs of our members and society-at-large! I was present at that meeting.

All in all, five (5) areas of common concern were identified as needing attention at the various levels of our association with one another in the Church namely: individual members, congregations, pastors, and administrators in District, Synod, and inter-Synodical relationships. The five (5) areas of concern pointed out were: doctrine and practice (unionism, syncretism, open communion, substitution of the elements, non-approved hymnals and hymns, discipline), clear confession of the faith on every level, confession among the laity, communication or lack thereof (with and between District, pastors, and people), and politics taking precedence over theology. These concerns were “fleshed out”, and desired goals and means of achieving the goals were proposed to answer the concerns.

I was not present at the District Convention, but I believe that the Scarborough meeting and its discussions ultimately led to the formulation and adoption of Resolution 06-3-1 at the East District Convention held at Ancaster last year (2006). The Resolution : To Strengthen Doctrinal Unity in the East District (Ref. Overture 06-3-6) reads: ...

WHEREAS there is One Holy Christian and Apostolic Church, to which Christ, through the Apostles, has given One faith to confess (Eph. 4:5); and

WHEREAS the New Testament exhorts the Church to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:3); and

WHEREAS the New Testament and the Lutheran Confessions teach that the Church and her unity is created and sustained only by the preaching of the Holy Gospel and the administration of Holy Sacraments, and that it is agreement in this which “is enough for the unity of the Church” (AC, VII, 2); and

WHEREAS the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions further teach that such consists of agreement in “ALL articles of faith,” (FC, SD, X, 31), and not merely in some, for the Lord has called his Church to “observe everything I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:20); and

WHEREAS a church remains a true orthodox Lutheran Church only when she retains complete agreement
in the One Apostolic faith and in all articles of faith which have been given to her by the
Lord, as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, and confessed in the Lutheran Confessions;
and

WHEREAS an orthodox Lutheran Church will always desire to preserve the Church's unity by a
unanimous confession of the faith; and

WHEREAS there is a danger that the Church can mistakenly believe that unity exists where it does not or
that the unity of the Church is based only on external man-made structures and organizations,
rather than the Divinely instituted means of grace; and

WHEREAS the Lutheran Church-Canada under article III - objectives, of its constitution has as its very
first objective to conserve and promote the unity of the true faith;" and

WHEREAS from her beginning in 1879, District has faithfully given a high priority to doctrinal unity;
and

WHEREAS at the 2006 District Planning Conference, doctrinal unity was identified as a high priority in
our District for the next three (3) years; and

WHEREAS the November 2005 East District Church Workers Conference identified several doctrines
and
practices that need to be addressed namely the divine call, church and ministry, worship,
church discipline, Law and Gospel and Third Use of the Law, repentance and faith, and the
Lord's Supper; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the District President appoint a committee of pastors and lay persons to organize, and
disseminate information and provide guidance to the District for discussion on every level;
and be it further

RESOLVED that said committee gather information and suggestions from these discussions; and be it
further

RESOLVED that said committee communicate comments and recommendations to the District and the

next District convention via communication vehicles; and be it further

RESOLVED that all members, including lay persons, be encouraged to participate in these forums and conferences that deal with matters of Lutheran identity and Synodical unity; and be it finally

RESOLVED that the East District convention encourage the entire Synod to address these issues as well.

The adoption of that Resolution has resulted in a major effort to meet, discuss, and properly deal with what seems to divide, trouble, or adversely affect our working and worshipping together. Problems that are perceived are real, whether factually real or not, and must be addressed in frank, open, and loving dialogue. If the problems are perceived to be controversial, they are controversial; and we must recognize that controversy in the Church is not something new or newly invented! It is part of our sinful human nature -- so be it; but it need not gain the upper hand, nor spread as wildfire in our midst. "The devil knows his game," to quote my daughter; but he can be overcome and put down. "He's judged; the deed is done; one little word can fell him," is another quote that surely applies here!

Because our Church subscribes to the Lutheran Confessions as a true expression and confession of the one true faith of the Christian Church drawn from the Scriptures, we do well from time to time to turn to them for guidance. In the context of the issues before us, we learn that controversy in the early days of Lutheranism prompted our fathers in the faith to address the problems in the *Formula of Concord*, and prescribe ways to resolve disunity. I am grateful to brother Paul Williams for pointing out in his *Report and Recommendation to the Circuit Counselors/Board of Directors of LC-C, East District* on January 15, 2007, "In each of the controversies addressed by the *Formula*, there is always a carefully followed three-step process by which the controversy is to be resolved, and pure doctrine confessed." He went on to list the three (3): first, one must clearly state the exact thing which is under controversy (I'll come back to that in a minute or so); second, the truth be affirmed and confessed in clear written statements and theses which give a clear and unequivocal Christian witness; and third, it is necessary that the opponents who teach otherwise be reproved. In other words, in order for a full and clear confession of the faith to be done, that which is in contradiction to it must be clearly condemned. Having said all that, and more -- and now I want to go back to the first point -- even the *Formula of Concord* alludes to certain instances "where a controversy involves

only semantic differences,” to quote Williams, “differences in terminology which are, however, saying the same thing or using the same terminology in different ways or contexts. Or, two (2) parties may speak past one another about two (2) different things.”

This happens all-too-often, no matter how careful we may try to be. For years, I had a plaque on my desk given to me by my secretary. In carefully chosen words it reads: “I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant!” And just in case you think the caution expressed therein applies uniquely to me, allow me to quote, a few announcements from church bulletins scattered around the country:

- 1) Charlene Mason sang, “I Will Not Pass This Way Again,” giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- 2) The peacemakers’ meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.
- 3) Low Self-Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday. Please use the back door!
- 4) Don’t let worry kill you -- let the Church help.
- 5) Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Memorial Church. ... Come tonight and hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa. (*K-W Record*. June 29, 2001)

There are many more, but that gives you an idea of what happens with words. Then there are those that come from kids in Sunday School, expressed in thoughts they were certain they learned from their teachers:

- 1) Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree.
- 2) The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
- 3) Noah’s wife was Joan of Ark.
- 4) Lot’s wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night.
- 5) The epistles were the wives of the apostles.
- 6) The (sixth) commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
- 7) Moses died before he ever reached Canada.

(*Historic St. Paul’s Newsletter*. February, 2007)

Perhaps one more citation on the importance of words and their use will suffice to demonstrate the pitfalls of something less than clear communication. A little more than a century ago, Charles Dodgson, better known by his pseudonym, Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* wrote of this exchange between Alice and Humpty Dumpty. You may remember it from your school days.

“Humpty Dumpty took the book and looked at it carefully. ‘That seems to be done right ...’ he began. ‘You’re holding it upside down!’ Alice interrupted. ‘To be sure I was!’ Humpty Dumpty said gaily, as she turned it around for him. ‘I thought it looked a little queer. As I was saying, that seems to be done right -- though I haven’t time to look it over thoroughly just now -- and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents ...’ ‘Certainly,’ said Alice. ‘And only one for birthday presents, you know. There’s glory for you.’ (Humpty Dumpty said). ‘I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory’,’ said Alice. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. ‘Of course you don’t -- till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you’!’ ‘But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’,’ Alice objected. ‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more or less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, which is to be master -- that’s all.’ (*Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Ch. 6)

Enough said? The foregoing may be considered satire at its most blatant, and yet, the exchange is a microcosm of what goes on in the world -- and sometimes in church -- every day of our lives. We use, misuse, and abuse words and thoughts too frequently to demonstrate who is the master! In the world -- at least in our part of it -- we have given new meaning to such words as “marriage,” “gender,” and “parent.” In the Church -- at least some parts of it -- we have given strange meanings to such words as “resurrection,” “justification,” and “faith.” Even the use of the words “Church” and “Ministry” is liable to “throw a curve” at people. When we say “Church” what are we talking about? When we say “Ministry” what do we mean? Do you believe we can achieve the assurance that we are united in our use and understanding of these concepts? We should, at least, give it a try!

When the District Committee for Doctrinal Unity met on March 6, 2007 they summarized the earlier referenced Resolution (06-3-1) in four (4) categories, and under the heading “Pastoral Office” listed Church and Ministry (pastoral authority, the role of laity -- the pastoral office and the priesthood of all believers); Divine Call; Church Discipline -- the Office of the Keys. For our purpose today, we’ll consider the items in that same order.

The Church

Way back in the days when I taught regularly from *A Short Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism*, we looked at five (5) definitions of the word “Church.” It could mean, or refer to, a building (181D; 175D), a local congregation (181C; 175C), a denomination (181B; 175B), the visible Church of God (181A; 175A), or the Holy Christian church, the communion of saints, that is, the whole number of believers in Christ. (175; 169)

I am not aware of any major differences among us -- except perhaps for architectural preferences -- when we think of the Church as a building, or in defining the local congregation; and though there is at present a blurring of denominational lines -- even inter- and intra- Lutheran -- for the most part we are able to agree on what is Pentecostal, or Baptist, or Anglican, or United Church, or Roman Catholic. Inasmuch as we in Lutheran Church-Canada are “on paper” committed without reservation to:

- 1) The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
- 2) All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three (3) Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, the *Smalcald Articles*, the *Large Catechism of Luther*, the *Small Catechism of Luther*, and the *Formula of Concord*.
(*Constitution of Lutheran Church-Canada*, Art. II)

it follows that for us the primary understanding of “church” should flow from those sources -- Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Our doctrine re “church” is based, therefore, on our theology -- our study of God’s Written Word and our quia subscription to the Confessions.

There is no more simple nor basic, nor complete place to start than in our confession of the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints ...” In his God-given wisdom, Dr. Luther provides the meaning of our confession: “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. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith ...” The Church, then, is the communion of saints, all those who believe in Christ Jesus -- but only believers -- in Him who said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”! (John 14:6) The Holy Christian Church is what St. Paul calls it in 1 Cor. 12:27, “the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

In his letter to the Ephesians (Ch.4) St. Paul expands the concept of unity in the body of Christ, urging members of the Church to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” In the same chapter, he goes on to say (v.11), “It was He (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.”

Most certainly Scriptural, therefore, is the truth that the Holy Christian Church is the creation of Almighty God Himself -- chosen by God (1 Peter 2:9) “you are a chosen people; called and enlightened ...” (1 Cor.3:16) “you yourselves are God’s temple and ... God’s Spirit lives in you;” saved by God (John 3:16) “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son ...” It was created by God so that man, the crown of God’s creation, might be restored to the holiness in which he was created, but lost when our first parents disobeyed their Maker. Paul sets the direction when he instructs Timothy to pray “for kings and all

those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

(1 Timothy 2:2-4) If all men are to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, it is the task of the Church to show them the way, assigned by none other than Jesus Himself: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt.20:19, 20)

Paul said Jesus gave us the people and the tools to do the job; and Jesus said He has the authority to send us out to get the job done! Dr. August Suelflow, former director of the Concordia Historical Archives has written, “Everything the church says, does, and acts upon is en Christo -- if it is worth doing at all. The result of being in Christ, is that it places us into a partnership with one another so that we might build together. ...” However ... we are not talking about building with stones ... or mortar mixed in a very careful combination of cement and sand, but ... about a huge spiritual construction project which surpasses the great pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal, the St. Louis Arch, and the Empire State Building all put together. (He might have thrown in the Great Wall of China and the World Trade Center.) The construction or building about which we speak is the Church. It is so totally unique, that the world has never understood it and has never even gained a picture of it.” (*Built on Christ to Build Together*. Mo. District Convention Essay, 1982)

Building together toward such a major goal obviously calls for planning and organization. the Book of Acts tells us how that happened and was achieved in the early Church. During the developing stages of the Church the same necessity was recognized and accomplished in the vast expansion of Christendom. When our spiritual forefathers saw the need to begin anew in North America, once more major effort was called for in “doing together what we can not do alone” -- and a Synod was formed. More recently, Lutheran Church-Canada, in its formation, prescribed Objectives (Art. III - *LC-C Constitution*) whereby the building of the Church might continue -- unitedly and with due diligence to the task at hand.

The framers of the Constitution spelled it out in clearly identifiable terms, noting first that “The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall --

- 1) Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:10); work through its official structures toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17) and heresy. ...”

(Art. III - *LC-C Constitution*)

In the list of Objectives following this primary statement the Article goes on to recognize the responsibility of congregations (the Church) to give bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world; to recruit and train pastors and teachers and other professional church workers ...; to provide opportunities through which ... members may express Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs; to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools; to provide resources and opportunities for (sustaining) confessional unity in the true faith; to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety ...

... in harmony with our common profession of faith; to provide ... counsel and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers ... in the performance of their duties (and in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death).

That, my friends, is a load -- of building, of working together, of maintaining unity, and tests the will and commitment of every member of the Church! In one way or another it touches every facet to what it means to be Church! We have consistently agreed that the marks of the Church are the Word and the Sacraments; and that the identity of the Lutheran Church is presented in the three (3) Solas -- Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone. With St. Paul, “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor.1:23) But the Church doesn’t stop there. That’s where it starts! That’s why the load of being the Church is enunciated in the Objectives of our Constitution. When Jesus sends us out to teach all nations to obey everything He has commanded us, He knows full-well what He

expects from us. All kinds of words come to mind: faithfulness, loyalty, commitment, courage, honesty, integrity, boldness, dedication, knowledge, wisdom, selflessness, love, hope, determination, stewardship, perseverance -- and on goes the list that motivates the people of God to perform the service He requires, and which is our glorious privilege to perform.

As St. Paul writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Romans 12:4-12 and 1 Cor.12:1-31 the Body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church, like the human body is one, with many parts, each given and assigned to assist the whole. Hands, feet, eyes, ears and vital organs work together in the human frame, and in like manner pastors, teachers, evangelists, elders, musicians, administrators, and caregivers serve the effective purposes of the Church. As one who had the privilege to organize four (4) congregations in four (4) fundamentally different locales, I remain unabashedly amazed at how our gracious God watches over what is done in His name. In a matter of days after our work was begun -- knocking on doors, meeting with civic officials, locating possible sites for worship services, and all that goes in to “starting a mission” we were blessed with the appearance of teachers for Sunday School (they needed training, but they were willing to learn); a pianist, and later an organist; people who were willing to go with me to “knock on doors;” youth workers; people with financial and administration skills. In all four (4) places it was the same -- and we built together the Church of God.

How the “building” is done is in many ways “adiaphora.” That is, there is no Scriptural or Confessional prescription for the administrative structure of our spiritual building, either as a church body (Synod) or as a congregation. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, has seen fit to establish a hierarchy, organized into orders or ranks of clergy wherein each rank is subordinate to the one above it, all of whom are responsible ultimately to the Pope! Many Protestant denominations on the other hand, have no rank at all among the clergy, and are independently related to one another voluntarily, sometimes by geography alone. Our Synod, having derived its current structure from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, comes somewhere in the middle, without rank of clergy but with a definite commitment to membership within prescribed guidelines wherein each pastor, deacon, and congregation are bound to a standard defined in our Synod’s “Handbook.” Members’ rights, responsibilities, privileges, and boundaries

of operation are addressed with the expectation of adherence by all who consider themselves to be members in good standing. (cfr. Art. VI - "Conditions of Membership") What seems to escape the attention of many members of our congregations is that individually they are not members of LC-C, but participate in the Synod through membership in their congregation.

LC-C has chosen to divide itself administratively into three (3) Districts -- A.B.C., Central, and East; and these Districts in turn have chosen to divide themselves into Circuits. Neither are these structures prescribed by Scripture or the Confessions; but have been devised to better serve the congregations united voluntarily in LC-C. As a consequence of this freedom, the current administrative structures may change without fracturing our concept of "Church," but the manner of change, or the degree to which change takes place must rest with the people who make up the Church. The President of the Synod or District, or Board of Directors of Synod or District, or some appointed board or agency may not -- according to whim or personal belief take the church body in the direction of his or their own choosing. The same may be said for individual congregations, pastors, or deacons who are the members of the Synod!

What is true of the Church's structure as a Synod or District is true also of the congregation's structure. That it must, or should, have clearly identifiable operational precepts, serviced by specifically selected or appointed officers, the manner of selection, the number of offices identified, the responsibilities assigned to each office, the term or tenure of a given position or assignment, and other categories of service to be determined as necessary or useful is left to the discretion and needs of the local congregations. Certain requirements, I believe, face every congregation: the need for a qualified pastor (or at least access to one), elders or deacons (both titles are used to describe the same office), teachers (Sunday School, youth, adult), pianist/organist, church council (chairman, treasurer, financial secretary, etc.), voters' assembly come quickly to mind. Whatever is needed to fulfill the task our Lord has given His Church, and whoever is best qualified to serve in a given capacity to achieve our Lord's directives is essential to our understanding of our true purpose as His Church. While there may be no hard-and-fast rule or regulation to demand a specific response to a specific need, we have more than an adequate catalog of resources on which to rely. Books,

pamphlets, essays, tapes, DVDs. rosters of qualified speakers, and more are available at our choosing to assist in innumerable ways to reach our maximum level of service to Christ Jesus.

A serious roadblock in reaching our potential in service is the lack of commitment, or desire, or recognized necessity to “lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes, for you will spread out to the right and to the left ...” (Isa. 54:2, 3 as he prophesies the future glory of the Church). We are too busy looking after what every day throws at us. Families, jobs, or looking for a job, households, sick and aging parents, kids at school and in sport activities, doctors, dentists, waiting around in emergency wards -- I know the drill! And then there’s TV and movies and stage and golf and hockey and curling and the Grey Cup and the Stanley Cup and hunting and fishing and fixing up the camp or cottage. Where in the world are we supposed to find time to read the Bible regularly, or the Book of Concord, or a book such as *The Caring Elder* by a schoolmate of mine, Victor Constien. Does CPH really publish books to prepare for better Sunday School teaching? is there really a source of help within the District or Synod to guide us reaching out to do the work of an evangelist? But even if that were the case, when in the day am I able to give any serious attention to personal participation in the realm of Church membership? (This in no way is meant to disparage, ridicule, or lose sight of the many men, women, and children who are -- in a committed and dedicated way -- already actively and joyfully giving of themselves wholeheartedly to Jesus.) Think how much more Christian influence could be brought to bear on our society if more than one-third of our people (rough estimate based on attendance at services of worship) cared enough to speak-up; if Christians would care enough to be disciplined to act according to their profession of faith; if pastors and people alike and together had the confidence in the power of the Word to exercise regularly the power of prayer. This is not “pie-in-the-sky” pipe-dreaming. It is the Church being the Church.

Ministry

“There is great confusion today between the doctrine of the holy ministry and the doctrine of the priesthood of believers.” So wrote Dr. Edwin Lehman, president of Lutheran Church-Canada, in his essay to the Synod’s 2nd Convention in 1990. “All those who by faith in Christ Jesus have been declared to be

God's children are priests before God. Peter assured the scattered Christians in Asia Minor, 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. ...' (1 Peter 2:9) The priesthood thus embraces all believers."

On the same subject, the priesthood of all believers, Dr. Bryan King, currently the Pastor of St. Luke Lutheran Church in Ottawa and 2nd Vice President of the East District, in an essay delivered to the District Pastoral Conference in 1989 (April 9), wrote, "The Priesthood of All Believers is a most important doctrine for pastors to understand. As members of this 'Priesthood,' pastors have the same function as every saint, but as pastors they have the added responsibility of 'equipping the saints for the work of ministry.'" He cites Eph. 4:12 as his authority; and there we read, together with the preceding verse, "It was He (Christ Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ (the Church) may be built up ..."

Beyond what Lehman and King say about the priesthood of all believers, both agree -- on Scriptural and Confessional grounds -- as do the numerous other authorities I have referenced on the subject (including the likes of Luther, Walther, Mueller, Marquardt, Kuntz, et. al.) the office of the holy ministry (what Luther called "das Predigamt") is a special gift that Christ bestowed on everyone included in the priesthood of all believers, nor is everyone in the priesthood of all believers aware of the distinction -- hence the confusion of which Lehman speaks. "What we find happening today," he says, "is that the laity, the members of the universal priesthood, are often given the impression that it is a special honor if they can publicly function in the holy ministry. Thus John Doe reads a lesson or assists with distribution of Holy Communion and is thrilled that he has played the role of minister. This is a role to which God has not called him."

In harmony with Lehman's observations, Bryan King writes, "Concerning the office of the 'clergy' as compared to the status of a layman, Luther makes the following observation: 'There is only an external difference because of the office to which one is called by the congregation.'" (*Luther's Works*, Vol.30, p.55) Notice here Luther's reference to the call by the congregation -- we'll come back to that later!

Staying with Dr. King's essay, "There is a difference, not in the quality or ultimate purpose of the work of , but in the duties assigned to different Christians by the Christians themselves. Luther states: 'A Christian congregation, however, should not and cannot be without the Word of God. It follows, therefore, logically enough from the foregoing, that it must have teachers and preachers to administer this Word. ...' (*Works of Martin Luther*, Vol.4, p.79) Since it is in the best interest of the individual congregations to have the offices properly filled, Luther makes the following observations: 'Therefore, we must do as the Scriptures say, and call and appoint from among ourselves men who are found fit for this work, and whom God has enlightened with understanding and endowed with the requisite gifts.'" (emphasis mine) (*Works of Martin Luther*, Vol.4, p.79) Elsewhere, Luther states categorically, "no one should undertake to preach or to declare the Word of God unless he is a priest" (and here the word "priest" is used in reference to the called clergy). (*Luther's Works*, Vol.30, p.54)

Having earlier cited Eph. 4 for perspectives into the various assignments, positions, and functions within the body of Christ, we might readily add reference to 1 Cor.12 to guide our understanding of the different roles for which God's people are gifted. As Dr. King points out, "The concept of different positions (externally different) is not an excuse to behave as though one holding one office is better than another holding a different office. It is God who arranges the members within the church (the Body of Christ). ... God is the one doing the appointing, for the good of His Church." Going no farther in this presentation, then, and saying no more about the office or the men who are called to it, let it be firmly understood by all that we have a doctrine clearly taught in Scripture, expressed and endorsed by our Confession, espoused by our Church's theologians, and addressed in the Handbook of LC-C (Bylaw V) - the doctrine of the Call.

As soon as I say that, however, I am confronted with a paper presented at two (2) joint meetings of the Systematic departments of both LCMS seminaries, and represents a consensus of these departments on the subject, *The Office of the Holy Ministry*. The paper is the work of Joel Okamoto, Asst. Prof. of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., and is printed in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, April, 2006. I realize the two (2) seminaries of the LCMS are not part of our Church, but many

of us in the ministry here today were trained at those schools; and I have learned through personal experience that it is not looked upon with favour to question what goes on or comes out of the LCMS because of our “fellowship relationships!”

Okamoto begins his paper, “The office of the holy ministry remains a significant topic in important discussions and debates. ...The topic arises most frequently in discussions about lay ministers, mission and evangelism, and the relationship of congregations with their ministers. ...and elsewhere ...absolution and church discipline, the nature of ordination (e.g., whether it ought to be numbered as a sacrament) pastoral education (e.g., field education, vicarage, alternate routes, and teachers of theology), the tenure of calls, auxiliary offices, and the duties of elders. ...To be sure there is no disagreement and confusion about what constitutes the Lutheran articles of doctrine. There is, however, much disagreement and confusion about how we should embody these articles in our lives, including how we should embody the Lutheran doctrine of the office of the holy ministry.” (Is this, simply put, a matter of practicing what we preach???) Okamoto goes on to say, “For instance, it is one thing to confess: ‘no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper (public) call’ (CA XIV). But it is another thing to discern what courses of action properly embody this doctrine when no pastor is available for God’s people, or when considering how seminarians might acquire skill in preaching and teaching, or when a congregation has many homebound in need of preaching and the Lord’s Supper.”

This latter concern touched me personally in several ways. While I was still a student at the seminary, I was assigned “local field work,” which included primarily conducting youth activities and teaching an adult Bible Class at a church in St. Louis; as well as having been given permission and encouraged to preach in my home congregation whenever possible. My vicarage assignment took me to the boondocks of southwestern Colorado and northwestern New Mexico. My “bishop” (supervising pastor) lived two (2) mountain passes and a high “hill” away -- some 180 miles distant -- and I saw him twice in the year I was there. Because of the remoteness of the area, and the desire of the Colorado District to establish two (2) mission congregations under my watch, the District President gave me permission -- and the instruction -- to preach the Word , administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, evangelize

(or make calls on) the two (2) communities I was serving, and ultimately “organize” and constitute the two (2) congregations. Interestingly enough, when one of our young ladies asked me to perform her wedding, even though the State of Colorado allowed me the privilege to do so by “virtue of my office,” the District President said, “No!”

Much more recently -- since my retirement from office -- I have been asked to serve congregations in a number of ways. Many times, without a formal “call” from the congregation involved, I have been asked to administer the Lord’s Supper, and on at least three (3) occasions to perform a Baptism.

Difficult or not, Okamoto maintains, “discerning faithful ways of embodying our doctrine is just as basic a Christian responsibility as confessing our doctrine. ...The office of the ministry does not exist simply by virtue of apostolic precedence or for the sake of good order, but by virtue of Christ’s will and for the sake of the salvation of sinners. ...Our thinking and conversation (therefore) as well as our practices and policies should be consistent not only with particular passages in the New Testament (e.g., John 20; Mt.28) and the Confessions (e.g., CA V; XIV) but also should be consistent with the ways the Scriptures and the Confessions present and discuss the office ... within God’s plan and work of salvation through Jesus Christ.”

Parenthetically, to demonstrate how interpretation of what appear to be clear statements of Scripture and/or the Confessions change, over against these previously stated concepts, we find this interesting note in a paper on *The Doctrine of the Call* presented by the sainted professor Dr. P.E. Kretzmann: “It would seem to be a matter of wisdom, if not necessity, to have all acts connected specifically with the means of grace performed by a man ‘regularly called’ (RITE VOCATUS), so that ordinarily the distribution of the Lord’s Supper be done by full pastors only (emphasis mine), not by students of theology or by lay elders.” This is said immediately following his declaration, “It is clear, then, according to the Bible, that the call, properly speaking, refers to the entire office of the ministry and includes all its functions. This is clearly indicated also in our Confessions, not only in ART. V. ... but also in ART. XIV.” (Northern Nebraska District Convention, August 20-24, 1934)

On the basis of such passages as 1 Thess.5:12, 13 and Hebrews 13:17 Kretzmann writes, “A man holding the ministerial office proper is responsible for every soul in the congregation in teaching, in admonishing, in reproving, in applying the Word to every condition and circumstance of life ... In short: the office of the ministry (DAS PFARRAMT) is established by God. All auxiliary offices of the Christian ministry, on the other hand, are established by the congregation (or synod).” (Ibid, p.8) Relative to the privilege and right to call, Kretzmann cites C.F.W. Walther: “Since the congregation or the church of Christ, that is, the assembly of believers, is in immediate possession of the Keys and of the priesthood (Mt.18:15-20; 1 Peter 2:5-10), therefore it is she, and can only be she (emphasis mine) through whom, namely through whose choice, call, and sending, the office of preaching, which is publicly in charge of the Office of the Keys and of all priestly offices in the congregation, is committed to certain persons fitted therefor.” (Kirche und Amt, 245) Our Confessions are right then in saying, “For wherever the Church is, there is the authority (command) to administer the Gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. ...Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists.” (*Smalcald Articles, Conc. Trigl.*, 523)

Though one does not hear much about it anymore, there once was significant emphasis imposed on the divinity of the call. We almost always spoke of “the divine call” of the pastor. Perhaps it is better that less is made of the terminology in a day when various ecclesiastical roles are commonly called into question. For example: what is an elder, what is an officer of the congregation?; may a woman be an elder?; may a woman be a chairman?; do female teachers have a “call”?; do men teachers have a “call”?; do those “called” teachers have a “divine call?” -- and if not, why not? For example, “is the teaching of religion a function of a divine call if done by a pastor while it is not ... if performed by an assistant in school? Is the encouraging or admonishing of a Christian brother a function of a divine call if done by a pastor, while it cannot be so regarded if a duly elected elder ...takes care of this duty? Kretzmann makes the point that both Luther and Walther recognize the divine character of the work of auxiliary officers, and concludes: “We are aware of the fact that the term “divine call” is one of ecclesiastical terminology (though) there are such as have confined the term to its restricted and narrowest conception, to the PERSON holding the ONE FULL OFFICE established in Scriptures. ... If we should, therefore, insist upon separating the divinity of the

auxiliary functions from the work as soon as this is performed by duly accredited assistance, then we should practically be compelled to have the pastor perform all such functions in person at all times, such as instructing ALL the children, admonishing ALL the laggards, (and all the rest).” (Ibid., p.12)

Since the fundamental purpose of the office of the ministry is to save sinners, the existence of the office itself will lead to questions and challenges relative to its authority or power. Ministers in the exercise of their calling perform deeds that God alone has the right and power to perform. Hence, in our liturgies the pastor announces, “by virtue of my office as a called an ordained servant of the Word ... and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Mt.28:18; Jn.20:21, 22; Lk.24:49) Through Christ’s calling the apostles were given not only the responsibility but also the authority to speak and act in God’s name. Through call and ordination, ministers are given not only the responsibility to speak and act in God’s name, but also the power. (cfr. Okamoto)

Part IV of Prof. Okamoto’s paper on the Office of the Holy Ministry centres on the premise: “The whole church’s possession of the power of the keys relativizes neither the necessity nor the authority of the office of the holy ministry, but it confers to the church both the right and the responsibility to call and ordain ministers.” We will come back to the office of the keys, but at this time, we want to say a few things about the word “minister” as it appears in this context, and about the rite of ordination. When we talk about the office of the holy ministry, our thoughts quite often and naturally go to the one holding the office -- and frequently in our thoughts make the nonchalant interchange of the words “minister” and “pastor”. “Minister” is a word that implies far more than the word “Pastor”, and while it is not of serious consequence to use one word or the other in discussing the matter before us, we might do well to keep in mind that a man is a pastor because he is called and placed in a congregation . This distinction, by agreement, came out of the inter-Lutheran, Grabau-Saxon debates of 160 years ago, (*Augsburg Confession XIV: Does It Answer Current Questions On the Holy Ministry*. Naomichi Masaki, Asst. Prof. of Systematic Theology, C.T.Sem. Fort Wayne, Indiana)

On the ordination of pastors, LC-C drew up the following for its 1981 Convention: “*Statement On the Holy Ministry and Ordination*. ... ‘The Church calls; and the Church ordains qualified male candidates for the office of the Holy Ministry. These called and ordained pastors are to exercise the Office of the Keys in the Church as the under shepherds of Christ, the Good Shepherd...’”

Though to my knowledge LC-C has not officially adopted all the statements of faith and belief formally endorsed by our mother Synod (LCMS), neither has LC-C rejected such. Appropriately, therefore, we may go directly to the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (Proceedings of 1932, pp.154, 155) where we read: “Although the office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, 1 Peter 4:11; that is to say, it is the duty of Christians to yield unconditional obedience to the office of the ministry whenever, and as long as, the minister proclaims to them the Word of God, Hebrews 13:17; Lk.10:16. If, however, the minister, in his teachings and injunctions, were to go beyond the Word of God, it would be the duty of Christians not to obey him (emphasis mine), so as to remain faithful to Christ, Mt. 23:8. Accordingly, we reject the false doctrine ascribing to the office of the ministry the right to demand obedience and submission in matters which Christ has not commanded.

“Regarding ordination we teach that it is not a divine, but a commendable ecclesiastical ordinance. (*Smalcald Articles. Triglot*,p.525)”

Another source once endorsed and widely-used throughout the LCMS is a booklet written by Rev. George Luecke and published by CPH (no date) entitled, *Distinctive Doctrines and Customs of the Lutheran Church*. “With regard to the ministerial office and its functions, several customs prevail ... One of these is the rite of ordination, i.e., the solemn setting aside for, and induction of, a person into the sacred office by prayer and the laying on of hands. The Lutheran Church, indeed, does not consider ordination an essential prerequisite for the performance of ministerial functions, because there is no command for it in the Scriptures. All that is essentially necessary for that is the call. Thus the *Augsburg Confession* says: ‘No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called? (ART. XIV

Concordia Triglotta, p.49) ... Luther says: ‘He who is called is consecrated and may preach to him who gave the call. That is our Lord’s consecration.’ But while there is no Scriptural command for ordination, there is abundant Scriptural precedent for it. (See Acts 6:5, 6; 13:1, 3; 1 Tim. 4:14) And, therefore, ordinarily no one would be permitted to hold the ministerial office in the Lutheran Church without having previously received ordination.” Luecke adds that “this rite of ordination, based as it is upon Scriptural precedent, has universally prevailed in the Christian Church since its earliest days, and is in vogue in nearly all branches of the Church (to) this day, with important differences, however, in its administrationIn the Lutheran Church it is looked upon as the public attestation of the Church that the candidate is duly qualified (emphasis mine) and called to the holy office; hence it is conferred in its name by the officers of the Church (with us by the synodical Presidents) or, under due authorization from them, by any pastor in their stead.” (6th Printing, pp.49, 50) (qualification, cfr. LC-C Const. Bylaw V, 5.21)

When we were graduated from the Seminary, we were told to get authorization for our ordination from the President of the District in which was located the congregation to which we had been called, and wherein our ordination and installation would take place. Because my first “call” did not come from a congregation, but from the Ontario District Department of Missions, to a mission that did not yet exist, Ontario District President Walter Rathke suggested I be ordained in my home congregation. The actual Call Documents I received, properly labeled *Diploma of Vocation*, were essentially the same, though not totally identical to those still in use. (*See Attached Sample*)

Note carefully in the Diploma itself the words, “In the name of the Triune God and by His authority ...” and “We pray God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has moved us to extend our call to you, to convince you by His Holy Spirit that it comes from Him ...” Note carefully, as well, the content of the *Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation*, relative to the listed obligations of both pastor and people. Who may be called as pastor by congregations that are members of LC-C is specified in our Synod’s Constitution. In the broader sense, every congregation has the right to call, no matter its size, percentage of delinquent members, meagerness of contributions to the larger body, or whatever other impediment might

be recognized. If the congregation submits to God's Word and wants the Gospel proclaimed, it may rightly call a pastor. (cf. *Smal.* Art. III, X:13. Tappert, p.314; *TPPP* 67, Tappert, p.331)

Having taken a peek at what the Scriptures, the Confessions, and some of our theologians have said concerning the office of the holy ministry, listen to a few excerpts from an essay that addresses the role of some who fill the office, prepared by one of our contemporary pastors, sent to me but not necessarily intended for publication. Though I feel constrained not to identify him for this reason, I feel no compunction for personally taking whatever criticism or fault you may find in what he says.

“Those involved in the various ecumenical dialogues attempt to overcome historic differences by stressing the respective “concerns” of the different communions engaged in dialogue. While this is usually done to blur doctrinal differences, let's use this approach to seek a greater consensus among those who may well be in doctrinal agreement even while they disagree on certain liturgical matters.”

“The High Church men care about pastoral authority because they care about the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Are Christ's faithful ministers put into office by God? Do they speak for Christ? Does Jesus impart salvation through the words which his ministers speak? Does Jesus still have authority on earth to forgive sins, or did He take that authority to heaven with Him?”

“No ...” “It is given concretely, actually, truly, that is, really given, by Jesus Christ Himself right here on earth where we live. Jesus tells His pastors to give it. And Jesus tells His dear sheep to go to the faithful pastor to receive it.”

“No Lutheran can argue with this theology. I am confident that this theology is the basis of the renewed emphasis on the sacraments, liturgy, true pastoral authority, and other topics which have caused some controversy among Lutherans ...” “They are viewed with a great deal of suspicion by many midwestern Lutherans who associate High Church with Rome. Perhaps we all need to think a bit more theologically, and to be a bit more tolerant of one another.”

“The vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ is not a doctrinal detail to be learned, affirmed, and set aside in favor of something more satisfying. It rather flows into the here and now through the ministry of Christ on earth. The One who ministered by giving His life a ransom for many (Mt.20:28) has never stopped serving His church through His ministers. Jesus brings the fruit of His atoning work to us today. He does so through His ministers.” ... “Put simply, the pastor is to show us Jesus who saves us from our sins. That’s his job, and the High Church men really do take it seriously.”

“Credible and legitimate criticism of the High Church men can come only from those who believe in and support the true biblical and evangelical authority of the pastoral office. It is true that in every pastor there is a little pope. It is equally true that in many congregations there are bullies who enjoy putting the pastor in his place. There are also those who have a very unlutheran understanding of the proper relationship between pastor and people. They presume to dictate to the pastor how he may and may not carry out the duties which God gave him in his call. They elevate the god of democracy over the word of God and office of the word.”

“Having said that, the High Church men do often speak of the ministry in a way which is less than helpful. A “sacramental” or “ontic” understanding of the office of the ministry which is placed in conscious opposition to a “merely” functional view has no basis in the Scriptures or the confessions and is very misleading. There is no office apart from function. If there is no function, there is no office. The minister says the things God wants him to say and that is what makes him a minister of Christ. That is not to say that the minister is anything at all. He is nothing. A “sacramental” or “ontic” emphasis ought also to emphasize that the only authority of the office is the authority of the word. Confusion results from placing an “ontic” and a “functional” view of the ministry into a false tension.”

“One also hears comments concerning the absolution as spoken by the pastor being something different than an absolution spoken by a layman who does not hold the office. Some have suggested that a

layman can give one the assurance of forgiveness as in, for example, the declaration of grace from *TLH (The Lutheran Hymnal)* page 5, but that only a pastor can absolve, that is, speak words which actually convey the forgiveness of sins. This is bad theology. Now a layman ought not to presume to act according to an office to which he is not called. It is a terrible abuse for layman to preach or to administer the Lord's Supper. It shouldn't be tolerated. But I hope no one is suggesting that a word spoken by a called and ordained minister could possibly have any more validity or efficacy than that same word spoken by any baptized child of God, young or old, male or female. The word is always over the office, in fact it creates the office, and there is nothing to the office beyond or above or beside the word itself."

"On the matter of what is and isn't Lutheran in the area of tradition, we should remember that tradition, if it has been interrupted, is no longer tradition. You may not simply introduce a long neglected symbolic feature of the liturgy, for example, and expect people to accept it, understand it, and welcome it. If the symbolism does not aid in the preaching and teaching of God's word, it is useless. The High Church Lutheran pastor who sets out to "educate" his parishioners on why it is "Lutheran" to do all sorts of things which they regard as "Catholic" (i.e., Roman) would be better off -- and his congregation would be better off -- if he simply stuck to the liturgy in the hymnal, chose good hymns, and concentrated on preaching good sermons."

"We cannot jump back over three (3) centuries." ... "it is naive to assume that we may reestablish forms and practices which have fallen into disuse among us." ... "If the laity tend more towards biblicism than confessionalism, well, that's life. We may not simply assert that this or that ceremony, vestment, symbol, or whatever, is "Lutheran" and expect people to accept our assertions. People know what is tradition. It is what they have received from their fathers, not what their ancestors 250 to 300 years ago received from their fathers. So, instead of wasting time and effort and risking wholly unnecessary conflict and opposition from 20th century traditionalists by seeking to "educate" them in matters where our Lord has not sought to educate us, we should find in what we have received (and in what our parishioners have received) that one thing needful which is our privilege and duty to teach."

“When we have the mass invasion of anti-creedal, anti-confessional, anti-Lutheran, anti-Christian, Church Growth fanaticism into formerly conservative Lutheran congregations, the solution is not building confessionals and teaching kids how to cross themselves! The solution is not to displace the doctrine of justification as the article on which Church stands by replacing it with incoherent mumblings about incarnational this or sacramental that, while the laity never quite figure out what you’re talking about. I would plead with all of the liturgically correct High Church pastors to consider that their best allies in the fight against Church Growthism, unionism, liberalism, and the invasion of the Arminian model in our Lutheran parishes are the Bronze Age laymen who perhaps don’t want Communion every Sunday, and perhaps think you’re silly to make such a big deal about private confession and absolution because they know (even if you don’t) that it just won’t fly with most folks today. Please don’t judge them to be less than Lutheran! They are Lutheran! They may not know as much theology as you, but they know more than you about people, and life, and the way things work in this life. They know that, regardless of how you present it, new is new is new, and new is new according to the experience of those who’ve never done it before!”

“I ask what gives any pastor the right to go into a parish and make as the test of orthodoxy what is not clearly established in the Bible? From the point of view of the layman who has come to know his Lord through the liturgical forms which he has inherited, the liturgically correct High Church pastor who presumes to “educate” the congregation on the “proper” way to worship (as if they have had it all wrong for generations) is just as obnoxious as the Church Growth jackass who comes in and throws out the liturgy all together.”

“If you want to introduce something which is new to the experience of your parishioners, it will be new regardless of its former status as a tradition. If the people want it, especially if they will receive it as a gift (not law but gospel) then go for it.”

“Now I’m just saying it the way people see it. We ought to retain the historic liturgy. We ought to retain the ordinary of the divine service. We ought to encourage frequent communion. We ought to offer

(without being too pushy) personal, private absolution for those who desire it. And do you know what? Many Bronze Agers have been doing this for years!”

“If you want to look at the liturgical spectrum within confessional Lutheranism in America, you will find that those of us who find our unity in the pure gospel and sacraments of Christ, that is, in the pure doctrine, range from High Church to Low Church and don’t judge one another on the basis of adiaphora.”

“The Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers were European. Are we to amend our confessional subscription to say that we will accept the Confessions only in so far as they don’t impose on us 16th century German cultural biases which allegedly crept into these documents?”

“Just as the High Church men should not imagine that they can jump over the centuries to reestablish what has long been lost (and pass it off as “traditional” when the laity know that it is “Catholic”), the “Bronzies” should be honest enough to admit that what the 19th century confessional Lutherans in America established as the best church polity for their day has evolved into something which frequently threatens the integrity of the office of the ministry. What do you get when you combine universal suffrage, doctrinal agnosticism, confessional collapse, the unionistic spirit, anti-clericalism, presentism (that is, an anti-traditionalism), and a few other trendy “isms” plaguing the church today? You get a full frontal assault on the Lutheran doctrine of the ministry. The voters’ assembly then becomes the enemy of Christ’s ministry.”

“When we evaluate a pastor or theologian, we should not do so on the basis of his liturgical style, but on the basis of the orthodox substance of his theology. The fact that certain liturgical styles flow out of bad theology is simply a fact of life. We criticize these forms because they cannot be divorced from the bad substance from which they come. We don’t evaluate worship forms primarily on the basis of aesthetics, but on the basis of doctrine.”

“(What) needs to be said is that for a Lutheran the pure doctrine is paramount, and everything -- liturgy included -- must be judged by this standard. Those who are into liturgical correctness and regard

themselves as High Church might want to keep in mind that most of us conservatives in our forties and older remember when the High Church guys were viewed as ecumenical, liberal, dandies who imitated the Episcopalians in order to obtain respectability among the religious elite. In short, they were seen as snobs. The last thing a pastor needs is a reputation as a snob. The critics of the High Church men should sit down and talk theology with them in order to discover that most of these men are good Lutheran theologians with a love for the truth and a love for the souls of those they have been called to serve.

Church Discipline/Office of the Keys

I grew up in a small mining town on the shore of Lake Superior. The population, at the time of my birth, had begun to diminish as the mines were emptied of their ore, but at the peak of the industry the community numbered over 60,000 people. For the most part -- in spite of the toughness developed within them because of the mining lifestyle, harsh weather in long winters, and hard-rock surroundings -- the people were happy, caring, contented, loving. They enjoyed each other and worshipped their Lord in numerous churches throughout the area. One of the largest of these, if not the largest, was the French Roman Catholic Church. I don't remember how many people were members there, but everybody in town "knew", and thought highly of, the French priest. He was a jovial sort, and did not always take himself seriously. Rumours floated around about his love for life, his drinking habits, and his coy fondness for the ladies. The rumours didn't seem to bother him a bit, and the adults in my life would often repeat one of his more common expressions: "Don't do as I do; do as I tell you!"

I never heard the man conduct a mass; never worshipped in his church; never heard a foul word come from his mouth; and certainly had no firsthand knowledge of his relationship with the ladies -- though from time to time I would overhear a conversation between my mother and the lady who lived across the street from us, when she (our neighbour, not my mother) would express her fondness for Father "so-and-so".

“Don’t do as I do -- do as I tell you!” might be a succinct way of phrasing the opposite of “practice what you preach!” This is, to coin another aphorism, “where the rubber hits the road.”

In a true sense of the real, Church Discipline involves practicing what you preach. For some reason, many people and pastors alike shy away from any thought of church discipline, perhaps because of some erroneous misconception that discipline is wrong -- inside and outside the Church! Were that the case -- that discipline is wrong, or that its application is somehow a violation of decency and good order -- I seriously doubt that the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the founders of our Church would have had so much to say about the need for discipline, or hold out for the Church’s use of that which we label, “The Office of the Keys.”

Before going any farther along this road, I want to express my personal disappointment in what I perceive to be happening in our approach to the Office of the Keys. When I was a catechumen, and when I taught the Small Catechism in my catechism classes in the parish ministry beginning in 1955, we dealt with the “six (6) chief parts of Christian doctrine” -- namely: the Ten Commandments, The Creed, The Lord’s Prayer, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, The Office of the Keys and Confession, and The Sacrament of the Altar.

A Short Explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism (Copyright 1943, CPH) was more or less the prescribed and accepted primary course of instruction in preparation for Confirmation in those days. My last catechetical instruction in preparation for Confirmation occurred when I left the parish ministry near the end of 1968.

Absence from the parish ministry did not terminate my use of, nor my affection for, my dear Catechism! But personal attachment to this wonderful instrument for learning, and its regular use in my own life did not relate to the joy I had in using it with the young people of the congregations I served. Nor did it prepare me for the surprise I experienced when in September of 2002 -- nearly 34 full years after I had left the parish -- I returned to full-time service as a vacancy pastor. In preparation for teaching the

Catechism to young catechumens again, and intending to follow the directions set by the pastor-on-leave, I encountered the “new” Catechism (copyright CPH 1986) for the first time.

I was dismayed -- to say it politely -- to discover that the Fourth Commandment in the “new” Catechism did not repeat the promise given in Scripture: “Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land. ...” (Exodus 20:12 ESV) (“That thou mayest live long on the earth” was the way I learned it). I had no problem with the upgrade in the language of the day, but why exclude the promise, “the first commandment given with a promise,” my pastor told us a long time ago! I phoned CPH that day in September 2002, and after running through a goodly section of staff personnel I was connected to a man whose name escapes me, but who spoke as one in authority, and simply answered that a different source of Luther’s work formed the basis for the current form of the commandment in the Catechism. When I suggested that Moses, and not Luther, produced the original in the Book of Exodus I was told that what is in the Catechism is in the Catechism! My response was , “That’s too bad!”

Advancing farther into the book I was again surprised, but not quite as dismayed by what I call the “downplaying” of the Office of the Keys. Mind you, the content is still there, but the emphasis seems to have changed -- and in the light of what has apparently been happening in some of our congregations, I am beginning to understand why! Too often in recent times I have heard the complaint of persons in the pew alluding to pastoral emphasis on confession and absolution. As was said earlier today perception is often more real than reality; and the perception among many is that the pastor has said there is no absolution without confession and there is no confession unless it is before the pastor! No Lutheran, layman or pastor, will deny the need for confession and absolution. Our prayers, our creeds, our liturgies, our services of worship, our whole conduct, our very life as the communion of saints is replete with the doctrine of confession and absolution:

1 John 1:8-10 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (ESV)

- James 5:11 Confess your sins to one another. (ESV)
- Acts 3:19 Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out. (ESV)
- Psalm 32:3, 5 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ...I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. ..." (ESV)
- Proverbs 28:13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (ESV)

We don't have to develop here a complete Concordance of the Scriptural passages that urge us to confess our sins; nor do I believe we have any serious argument with our Lutheran Symbols re confession and absolution. The problem arises, it seems to me, in the emphasis imposed on the relationship between the Office of the Keys and the confession of sins.

Much emphasis is currently being applied to parts of the Lutheran Confessions specifically addressing the issues of Confession and Absolution. See, for instance, the article by brother Thomas Korcok printed in the September, 2006 issue of the Canadian Lutheran. "When the *Book of Concord* speaks about confession and absolution, it always means private (emphasis mine) confession and absolution." Does it? "The Lutheran fathers regarded this matter so highly that, in some places, they referred to it as a sacrament," Korcok writes. "Thus the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states, 'Therefore Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance, are truly sacraments. For these rites have God's command and the promise of grace, which is peculiar to the New Testament.'" (AP. XIII.4)

Again, there is no argument against what the *Apology* has to say; and I am not proposing doing away with confession and absolution; but the change in emphasis has gone so far that some pastors propose the necessity for private confession, without which there is no absolution. Further -- and this is another change in the "new" Catechism -- there seems to be a not-so-subtle change in the definition of the word "sacrament" as we have commonly and historically used the word in our church. Though the Roman Catholic Church has its own number and definition for "sacrament," we have in our church's history

counted only two (2), and by definition limited the appellation to Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar (the Lord's Supper). Even the current Catechism appears to have difficulty in presenting a valid number for our recognition of the word, answering the question, "How many such sacraments are there?" this way: "by this definition (the formerly commonly accepted -- a sacrament is a sacred act, instituted by God, in which God himself has joined His Word of promise to a visible element, and by which He offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ) there are two (2) sacraments: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. NOTE: Sometimes Holy Absolution is counted as a third sacrament, even though it has no divinely instituted visible element. (*Large Catechism* IV 74; *Apology* XIII 4)."

My own observation of this dilemma is, "play the piano or get off the bench!" Either we have a definition for the word "sacrament" or we don't! And as long as we are in the numbers game, we might some day soon agree with our Roman friends that there are seven (7) sacraments; or conversely, we could decide to agree with Martin Luther who declares in his *Babylonian Captivity, 1520* that he prefers to say that there is but one (1) sacrament.

This may strike you as being a tad outrageous, but it is intended to do so! We don't want to "get hung up" on the number of sacraments, or even on the word itself. It doesn't appear in the Bible. As the Catechism explains, the word comes to us from the Latin Bible (*Jerome's Vulgate*) where it is used to translate the Greek word for "mystery." The point to be made here is that in an eagerness to modify an historic position, thought by some to be inadequate in interpretation and application, church leaders have gone too far! By relating absolution to the two (2) sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and relying on the assertions of *Augsburg* V and XIV, they come dangerously close to depriving the laity of the church from exercising the Office of the Keys.

Prof. Joel Okamoto speaks to this concern in his essay, but without being so blunt. "As we noted," he says, "the topic of the office of the ministry arises 'in discussions about lay ministers, mission and evangelism, and in the relationship of congregations with their ministers.' Looking further into all these discussions one frequently finds contentions over the relationship between the church as possessing the

power of the keys and the office of the ministry also as possessing this power.” (He adds in a footnote, “as significant as it may be, however, it is only one (1) key point of contention”). “These contentions make this relationship an important issue today.”

Here, I will quote Okamoto’s essay at length. “To sort out such issues faithfully, we should acknowledge both that Christ instituted the office of the holy ministry and gave it the power of the keys (Jn.20:21-23; Mt.16:13-19), and also that Christ gave the power of the keys to the whole church (Mt.18:18-20). The Lutheran Confessions affirm both testimonies. The *Treatise* affirms explicitly both when it refutes arguments for papal primacy (*TR*.22-24). The Roman opponents insisted that its claims about the primacy of the bishop of Rome derived from Christ giving the keys to Peter in particular (Mt.16:18-19; Jn.21:17). The *Treatise* counters with two (2) arguments; one that Christ had given the power of the keys equally to all the apostles; and other that Christ gave the keys also to the whole church. The Confessions, moreover, testify to the keys granted to the whole church in other ways, notably when the *Smalcald Articles* speak about ‘the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters’ (*S.A.* III iv) and when the *Large Catechism* identifies a ‘secret confession that takes place privately before a single brother or sister’ (LC Conf.13). These citations show that the confessions understood that Christ gave the power of the keys both to the entire church and to the office of the ministry. To be sure, the confessions themselves do not articulate a precise distinction of the possession of the keys. Nevertheless, it is a clear conclusion from the fact that they recognize and argue that Christ gave the power of keys both to the church and to the office. ...The Confessions also see the church as possessor of the keys by virtue of another of Christ’s teachings: ‘Where two (2) or three (3) are gathered in my name’ (Mt.18:20). They do not see the office (of the ministry) as sole location of the power of the keys nor those in the office (of the ministry) as the sole possessors of the keys. Accordingly, we also must recognize that the power of the keys is neither the exclusive possession of those called to the office (of the ministry) nor granted to the office simply by way of derivation from the church. ...

“The assertion that Christ gave the keys to the whole church is significant for at least two (2) reasons. ...This claim is the basis for recognizing that in certain circumstances any Christian might administer God’s grace. ...any Christian could convey God’s grace to another Christian brother or sister

(TR.67). ...(In) a situation of imminent danger of death where no pastor is available ... ‘even a lay person grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another (TR.67).

“The assertion that Christ gave the keys to the whole church is significant also because it gives to the church the right and responsibility to call and ordain ministers (TR.60-72). ...Exercising this right by calling those who are placed in the office is one (1) significant way that the church keeps Christ’s institution and command.”

CPH’s *Luther’s Small Catechism With Explanation* (1986) beautifully summarizes for us what is said by so many, in so many places, about the Office of the Keys; “The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. ...This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in Chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven.’” (Jn.20:22-23) The *Explanation* goes on to teach, “I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.” The authority for so saying is Jesus Himself, in the words of Mt.18:18, “I tell you the truth whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The authority thus works like a key to open heaven by forgiving sins, or to close heaven by not forgiving them; and the Christian congregation, by the command of Christ, calls pastors to carry out the office of the keys publicly in His name and on behalf of the congregation.

From this office -- and power -- of the keys derives the congregation’s right and responsibility to exercise Church Discipline, that may lead to Excommunication. We read in *The Abiding Word, Vol.1* (CPH, 1946. p.362), “the exercise of the Office of the Keys, given to all Christians, includes a large number of solemn duties. ...not only of proclaiming the Word but also of preserving the Word of God. ...The Church must bend every effort, under God, that God’s truth does not perish from the earth and that the indelible

pages of the Sacred Volume be preserved and perpetuated in their purity, so that there may never arise on earth a generation of men which knows not the Lord nor the works which He hath done (c.p. Judges 2:10). ...Since the Lord has given all Christians a loosing key and a binding key, He expects all Christians to employ both keys in their respective capacities.”

For the most part, we do not apply the word “discipline” to the performance or maintenance of proper deeds or behaviour, though it may be so used in teaching or instruction. Our English word “discipline” stems from the same Latin root as does our word “disciple,” and may properly be understood as a “field of study.” More often, though, we use it to imply a form of teaching or training having to do with correction, to bring about a change in decorum, leading to a change in behaviour. Therefore, in addition to its God-given responsibility to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments, the Church has the duty to teach the wayward, to correct the erring, and to exercise the necessary discipline to preserve and perpetuate the purity of the doctrine of salvation. We must take seriously the words of Jesus (Mt.10:32), “Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven.” Inasmuch, then, as love compels us to prevent anyone from becoming eternally separated from Christ Jesus, we must be diligent in our pursuit of appropriate discipline.

My father, who was not a pastor, taught my two (2) brothers and me a great deal about discipline -- in the context of correcting our behaviour. When it was deemed necessary, he spanked our bottoms, but he never did so without saying something like, “This hurts me more than it does you!” I didn’t fully appreciate his hurt until I became a father, and found myself in the same predicament! My dad also taught me something else about the practical reality of discipline. He said there can never be love without discipline; and there is never real discipline without love! It too readily degenerates into punishment!

God did not give the Church the command to punish people, but frequently speaks of the responsibility to discipline His loved ones. The Confessions do likewise in *Augsburg XXVIII* and in the *Smalcald Articles Part III, IX*.

The Abiding Word, Vol. II (CPH, 1947) presents an excellent review of Church Discipline in the form of fourteen (14) theses proposed by Rev. E.J. Otto. I am not qualified to improve on these theses, and, therefore, offer them here as they appear in the book.

- I Church discipline comprises certain essential duties which are enjoined upon every Christian and every Christian congregation by a clear and direct command of God.
- II All the communicant members of a given church come under the disciplinary authority of that church, or congregation, and its individual members.
- III A brother's manifest sins relating to doctrinal error or an ungodly life require disciplinary action.
- IV The purpose of church discipline is to gain the brother, to further the glory of God, and to purify and strengthen the congregation.
- V Church discipline must be practiced in an evangelical way.
- VI The procedure employed in a disciplinary action must conform to the instructions of our Lord set forth in Matthew 18.
- VII In cases of church discipline where evidence must be submitted to establish the guilt of a person charged with an offense, the congregation should be familiar with the rules and principles which govern the validity of testimony and the qualifications of the witnesses.
- VIII The act of excommunication includes the exercise of the power of the keys and must be invoked as a last resort when dealing with an impenitent sinner.
- IX The custom of seeking counsel and guidance from orthodox and learned Christians of the Circuit or District in difficult cases of church discipline is commendable.
- X The excommunication of a member from the church must be unanimous.
- XI Anyone who severs his connection with the church while disciplinary proceedings are in progress excludes himself from the congregation.

- XII The person excommunicated by a congregation may appeal from the church's judgement and demand
a review of the proceedings before another congregation or some qualified board or committee.
- XIII The attitude and relationship toward an excommunicated person must be one of civil courtesy, but not of religious fellowship.
- XIV A church or congregation that has never exercised the right and duty of employing the successive steps of church discipline must not for that reason be adjudged unorthodox or unchristian.