

The Pastoral Office and the Priesthood of all Believers
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Introduction

Dr. Ronald Garwood, who recently retired as president of the Wyoming District, wrote an article a few years ago called “Christ, Pastor and Congregation” that was published in the official periodical of Concordia Seminary, Fort Wayne.¹ He begins with this provocative statement: “It’s been said that every pastor ought to have six weeks of vacation every year.” (All in favor, say Aye!) Here’s the rationale for this suggestion: if the man is a good pastor, says Dr. Garwood, he deserves it; if he’s not a good pastor, his *congregation* deserves it. (I’ll let you pastors decide if you want to take this idea back to your voters’ assemblies, and if so how you want to try to sell it!)

I’ve been asked to speak to you over the next few days on the topic of the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. This is a *huge* topic in the history of the Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. And as I’m sure some of you are aware, it’s also a highly—and sometimes hotly—debated topic.

I still have vivid memories of attending my first synodical convention as a young and rather “innocent” pastor from the Michigan District. It was the 1989 convention in Wichita, Kansas, and I was taken aback (to put it mildly) at the fierceness of the debates that took place at that convention on all kinds of issues, including the relationship between the office of the ministry and the priesthood of all believers. (I know it’s probably hard for some of you to imagine Missouri Synod Lutherans *arguing* with each other, but I saw it with my own eyes.) During one of those prolonged debates, Dr. Samuel Nafzger, executive director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, was asked to address the assembly, and he began with these words:

“The doctrine of the ministry is a very difficult and complex issue about which Lutherans have probably disagreed more in the history of Lutheranism than any other single issue.” Dr. Nafzger reminded the assembly that it was disagreement about this issue that “characterized the very birth of Missouri Synod” in Perry, County (MO). And it was in the midst of this debate, he said, that a young pastor named C. F. W. Walther, after digging deeply into Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, “was able to articulate a view that holds together the high respect for the divinely instituted office of the public ministry, while at the same time encouraging and recognizing the ministry of all God’s people in the priesthood of all believers.” (1992 *Proceedings*, 113)

¹ *Life of the World*, January 2003.

Just a few years ago, at its 2001 convention, our church body adopted a resolution re-affirming “the Synod’s Official Position on Church and Ministry.” This is a pretty important resolution, so I’d like to put it up on the screen and have you follow along as I read it to you (all but the final resolved, which I’d like to save until tomorrow):

WHEREAS, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has experienced during its history confusion with regard to the doctrine of church and ministry; and

WHEREAS, Dr. C. F. W. Walther addressed this confusion in 1851 through his *Theses on Church and Ministry* which were subsequently declared to be the position of the LCMS in 1851; and

WHEREAS, The book, *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry*, by Dr. C. F. W. Walther was published in 1852. The LCMS in convention declared this book to be the pure doctrine (reine Lehre) of Church and Ministry; therefore be it

***Resolved*, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod meeting in convention in the year of our Lord 2001 affirm the above referenced writings of C. F. W. Walther as the definitive statement under Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions of the Synod’s understanding on the subject of Church and Ministry; and be it further**

***Resolved*, That the LCMS in convention re-affirm the decision of the 1852 convention in recognizing C. F. W. Walther’s book, *The Voice of Our church on the Question of Church and Ministry*, as the official position of the LCMS; and be it further**

***Resolved*, That all pastors, professors, teachers of the Church and congregations honor and uphold the resolutions of the Synod as regards the official position of our Synod on Church and Ministry and teach in accordance with them.**

It’s kind of hard to “honor and uphold” the official position of the Synod on this issue unless you have some idea what it is. And even if you know what it is, it’s not a bad idea to do a little review once in a while. So in this first session, I’d like to focus on the question *what*: what exactly is C.F. W. Walther’s position on church and ministry which the Synod has recognized as the “definitive statement” on this issue “under Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions?” In our second session tomorrow, I’d like to talk about *why* this issue is so important for our life and work together in the Synod, and then on Wednesday we’re going to talk about *how* we put this position into practice in our joint efforts to carry out the Great Commission. So that’s the outline: What, Why, and How. And in order to talk about the what, we need to do just a little bit of history.

Part One: What?

I'm sure some of you know the story pretty well: In the year 1839, a small group of Saxon immigrants arrived in Perry County, Missouri, under the leadership of a rather autocratic bishop named Martin Stephan. When they first arrived in this country, these Lutherans from Germany had some pretty definite ideas about the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep. Almost immediately, however, these ideas were severely tested, because within a matter of weeks charges of immorality were brought against Bishop Stephan, and they found it necessary to remove him from office.

Well—talk about a crisis. First and foremost, it was a crisis of conscience for many—they agonized over whether they really had the right, the authority, to remove a man who had been called by God to serve in this authoritative office. Others wondered whether they had the right to continue to call themselves church now that they had no bishop, no spiritual leader. Some took it as a sign from God that the whole venture was misbegotten, and thought they should just go back to Germany. Others wanted to stay, but they weren't sure who to trust or how to move forward or who should be in charge. Some even began to wonder whether it was really necessary to have this special office of authority in the church. After all, didn't Luther say that all believers were priests, that all Christians had equal access to God's Word and Sacraments, and that all of us have the right and privilege of sharing God's gifts with others?

Eventually two factions arose in Perry County. With regard to the doctrine of the ministry, one emphasized the authority of the clergy over the laity, while the other championed the authority of the laity over the clergy. Each claimed support from the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions and Martin Luther and certain theologians in Germany and in America who had differing views on this issue. Enter 27-year-old C. F. W. Walther. He didn't really want to take sides; he wasn't looking for a fight; and he certainly wasn't hungry for power—not after what happened to the last bishop! But he did care deeply about this foundling church that seemed to be coming apart at the seams. And he cared even more deeply about the teaching of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions on this issue, which he believed was being misunderstood and misconstrued in certain ways by both sides in this debate.

It's true, said Walther, that the Bible calls all Christian priests. That's crystal clear from passages like 1 Peter 2:9: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." And (said Walther) Martin Luther taught the same thing:

We hold fast to this, that there is no other Word of God save that only which all Christians are commanded to proclaim, that there is no other baptism than the one which all Christians can give, that there is no other remembrance of the Supper of the Lord than that which every Christian can celebrate; there is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose...²

² Walther, *The Congregation's Right to Choose Its Pastor*, 11-12.

But as Walther was quick to point out, the Bible also says that it was *God* who gave some to be pastors and teachers to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ might be built up (Eph. 4:11-12). Remember, said Walther, what Paul told the pastors at Ephesus: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which *the Holy Spirit* has made you overseers, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). According to Walther, this truth was emphasized just as strongly by Luther, especially in his later years.

Although we are priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office, but a servant to all the others who are priests... This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching or the office of the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians.³

Everyone who is a Christian, said Luther, "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."⁴

In a series of debates held in Altenburg, Missouri in the year 1841, Walther presented a number of theses which became the foundation for the Missouri Synod's official position on church and ministry. The Synod wasn't officially organized until 1847, but just four years later, at its 1851 convention, Walther presented a series of theses on "church and ministry" that were discussed and officially adopted by the Synod—the very same theses that were reaffirmed at the 2001 convention of the Synod. Like so many historic teachings of our church based on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the best way to describe this position is: "On the hand...and on the other hand." On the one hand, says Walther:⁵

The holy ministry, or the pastoral office, is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers. (I)

The ministry, or the pastoral office is not a human ordinance, but an office established by God Himself. (II)

The ministry of preaching is not an arbitrary office, but its character is such that the church has been commanded to establish it and is ordinarily bound to it till the end of days. (III)

³ Luther, *Exposition of Psalm 110*, LW 13, 332.

⁴ Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, LW 36, 116.

⁵ The following theses are included in (and here quoted from) the Appendix of the CTCR's 1981 report on *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures and Nomenclature*.

The ministry is the highest office in the Church, from which, as its stem, all other offices of the Church issue. (VIII)

On the other hand, says Walther:

The ministry of preaching is not a peculiar order, set up over and against the common estate of Christians and holier than the latter, like the priesthood of the Levites, but it is an office of service. (IV)

Reverence and unconditional obedience is due to the ministry of preaching when the preacher is ministering the Word of God. However, the preacher may not dominate over the church; he has, accordingly, no right to make new laws, to arrange indifferent matters and ceremonies arbitrarily, and to impose and carry out excommunication *alone*, without a previous verdict of the entire congregation. (IX)

According to divine right the function of passing judgment on doctrine belongs to the ministry of preaching. However, laymen also have this right, and for this reason they also have a seat and vote with the preacher in church courts and councils. (X) [Note: this is why, to this very day, district and synodical conventions in the Synod are composed of an equal number of lay delegates and pastoral delegates. This is a direct result of the theology of C. F. W. Walther on church and ministry.]

The ministry of preaching is conferred by God through the congregation as holder of all church power, or of the keys, and by its call, as prescribed by God. The ordination of those who are called, with the laying on of hands, is not by divine institution but is an apostolic custom and merely a public, solemn confirmation of the call. (VI)

On the one hand...on the other hand. On the one hand, says Walther, the congregation is the holder of all church power, and for this reason Walther insisted that any Christian, in a case of necessity, could exercise this office publicly.⁶ On the other hand, congregations are commanded by God, for the sake of order in the church, to call pastors to exercise this power of the keys in their midst and on their behalf. There is no Scriptural or confessional basis for saying that the laity should *ordinarily* perform pastoral functions. On the one hand, the office of the ministry is the highest office in the church because of the high and holy responsibilities assigned to it by God himself. On the other hand, it merits this title only because it is also an office of service, patterned after the office of the Good Shepherd himself who laid down his life for the sheep. The pastor's "high calling" is to stoop down and deliver God's life-giving gifts of Word and Sacrament obtained by the greatest Servant who ever lived and died. On the one hand, congregations are to reverence their pastors and even obey them unconditionally when they are preaching and teaching God's inspired and inerrant Word. On the other hand, pastors are forbidden by God to lord it over their congregations, or to use their office of

⁶ See *The Congregation's Right to Choose Its Pastor*, 132.

authority to enforce human rules or traditions or decisions where there is no “thus says the Lord.”

On the basis of New Testament passages like Acts 6, Walther also recognized that the church has the right to create other offices for the purpose of extending the range and effectiveness of the office of the public ministry. Walther called these offices “auxiliary offices,” and regardless of what you think of this term, it’s clear that for Walther this is meant as a term of honor and distinction because it connects these offices directly with “the highest office in the church.” “The highest office,” wrote Walther, “is the ministry of preaching, with which all other offices are simultaneously conferred. Therefore every other public office in the church is a part of the office of the ministry, or an auxiliary office, which is attached to the ministry of preaching.” These auxiliary offices, said Walther, are “sacred offices in the church,” since they exercise certain vital functions of the office of the ministry for the sake of the mission of the church.⁷

Perhaps it goes with saying that Walther’s theses on church and ministry don’t simplistically answer or even specifically address all the practical questions that have arisen over the years (and continue to arise) concerning the relationship between the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. Many of these questions continue to be discussed and debated in the Synod: questions about how to provide for Word and Sacrament ministry in places where no ordained pastor is available—including the rapidly growing number of ethnic missions and ministries cropping up all over the country, offering tremendous opportunities that cry out for direct and immediate response. Questions about the role and status and training and supervision of deacons or lay ministers, who have been authorized by our church to carry out Word and Sacrament ministry in certain situations of necessity where no ordained pastor is available. Questions about what constitutes a legitimate case of necessity in light of Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession, which says that “no one should publicly teach or preach in the church without a regular call.” Questions about the relationship between “call” and “ordination,” especially in light of Walther’s insistence that ordination is not a divine rite or sacrament that confers upon the pastor some indelible character or some special personal power to do things that only pastors can do.

Questions about alternate routes into the pastoral ministry. Questions about the relationship between the pastoral office and so-called auxiliary offices in the church. Questions about removing a pastor from office for Scriptural reasons, or eliminating the position of a called worker for non-theological reasons—like we just can’t afford three pastors anymore. Questions about the role of lay people (both men and women) in worship and in various leadership roles in the congregation and in the district and Synod. I would love to get into the nitty-gritty of all of these questions and more; all you’d have to do is clear out the rest of the agenda from now until the end of the convention, and we could have some great discussion.

These are just some of the questions that have been addressed and/or continue to be addressed and discussed in the Synod, and they’re important questions. It’s important

⁷ See the CTCR’s 1981 report on *The Ministry*, 17.

that we continue our discussion of these kinds of questions honestly and respectfully and fraternally, on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

But this much is clear. As long as Res. 7-17A stands, the answers given to these questions must be consistent with the historic position of the Synod on church and ministry as articulated by C. F. W. Walther. The answers given to these and all other questions that may arise in this area must somehow hold together the high regard that Scripture itself requires us to have for the public ministry as an office which has been instituted by God himself, while at the same time strongly affirming the teaching of Scripture regarding the ministry of all God's people in the priesthood of all believers.

In the year 1932, The Synod adopted a document called the "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the LCMS" written by Walther's student Francis Pieper, one of the most influential and highly respected theologians in the history of the Synod. This document has been reaffirmed by our church repeatedly over the years as a faithful articulation of what the Scriptures and Confessions teach, and I'd like to bring things to a close this afternoon by sharing with you a couple of summary statements from this document. "Concerning the Church" the Brief Statement says:

Since the Christians are the Church, it is self-evident that they alone *originally* possess the spiritual gifts and rights which Christ has gained for, and given to His Church. Thus St. Paul reminds all believers: "All things are yours," 1 Cor. 3:21-22, and Christ Himself commits to all believers the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:13-16; 18:17-20; John 20:22-23, and commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. Accordingly, we reject all doctrines by which this spiritual power or any part thereof is adjudged as *originally* vested in certain individuals or bodies such as the Pope, or the bishops, or the order of the ministry, or the secular lords, or councils, or Synods, etc. The officers of the church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of delegated powers, conferred on them by the original possessors of such powers, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Col. 4:17.

Lest anyone misunderstand the seemingly unqualified statement that "Christ commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments," the "Brief Statement" immediately goes on to address the topic "Of the Public Ministry."

By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered *by order and in the name* of a Christian congregation. Concerning this office we teach that it is a *divine ordinance*; that is, the Christians of a certain locality must apply the means of grace not only privately and within the circle of their families nor merely in their common intercourse with fellow-Christians, John 5:39; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:16, but they are also required, by the divine order, to make provision that the Word of God be publicly preached in their midst, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work . . . Although the

office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, 1 Pet. 4:11....Regarding ordination, we teach that it is not a divine, but a commendable ecclesiastical ordinance.

One the one hand...on the other hand. That's the key to understanding the position of Scripture and the Confessions and Luther and Walther and Pieper and the historic position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. Tomorrow we'll talk about *why* understanding this position is so important for our life and work together in the Synod, but now it's time for me to step aside and ask another Pastor Walther to lead you in some discussion of what we've talked about this afternoon.

Part Two: Why?

One of the services that we provide as staff for the Commission on Theology is to answer questions about the official position of the Synod on this or that issue. Many of these requests come by e-mail these days, and some of them are, frankly, a bit unusual. People want to know, for example, what is the official position of the Synod on the possibility of life on other planets, or on being a vegetarian, or on enhancing one's appearance through cosmetic surgery. Someone named Mary wrote in not too long ago and asked: "What I want to know is this: When a pastor gives a sermon in the LCMS, do the topic and words come from God, or from the elders?" (I guess that's sort of a "church and ministry" question.) We get a surprising number of e-mails about pets: will I see my pet in heaven? What about church ceremonies for the blessing of pets? Even more strange and disconcerting was this recent e-mail: Does our church believe that it is possible for people to communicate with their deceased pets? (Pastors, I think you have some catechesis to do!)

In case you're wondering, our church doesn't have an officially adopted "position" on any of these issues, although (as staff) we do try to give some Scripturally-based guidance whenever possible. However, the Synod does have an official position on the relationship between the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers—we talked about that position yesterday on the basis of Res. 7-17A. What we didn't talk about yesterday was the final resolved of this resolution. The last resolved says: "That all action taken in this resolution shall be used to help carry out 'The Great Commission' and shall not in any way detract or distract from the primary mission of God's kingdom here on earth. We will remember 1-02!"

1-02 (in case you're wondering) is another resolution adopted at the 2001 convention, and this is another pretty significant resolution, so I'd like to put this one up on the screen and read it to you as well:

To Be Passionate for the Great Commission

WHEREAS, The Gospel provides the proper motivation for our life together as a synod, manifesting itself in faith, hope, and love; and

WHEREAS, Such a motivation should be determinative for all that we do together in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; and

WHEREAS, As disciples of Jesus Christ, our calling is to be witnesses of the love of God in Christ; and

WHEREAS, An indifference to Christ's Word and work continues to hinder our ability to tell the Good News about Jesus worldwide; and

WHEREAS, It is God's desire that all the members of His family live in love with one another for the common goal of sharing the Gospel; and

WHEREAS, There has also been a tendency toward self-congratulation concerning our past accomplishments, often at the expense of outreach to a world that is perishing in sin; therefore be it

Resolved, That we implore God’s forgiveness for our failures to give the Gospel the precedence that it deserves; and be it further

Resolved, That we seek, with the aid of God’s Holy Spirit, to renew our commitment to the Gospel as the motivation for all that we do; and be it further

Resolved, That we, members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, thank God for His grace in bringing us into His family; and be it further

Resolved, That we seek to resolve the differences in doctrine and practice which cause dissension and division among us by honest and prayerful discussion, so that we are able to live in genuine and God-pleasing harmony as God’s people and not allow dissension among us to become destructive of the unity that should characterize us as God’s people; and be it further

Resolved, That we encourage all of our church leaders, local, District, and synodical, lay and professional alike, to renew their efforts to train and equip our members to be the “salt of the earth” and “ambassadors” of the love of Jesus Christ; and be it further

Resolved, That we in convention turn our energy and efforts to “let the earth shake” (Psalm 99) with the Good News of Jesus Christ, making the Great Commission the main passion of our Synod and its members; and be it finally

Resolved, That as a reminder of the primacy of this resolution, all future resolutions passed at this convention shall have inserted into them the following statement: "Resolved, That all action taken in this resolution shall be used to help carry out 'The Great Commission' and shall not in any way detract or distract from the primary mission of God's Kingdom here on earth. We will remember 1-02!"

Why is it so important that we understand what the Bible says about the relationship between the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers? Why is it so crucial that we strive honestly and prayerfully to resolve any differences in doctrine and practice that may exist or arise in our church concerning this issue? Well, we could answer that question in a lot of different ways, but this morning I’d like to focus on the reason given in the last resolved of Res. 7-17A—because a clear and unified understanding of this position will greatly enhance our efforts to carry out the Great Commission under God’s grace and blessing, and a failure to understand and embrace this position will greatly hinder our ability to carry out God’s mission in a unified and God-pleasing way.

Peter says: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...**SO THAT** you may declare [before all the world] the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” At the beginning of his commentary on 1 Peter, Martin Luther makes this rather stunning statement: “We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people. Otherwise, it would be best if God would strangle us and let us die as soon as we were baptized and had begun to believe. For this reason, however, he lets us live: that we may bring other people to faith as he has done for us.”⁸ Of course, no one knew better than Luther that *we* can’t bring people to faith by our own power or urging or arguing or planning or strategizing. Only the Holy Spirit can do that through the power of God’s living and active Word. But God can certainly use us to deliver His Word to other people, and “for this reason,” says Luther, “God lets us live: that we may bring other people to faith as he has done for us.”

In the year 1842, C. F. W. Walther preached a sermon called “Bringing Souls to Christ—Every Christian’s Desire and Duty.”⁹ I don’t think this sermon has ever been published in English, and that’s a shame, because it ought to be widely accessible—in fact, I think it ought to be read on a regular basis by every pastor and church worker and lay leader in the Synod. Walther begins by saying:

“The church that Christ established on earth ought to be marked by perfect equality. It should never be set up as an earthly government. In the church, no one should be on top, no one the superior, no one first, no one the lord or master. This is one of the fundamental doctrines of all of Christendom: whoever is a real member of the true church is equal to all the others. Each has the same baptism, the same faith, the same Christ, the same righteousness, the same hope of eternal life, the same eternal, heavenly blessing of salvation in Jesus Christ.”

“As long as the world stands,” says Walther, “there will certainly be external differences between people: one is rich, the other poor; one is esteemed by the world, the other despised; one has a high status in society, the other low; one is clever, the other simple. But in the...church, these things make no difference. Although gifts, offices and accomplishments may differ, all members remain the same before God.”

In order for Christian congregations to be and remain all that God intended them to be and remain, says Walther, “they must hold fast to the precious right of the spiritual priesthood, which all Christians possess. This priesthood is their right to present offerings, to pray, to search the Scriptures, to examine and judge all teachings, to teach one another, and to exhort, admonish and comfort one another. Where this right and duty is not known or put into action, the Word of God cannot long remain. There is no blessing, no zeal, no passion.” Instead, there will be only “slumber, laziness,

⁸ *Luther’s Works* (American Edition) 30, 11. Translation is from Volker Stolle, *The Church Comes from All Nations: Luther Texts on Mission*, trans. Klaus Detlev Schulz (St. Louis: CPH, 2003), 20.

⁹ Published (in German) in *Gnadenjahr: Predigten über die Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs von Dr. C. F. W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1891). Quotations from this sermon throughout this part of the essay are from an unpublished 1993 translation by Dr. Bruce Cameron.

indifference.” “It is therefore my duty,” he says, “to teach the right and duty of the spiritual priesthood diligently and often.” And in this sermon, says Dr. Walther, I’m going to focus on one of the most important duties of the spiritual priesthood: “the duty of all Christians to lead other souls to Christ.”

Walther insists that “No one should say, ‘I’m not a pastor or teacher or preacher—let *them* teach, instruct, comfort and lead souls to Christ. I wish to remain in my own vocation.’” That excuse just won’t cut it, says Walther—why? Because “you are baptized.” “Through holy baptism,” he says, “every Christian has been consecrated, ordained and installed into the ministry to teach, admonish and comfort his neighbor. Through holy baptism each Christian has obtained not only the authority, power and right, but also the high, holy obligation...of rousing himself to care and to help so that others may be brought to Christ.”

Now, before you accuse Walther of vitiating or eliminating the distinction between the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers, listen to what he says in the very next paragraph. “It is certainly true that not everyone is a pastor or a bishop in the Christian congregation. God is a God of order. For order’s sake, the congregation calls only one (or a few) to publicly administer—in the name of all—the rights of the spiritual priesthood. But just as in the construction of a church building many workers are needed, not just the foreman who organizes and supervises the work, so also in the construction of the invisible church it’s not just the called ministers of Christ who do the work, but all Christians must lend a hand.”

The Christian church,” says Walther, “is a great mission-house. Every Christian in it is a missionary, sent out by God into his own circle to convert others to Christ. God does not give his spiritual gifts only to pastors and teachers. Laypeople, who do not stand in the public office, often have very glorious gifts—a splendid knowledge of Christian doctrine, the gift of understanding and explaining the Scriptures, the spiritual gift of examining and confronting error, the gift of administration, the God-given ability to encourage, or to admonish, or to pray.” “Did God give these gifts to the church for nothing?” he asks. Does not God clearly show by these gifts that every Christian is a fellow laborer in his vineyard?”

A couple of years ago I got a phone call from a young wife and mother in California who said she was searching for a church home and had some questions about the LCMS. Well, that was an understatement—we ended up talking on the phone for several hours, and she had obviously done her homework. She had questions like: “What’s the Lutheran view of conversion with respect to the freedom of the fallen will? What’s the Lutheran understanding of predestination, and how you would compare it to the Calvinist and Arminian views?” “What’s the Lutheran perspective on the Lord’s Supper—is it closer to transubstantiation or consubstantiation?” “What’s the difference between the LCMS and other Lutheran churches?”

This woman had discovered the Synod’s web site by way of an article she found on the internet that talked about our church’s position on homosexuality. The reason this

particular issue was so important to her was that before her conversion to Christianity she had been immersed in a homosexual lifestyle that left her, in her own words, “hurting, depressed, violent, confused, promiscuous, agoraphobic, and very suicidal, convinced that life was meaningless.” After our conversation, she sent me an eight-page e-mail detailing the story of her journey to faith, which she gave me permission to share with others who might find it meaningful. It’s a great example of how both pastors and lay people serve a critical role in God’s plan to bring people to faith and to nurture them in faith.

“There was a man in my office,” she writes in her e-mail, “who sent me a Christmas card one year with a very explicit Christian message. He was a very kind man, different from his colleagues—this was a very high-pressure work environment, yet he seemed so peaceful.” One day she worked up the courage to ask him about that card—what it meant to him, why he had sent it to her. So he took her to lunch, and “over tuna fish sandwiches,” she writes, he shared the simple Gospel: we’re all sinners, God loves us, Jesus died for us. What was her reaction? “Well,” she says, “I was *so* offended—who does this guy think he is, telling me I’m a sinner.” But he gave her a New Testament, she began to read it and talk to him about it, and finally—by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word—the Gospel broke through.

But that was really only the beginning of the story. Next came her search for a church home to nurture her in her new-found faith. “Prior to our conversation on the phone today,” she writes in her e-mail, “I knew almost nothing about the LCMS.” I’ve been “in and out of so many churches in the last nine years”—I’m “mortified by the liberalness of the mainline denominations, yet I’m completely disillusioned with evangelical fundamentalism. Searching for an alternative, I stumbled across your web site, which gave me a glimmer of hope.” “After so many painful experiences, I don’t buy the ‘just me and my Bible thing.’ I’m looking for a church that takes the Bible seriously, and yet has pastors who have actually been to the seminary, who have studied theology, who don’t need to re-invent the theological wheel, and who can help answer my many questions about what the Bible teaches. I’m also increasingly drawn to a church that appreciates the order and beauty of the liturgy—a place where I can go week after week and know that I will hear God’s Word and receive the Sacrament for the strengthening of my faith and the forgiveness of my sins. I’m convinced that the only way that God can continue my healing is by keeping me grounded in who I am in Christ through proper worship and sound teaching and preaching and firm and loving pastoral care.”

“I want you to know,” she says in her letter, “that I am not searching for the perfect church—I know better than that. But I am searching for a safe church home where I can grow in my faith in Jesus and learn to love him and serve him to the best of my ability. And so I just want to thank you, Pastor Joel, for taking the time to answer my many (embarrassing) questions! I was just so thankful this afternoon to find a ‘conservative’ (you!) in a church like the LCMS—a church that seems to proclaim so clearly the simple Gospel and yet understands the importance of educated, well-trained clergy and Christ-centered worship that is grounded in God’s precious Word and Sacraments.”

A number of years ago (1987) the Commission on Theology prepared a report on the topic of *Evangelism and Church Growth* that begins by offering a series of theological presuppositions regarding the mission of the church. They're pretty basic, but they're also pretty important, and I'd just like to read them to you without all of the commentary that's included in the CTCR's report:

- 1) The mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations.
- 2) The mission of the church presupposes that the Bible is God's inspired and inerrant Word.
- 3) The mission of the church presupposes the total depravity of the entire human race.
- 4) The mission of the church presupposes God's eternal plan of salvation through faith in Christ.
- 5) The mission of the church presupposes that the church has been instituted by God.
- 6) The mission of the church presupposes that conversion is solely the work of the Holy Spirit.
- 7) The mission of the church presupposes the necessity and centrality of the means of grace (Word and sacrament).

And I especially want to highlight numbers 8 and 9:

- 8) The mission of the church presupposes a distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the pastor.**
- 9) The mission of the church presupposes that God gives Christians the grace to serve Him in their various callings.**

In order for the mission of the church to function as God intends it to function, says the Commission, all of these truths need to be held together and fully embraced and implemented in the service of God's mission. God has given his church on earth the keys to the kingdom of heaven. We have the keys to unlock heaven's door for anyone who wants to enter. By God's own command and design, the church entrusts these keys to pastors to exercise publicly on its behalf by preaching and teaching and leading worship and pronouncing absolution and administering the sacraments and caring for the souls entrusted to their care by God through the congregation and its call. The church calls other qualified men and women to teach and to serve in other offices directly connected to the office of the public ministry in support of the mission of the church. At the same time, the church at large continues to exercise the office of the keys through the words and witness of its individual members—in their homes, in their families, in their marriages and relationships, in their workplaces and wherever they are, as they speak words of comfort and warning and instruction and forgiveness to each other and to anyone and everyone who will listen.

In his classic work *Die christliche Wahrheit, The Christian Truth*, Paul Althaus, the well-known German Lutheran theologian, strongly emphasizes the importance of the preaching office and the preaching and teaching that the pastor does within that divinely instituted office. But, he says, "this preaching must always be framed within the witness

of the fellowship, the priesthood of all believers. Preaching does its work in us because fathers and mothers, teachers and friends have preached to us in their way and continue to preach to us, even though this may consist in nothing more than their leading and attracting us to listen to the preaching by their own listening.” In fact, says Althaus, according to passages like 1 Peter 3, “the witness expressed in words lives by the witness of life without words... To live among people who really live in the fear of God, who demonstrate faith and love and Christian patience; to meet people who have been liberated by Christ to praise God and serve joyfully; to know people in whom the victorious power of faith in Christ is manifested in the midst of grievous suffering and even in the face of death—these are the most powerful sermons we can ever hear. Through this kind of testimony the church makes its mightiest witness.”¹⁰

We need pastors and teachers and other full-time church workers to help us make this kind of witness through their faithful preaching and teaching and serving and delivering God’s gifts to us through which his Spirit works. And we need to help our pastors and those who serve as full-time workers in God’s church—we need to help them help us and others by the preaching that we do on a daily basis, by the witness that the Holy Spirit empowers us to give by our words and by our lives. “For this reason,” says Luther, “God lets us live” (and what a glorious, grace-rooted reason it is!): “that we may bring others to faith as he has done for us.”

¹⁰ Quoted in John W. Doberstein, *Minister’s Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959) 432-434.

Part Three: How?

In August of last year around 225 pastors, laypeople, district presidents, and other full-time church workers from every district in the Synod gathered together in Phoenix, Arizona for the second synod-wide theological convocation sponsored by the CTCR and the president's office. (Vacation tip: try Phoenix in August for some great room rates!) The theme for that convocation was "The Congregation's Mission and Ministry: Who's in Charge Here?" When push comes to shove, who's really in charge in the congregation? Is the pastor in charge? Are the elders in charge? Are the voters in charge? Is the church council in charge? Is the president or chairman in charge? Is the altar guild in charge? Maybe it's the organist or church secretary. (Of course, we all know who's really in charge: it's the person who writes the checks!)

One of the resolutions we discussed at that convocation was 1992 Res. 3-06A "To Affirm Proper Relationship between Congregations and Their Pastors." This resolution isn't so much about the "what" or the "why," it's about the "how"—and that's our topic for this morning. So let me put it up on the screen and read it with you:

To Affirm Proper Relationship Between Congregations and Their Pastors

RESOLUTION 3-06A

WHEREAS, God exhorts both pastors and congregations to serve one another in their respective responsibilities so that no obstacle may be placed in the way of the church's proclamation of the Gospel; and

WHEREAS, Mutual edification, support and encouragement yields manifold blessings to the congregations and to the pastors; and

WHEREAS, The body of Christ is harmed when either the pastor or the congregation attempts to exercise unscriptural authority over the other; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Synod reaffirm the scriptural position of the church and its ministry as taught in the Lutheran Confessions that God has instituted the office of the pastoral ministry and that the one who holds this office carries it out on behalf of and with accountability to God and those through whom God has called him; and be it further

Resolved, That the Synod guard against all distortions of the scriptural position.

One of the most beautiful Scriptural depictions of the proper relationship between pastor and congregation (and other workers in the church) comes from Philipians chapter one:

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about you, because I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”

In his article “Christ, Pastor and Congregation” (to which I made reference on Monday), Dr. Ronald Garwood reflects on his years of experience as a district president, and he concludes on the basis of this experience that there are essentially two keys to a healthy and happy and productive relationship between a pastor and his congregation. Now, of course, it’s possible to oversimplify anything. But it’s also possible to make things a little too complicated, and to lose sight of what should be most obvious. My wife has to remind me once a while that there’s really only one thing she needs to know in the context of our relationship—maybe you can guess what that is. According to Dr. Garwood, the first key to a healthy and happy relationship between a pastor and a congregation is that the pastor must love his congregation. The second key is that the congregation must love its pastor.

Time and time again, he says, I have observed that “when the congregation believes that their pastor really loves them and cares for them, then no matter what other circumstances may exist in the parish, the congregation will be patient and accommodating with their pastor, and the health of the ministry in that place is generally good. However, in a congregation where the people do not believe that the pastor loves them, every little circumstance seems to become a major problem or issue, and the mission and ministry of that congregation and pastor is greatly distracted.”

In support of his theory, Dr. Garwood offers this quotation from Martin Luther: “Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the congregation. Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother who would walk through fire to save her children, you are not fit to be a preacher.”¹¹ Obviously, says Pastor Garwood, the love that Luther is talking about here is not just “emotional fluff” or “warm feelings.” “A good Christian mother loves her children in a sacrificial way, doing what is good and necessary for them even if it means disciplining them and loving them with ‘tough love.’ So too the good pastor will love his people in a giving and sacrificial way, being available to them as a shepherd to his flock, bringing them the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, ministering to them with that precious Word of Christ. It is God’s love for him in Christ that motivates and enables the pastor to love the

¹¹ See Edward Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: CPH, 1959), 932.

people of the congregation, and it is the love of God in Christ that he brings to the people as he faithfully preaches and teaches the Word of God and administers the Sacraments.”

On the other hand, he says, the congregation is to lovingly “receive their pastor as God’s man, sent to them by God through their call to be their shepherd. They can and should see him as their servant, but first and foremost as the servant of Christ, a servant of the Word. He is not the employee of the parish. He is not someone that they have hired to serve them just as they want him to from some human perspective. Rather, he is accountable to them as the servant of Christ, and he is accountable to God for his work among them. They need to expect that he should, indeed he must, be faithful to his call, faithful to the Word, faithful to his ordination vows, and faithful to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ.”

Luther once had occasion to remind certain congregations of his day: “You are not lords over preachers and the ministry; you have not established this office. God’s Son alone has done so.”¹² Unfortunately, there are real-life examples of pastors “lording it over” their congregations—and just as unfortunately, there are real-life examples of congregations lording it over their pastors: making demands of their pastors that are not only unscriptural but also unreasonable and counterproductive to the “partnership in the Gospel” that Paul describes so beautifully in Philippians. 1.

“The wise Christian congregation,” says Dr. Garwood, “receives the pastor as God’s man, and expects him faithfully to preach and teach the Word of God, to lead and guide and counsel with the Word of God.” And “as the pastor loves and cares for the congregation by faithfully serving them with God’s Word and administering the Sacraments according to the Lord’s institution, God will bless both the pastor and the congregation.” Problems will arise, of course, “but because both pastor and people have their focus on Christ and are committed to each other in Him, they are able to work through their problems in a successful and God-pleasing way and the mission and ministry in that place is blessed.”

“When Is the Day of the Installation of a Pastor a Day of Festive Joy for a Congregation?” That’s the (rather lengthy!) title of a sermon that Walther preached at the installation of Pastor Carl Stoeckhardt, who later became a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.¹³ Walther gives some helpful practical advice in this sermon to both pastors and congregations, and I’d like to highlight three points that I think resonate well with the words of Dr. Garwood and the 1992 resolution that we looked at earlier. First of all, says Walther, just as the pastor should recognize the diversity of gifts within the congregation and not expect every member or every congregation to have the same gifts, so also the congregation should remember “that no single preacher has all the gifts, but each one has only his particular portion.” “Even the holy apostles and their helpers,” says Walther, “did not have the same measure of gifts. To Paul was given especially the gift of deep and rich knowledge; to John the special gift of looking into the future; to

¹² *Ibid.*, 926.

¹³ For the text of this sermon (from which the following quotations are taken), see *Selected Sermons* trans. by Henry Eggold and ed. by August Suelflow (St. Louis: CPH, 1981), 164-172.

Apollos, the gift of ready speech.” Therefore, “a congregation should not seek in its pastor this or that [particular] gift, but only the gifts given him by God.” If it looks for more, he says, that is nothing short of “cruelty,” and “the congregation will be at fault if its pastor does not carry out his office...with joy but with grief.” Obviously, he says, “that hurts not just the pastor but also the members, “for they do not receive the full measure of the blessing which God intended.”

Second, says Walther, just as the pastor needs to be patient and understanding with the sins and struggles of his members, so also the congregation needs to be patient and understanding with the sins and struggles of their pastor. There’s one thing you can count on, says Walther: “The flesh, the world, and the devil will trouble our pastor daily. Therefore, we need to...remember him in heartfelt prayer!. If his courage fails, let us speak to him so that he will take heart. If he becomes weak in faith or in any necessary work, let us encourage him. If sorrow overtakes him, let us comfort him. If he stumbles, let us with a gentle spirit help him up. And if we see him faithful in the work in God’s house, let us hold him all the more dear for the sake of his work and consider him worthy of double honor.”

A number of years ago I read an article by a Lutheran pastor called “Confessions of ‘a man of the cloth.’” Despite the rather provocative title, the only thing the pastor really “confesses” in this article is his profound distaste for the expression “man of the cloth,” because it tends to put the focus on the pastor’s personal character and moral conduct as the central features of the his office and calling. It’s true, he admits, that according to the Bible pastors are to be “blameless” and “above reproach”—they are to set an example for God’s people by their holy lives and behavior. On the other hand, he writes: “I never step into the pulpit to preach as a perfect man to a congregation of sinners. I never want the people I serve to see me as someone who can do no wrong. Instead, I hope people see me as a man who struggles with sin as much as they do, but who is convinced that Jesus is the only answer for that sin. Instead of being referred to as ‘a man of the cloth,’” he says, “I would rather be known as ‘a man of the cross.’ That tells of my faith and my conviction, as well as the gospel message I am privileged to preach. The higher the pedestal I am placed on, the farther I have to fall. [But] if I’m viewed as ‘a man of the cross,’ people will know me as someone who confesses, like St. Paul, that he is ‘the worst of sinners.’ Those who hear me preach will know I need the Savior as much as they do. Those who look to my example for strength will find it exactly where I find it—in the cross of Jesus Christ.”

St. Augustine, whose story is somewhat similar to that of St. Paul, once preached a sermon on the anniversary of his own ordination into the office of bishop, an office that he held for nearly 35 years. Augustine confessed to being rather uncomfortable in that office, not only because he felt that he was so completely unworthy of it, but also because he was afraid that the people he served would begin to think of him as someone who was higher or holier than they were. In his anniversary sermon he says: “When it dismays me that I am here *for* you, it consoles me that I am here *with* you. *For* you, I am a bishop [a pastor], but *with* you I am a Christian. The first is an office accepted, the second is a grace received; the first is a danger; the other is a safety. We are tossed, it is true, as in a

high sea, by the storms of our toil; but as we recall whose blood it was that bought us, we come, through the calm of that thought, safely into harbor. And as we labor at this task of ours, our response is in the benefit we all share. If, then, I am gladder by far to be redeemed with you than I am to be placed over you, I shall be more completely your servant as the Lord commanded, for fear of being ungrateful for the price that he paid to save me that I might be yours.”¹⁴

The third point from Walther’s sermon that I’d like to highlight is this: “As important as it is,” says Walther, “that a pastor remain faithful in doctrine and life, it is just as important that the congregation *demand* that he remain faithful.” “In a certain sense,” says Walther, “God’s grace has placed it into our hands whether the office which [the] pastor wants to exercise among us will be blessed or not. Consider this: As God’s steward our pastor must take a fearful oath that he will be faithful; he must pledge nothing less than his soul’s salvation to us, to the whole church, and to God. Therefore I exhort you by your salvation, let us not demand of him what God forbids, or fail to demand of him what God demands.”

One of the best articles I’ve ever read on Luther’s understanding of the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry is an article by Herman Preus that was published around 25 years ago in the *Concordia Journal*.¹⁵ The second-to-last section of Preus’s article is called “Honoring the Ministry,” and it includes some strong statements by Luther on the authority of the pastoral office as instituted by God. The last section of his article is called “Judging the Doctrine,” and it includes some equally strong statements about the proper, God-given authority of the laity.

“Luther had a way of shocking a dormant church into action. In exalting the role of the laity in the church he said some things that, if taken seriously, could rock the church, could awaken the sleeping giant of lay power, and cause every preacher to strain every sermon through blood, sweat, and tears. In 1522 he wrote to the Christian in Leisnig assuring them of their right to call a pastor.” But “Luther goes one step further: As priests they also have the right and duty to see that the Word is preached in all its truth and purity.” Luther firmly rejected “the prevailing Roman Catholic position that ‘only the bishops, scholars and councils should be allowed to judge doctrine,’ while ‘the ordinary Christian is supposed to await their judgment and obey it.’ No, says Luther: ‘Christ institutes just the opposite. He takes both the right and the power to judge teaching from the bishops, scholars and councils and gives them to... all Christians equally when he says, John 10: 4, “My sheep know my voice”... Here you see clearly who has the right to judge doctrine: bishops, popes, scholars and everyone else have the power to teach, but it is the sheep who are to judge whether they teach the voice of Christ or the voice of strangers.””

¹⁴ Quoted by Aidan Kavanaugh, “Christian Ministry and Ministries,” in *Church and Ministry*, ed. Daniel Brockopp, Brian Helge, and David Truemper (Valparaiso, Indiana: Institute of Liturgical Studies, 1982), 17.

¹⁵ Herman A. Preus, “Luther on the Universal Priesthood and the Office of the Ministry,” *Concordia Journal* (March, 1979), 55-62.

“What would happen,” says Preus, “if our laity and our congregations really became aware of this power—and responsibility—that God has given them? What would happen to our preachers and their preaching? Have you ever heard a preacher tell his congregation of this power that they have from God? Luther got excited about this and exploded: ‘There never would have been a universal papacy if this right of judgment had prevailed.’”

“As anyone can see,” Preus says, “this is pure dynamite.” “It could indeed rock the church beyond anything Luther contemplated had he not in the same breath served up the antidote. Let no laymen take this doctrine as a license to set himself up as an adversary arrogantly challenging the minister’s God-given authority. For the call of a minister imposes on the congregation that extends the call the obligation to honor its pastor and to hear his word as the word of Christ.”

Luther, says Preus, “sails a straight course between” the doctrine of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. He uses one “to correct the clerical tyranny of Rome and the other to correct the radical anti-clerical activities of the Enthusiasts. If a thorough examination is made of both the early and the mature Luther, one can see that he arrived at a beautiful balance between the two doctrines. There seems no better way for the Lutheran church to avoid pompous preachers or arrogant laymen and to bring harmony between the two than to maintain the balance that Luther found in Scripture and the words of Christ.”

This past Sunday, June 25th, was the 476th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire. The Augsburg Confession is the foundational confessional document of Lutheranism. It contains the clearest statement found anywhere outside of Scripture itself of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And it also explains how God makes the miracle of faith possible. “To obtain such faith,” says AC V, “God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.” The shortest article in the Augsburg Confession, but no less important for its brevity, is Article XIV, which says: “It is taught among us that no one should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.”

Obviously, many pastors played an important role in the formulation and defense of this confession, foremost among them the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther. But the Augsburg Confession itself, as well as its Apology, was written by a layman—Luther’s friend and fellow professor Philip Melancthon, who was never ordained as a pastor. The Augsburg Confession was read in the presence of Emperor Charles V by a fearless layman named Christian Beyer, who read it so loudly and distinctly that even the crowd standing in the courtyard outside of the palace could hear and understand every word. And all of the official signers of the AC were laymen, dukes and princes and margraves and mayors who knew full well before they walked into the Bishop’s Palace in Augsburg in the year 1530 that they were putting their lives on the line for the sake of this confession.

In his classic book *Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton has a stirring description of this historic event and the fearless actions of these founding fathers of Lutheranism.

“When Charles V approached the city of Augsburg, the dignitaries went out to receive him. As the notables knelt bareheaded for the benediction of Cardinal Campeggio, the Elector of Saxony [a supporter of Luther] stood bolt upright. From there they marched to the cathedral, where the emperor and all the throng knelt before the high altar. But Elector John of Saxony and the landgrave, Philip of Hesse, remained standing. The next day the emperor took the Lutheran princes aside. He told them that their ministers must not preach in Augsburg. The princes refused. The emperor insisted that at any rate the ministers must not preach polemical sermons. The princes again refused. The emperor informed them that the following day they would see the *Corpus Christi* procession, in which they would be expected to march. The princes once more refused. The emperor continued to insist, when the margrave stepped forward and said, “Before I let anyone take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let him strike off my head” (252-253).

Just a couple of years after the presentation of the Augsburg Confession Duke John of Saxony died. The preacher at Duke John’s funeral was a grieving pastor named Martin Luther. He said: “You all know how Duke John really died two years ago in Augsburg, not only for himself but for all of us, when he stood up to the Emperor and, as a result, was obliged to swallow all kinds of bitter broth and venom which the devil poured out for him. There at Augsburg our beloved elector openly confessed Christ’s death and resurrection before the whole world and he stuck to it, staking his land and his people and his own body and life upon this confession. There can be no doubt that he felt this death and its severity in his heart.” But he took refuge in Christ’s death and resurrection, “by which he has swallowed up death and hell and all of our sins.”¹⁶

The Reformation would never have happened without Martin Luther and other courageous and committed pastors; nor would it have been possible without courageous and committed lay people—both men and women—who were willing to risk all for the sake of Christ and his Gospel.

In the last sermon he ever preached Luther said: “True preachers must carefully and faithfully teach only God’s Word and must seek its honor and praise alone. In the same way, the hearers must say: ‘We do not believe in our pastor, but he tells us of another Master, One named Christ. To Him he directs us. We will heed our pastor insofar as our pastor directs us to this true Master and Teacher, the Son of God.’”¹⁷

Herman Preus concludes his article with these words: “Luther regards the relationship between the minister and the laity as a holy relationship, a marriage of love and respect. No conflict. No jealousy. No competition. Let the minister be faithful to his ordination

¹⁶ LW 51, 237.

¹⁷ LW 51, 388.

vows and the congregation will honor him and follow him. In all this Luther is summoning us, all of us, laymen and pastors alike, to join hands in carrying out our priestly function of teaching, witnessing, and preaching the Word of Life in Christ, of being in constant prayer for others, and of offering ourselves as a living sacrifice for our neighbor, even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.”

In Phil. 1, we see Paul’s great love for the people he served, and we get a glimpse of their deep love for him. In Phil. 2 we learn the secret of that beautiful partnership in the Gospel, and I’d like to close with these words: “Your attitude [whether you are a pastor or a lay person or a commissioned minister or whoever you are] should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen.”