

## **RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR OPINION FROM THE MICHIGAN DISTRICT PRESIDENT**

### **Question #1:**

In a multiple pastoral staff congregation, if the congregation eliminates the administrative pastor position and the associate pastor position in favor of a sole pastor position, do the Calls to the administrative pastor and the associate pastor terminate? In other words, if the position is terminated, are the Calls by the congregation also terminated?

### **Response:**

1. The pastoral office itself is divinely mandated and the congregation may not abolish it. The Commission reminds the congregation of the necessity to examine the specific language of the original call documents of both pastors and honor the commitments that were made.
2. As to whether a congregation may terminate certain specific positions within the pastoral office the CTCR points, first of all, to its previous statement that: "According to her need, the church may under the one Ministry of the Word establish such 'offices' as the situation requires. If the situation changes, she may also abolish some offices" (*The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church* [1973], p. 12).

In specific response to the question "Can a congregation, district or Synod terminate a call for financial reasons?" the CTCR reaffirms its previous opinion (dated Sept. 21, 1990) in which it makes reference to its 1973 report and further states: "A congregation may abolish any called position or ranking that it has established as long as it retains the pastoral office." In this same opinion the CTCR urges a congregation that finds itself in this situation to "examine its motives and procedures before Him who searches the heart" and to be "guided by the concern that nothing be done in disobedience to God's Word."

Since there is no "Call" without a position, a called position that is eliminated inevitably involves the termination of a person's Call to that position. It should be made clear to all concerned, however, that in situations of financial duress a person's call is not being terminated for "cause" – i.e., false doctrine, an immoral life, or unwillingness or inability to fulfill the responsibilities of the office. (See also the CTCR's 1981 report *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, pp. 41-42 and its 2003 report *Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call,"* pp. 21-25, 42.) The goal should be to come to "mutual agreement" about what is best for the congregation and both pastors (*Theology and Practice of "the Divine Call,"* p. 45).

### **Question #2:**

If both administrative and associate positions are eliminated, may the congregation choose to Call either pastor or neither pastor currently in those positions?

### **Response:**

The congregation retains the right to call to the pastoral office the man of its choosing. As C.F.W. Walther's says in Thesis VII of his Theses on the Ministry: "The holy ministry is the authority conferred by God through the congregation, as holder of the priesthood and of all church power, to

administer in public office the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of all.” (See the CTCR’s 1981 report on *The Ministry*, p. 44.)

However, while upholding the congregation’s right to choose and call its own pastor(s), the Commission urges the exercise of great care and extreme caution in situations such as those depicted in this request. The potential to divide deeply the congregation over the matter of personal loyalties to one or the other of the pastors involved must be carefully taken into account. Whether either pastor should be called to the new sole pastor position should be carefully considered. Seeking the counsel of the appropriate people in circuit and district positions of supervision (Circuit Counselor and District President) is critically important for the well being of the congregation now and in the future.

**Question #3:**

If the congregation chooses to call the associate pastor as sole pastor, could the administrative pastor have grounds for appeal?

**Response:**

The right to appeal is given to all members of the Synod. As to the question of whether a called worker has “grounds for appeal,” that is to be determined after consideration of all the specifics of the situation. The procedure that governs matters of dispute resolution is described in the 2007 *Handbook* of the LCMS. We call particular attention to the purpose of dispute resolution on p. 38, Section 1.10.2.

Again, if circumstances make it necessary to eliminate a certain position, great care and concern must be exercised so that all persons involved are treated fairly and with Christian compassion. Our Lord’s call to love one another and care for one another must prevail. The necessity of providing financial support and benefits during a time of transition must also be addressed.

Adopted by the CTCR  
April 25, 2009