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# **THE OFFICE OF THE HOLY MINISTRY**

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## HELPING OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

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The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is in a state of crisis regarding the office of the public ministry. Perhaps this an overstatement, but I don't think so – too many voices are saying too many different things for us to pretend that there is still a unity of teaching in our church regarding this office. One Concordia Publishing House publication, for example, describes pastors primarily as enablers and equippers of the laity for ministry and insists, "To be sure, pastors are to be honored because they are our spiritual leaders (1 Tim. 5:17). But Christian service is as sacred when performed by a layman as when performed by a seminary graduate or a properly called pastor of a parish."<sup>1</sup> But another LCMS clergyman writes that the absolution when pronounced by a pastor has a validity that it lacks when pronounced by a layman:

The pastor...is able to deliver "indicative-operative absolution" .... Christ is here personally addressing the penitent through the instrument of the pastor .... If a member of the laity should speak in this manner, the offered forgiveness would be considered as coming from the absolving individual rather than from the only begotten Son of the Father.<sup>2</sup>

In other church bodies, perhaps such variety of theological opinion would not constitute a crisis; but for the Missouri Synod it does, since an integral part of what it means to be "Missouri Synod" has been from its founding to hold to a particular understanding of church and ministry. Having reached that understanding in the wake of Martin Stephan's dismissal from their colony, C. F. W. Walther and his colleagues maintained it in their meetings with Löhe's men that led to the formation

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar E. Feucht, *Everyone a Minister* (St. Louis: CPH, 1974), pp. 54-55. Describing the pastor, Feucht writes, "...in the remaining chapters of this book...the emphasis will be on his role as an enabler, teacher, and shepherd of all his members" (pp. 64-46) and "the pastor is a mission director and enabler. His team is as large as his congregation" (p. 136).

<sup>2</sup>Douglas Fusselman, "Only Playing Church? The Lay Minister and the Lord's Supper," *Logia* 3 (1994): 45.

of the Missouri Synod; and, on account of the controversy with J. A. A. Grabau and the Buffalo Synod, the Missouri Synod officially adopted Walther's theses on church and ministry already at the 1851 convention, just four years after Synod's founding.<sup>3</sup>

That teaching has been repeated again and again throughout Synod's history; and as recently as 1992, when Synod directed the Commission on Theology and Church Relations to provide answers to questions regarding the theology and practice of "the divine call," they were told to do it "utilizing the writings of C. F. W. Walther," specifically his essay, "The Congregations's Right to Choose Its Pastor" and his book, *Church and Ministry*. To be Missourian, then, has meant to accept a specific teaching regarding this topic.<sup>4</sup>

However, even though many Missourians still hold to the official teaching of our church, new issues have arisen which call that teaching into question or, at least, compel a re-examination of our doctrine. The most obvious such novelty is women's ordination. Although one might argue that the burden of proof rests upon those who innovate against the practice not only of the Missouri Synod but of virtually all of orthodox Christendom for 1900 years, in the West, especially the United States, the capitulation of one denomination after another to the forces of feminism, including the ELCA and its predecessor bodies, has shifted the burden to those who would resist the tide: Why don't you Missourians ordain women? What do you have against women? Are you misogynists or only old sticks in the mud?

Theologians of previous eras were more ready to answer the advocates of women's ordination in terms of the nature of men and women—men are leaders, women are nurturers; men are thinkers, women are emotional, etc. But that simply won't do in modern America; and so, defenders of the old position have felt themselves under pressure to re-examine the office itself and to demonstrate what it is in

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<sup>3</sup>Carl S. Munding, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: CPH, 1947), pp. 163-98. See also C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), pp. 7-12; and the 1851 *Convention Proceedings*, 1876 reprint ed. (St. Louis: Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten, 1876), p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>1992 *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 3-09A; cf. also the *Brief Statement* which, with its paragraphs on church and ministry, was adopted in 1932, 1947, and 1959. 1932 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 155; 1947 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 476; and 1959 *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 3-9, p. 191. See also Franz Pieper's essay in *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (Phil.: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), pp. 130-36.

the nature of the ministry that necessitates a male-only clergy.<sup>5</sup> Such explorations have been useful and sometimes persuasive; but one unintended consequence has also been, in part, a greater sense of insecurity among some Missourians about our own long-standing doctrine of the ministry and its capacity for answering the feminists. For example, if we hold that God has instituted the office for the sake of preaching and administering the sacraments—a responsibility which in some sense already belongs to the individual Christian—and if we also agree with our critics that women are as capable of preaching and teaching as are men, then what is to keep us from ordaining them?

It is questions like this that prompt new ways of describing the office of the ministry. A goodly number of Missourians are still content with simply saying no to the advocates of women's ordination on the basis of clear Scripture passages regarding authority in the church, e.g., 1 Tim. 2:11-12, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." If it was good enough for St. Paul, we say, it's good enough for us. And so, "so long" to women's ordination; but the questions regarding the nature of the ministry that the issue of women's ordination has raised in our circles are not so easily dismissed.

Furthermore, besides the changing role of women in society and church, our crisis over the doctrine of the ministry arises for other reasons as well. In particular, there is also the multiplication of "helping offices" in the church. In the current *Lutheran Annual*, under the listing of "Ministers of Religion – Ordained," we find 17 categories besides pastors of various kinds; and under "Ministers of Religion – Commissioned," besides 4 major subdivisions (certified teachers, directors of Christian education, deaconesses, and directors of Christian outreach), there are a host of additional subcategories. The third major division, "Certified Church Workers, Lay," includes lay ministers, lay teachers, parish assistants, parish musicians, and parish workers. And these are only those offices which are recognized at the synodical level!<sup>6</sup>

Such offices are usually full time positions and one or more of our synodical schools often has a program preparing men and women for such vocations. Entering

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<sup>5</sup>See, for example, David P. Scaer, "The Integrity of the Christological Character of the Office of the Ministry," *Logia* 2 (1993): 15-18; and Jobst Schöne, "Pastoral Letter on the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office of the Church," CTQ 59 (1995): 301-16.

<sup>6</sup>*The Lutheran Annual 1996 of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: CPH, 1995), pp. 185, 365, 552.

such a position is often described as a call, and there are special services of induction and installation when one begins his work. In addition, the duties of such positions often include responsibilities for some sort of teaching God's Word. No wonder, then, that the existence and the proliferation of these positions within the church have provoked questions about the ministry of the church - questions, such as, who precisely is in the office of the public ministry? Are teachers? DCE's [Director of Christian Education]? High school religion teachers? Seminary professors? Who? Or again, what is unique about the office of the pastor in 'a congregation? What responsibility does he have for those aspects of ministry that have been given to others, and what parts of ministry are his alone?

Complicating matters even more, in almost all of our congregations, there are a multitude of congregational members—laymen—who also are involved on an occasional basis in proclaiming the Word of God – the Sunday School teachers, the evangelism team members, the Sunday morning lectors, and the like. What is the nature of these positions in the church and what is their relationship to the office of the ministry?

Although such developments have been a long time in the making, the catalyst for our present crisis occurred only in 1989, when synod took an action that many really could not figure out in terms of our theology by creating yet another "helping office" in the church, that of licensed lay minister to preach and to administer the sacraments "in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies." Those who participate in this particular office do so under the supervision of a pastor and with an annual, renewable license from their district president; nevertheless, what they are licensed to do is unmistakably and admittedly pastoral as the synodical resolution indicated when it described its purpose as "providing for an orderly way of carrying out distinctive functions of the pastoral office in the absence of an ordained clergyman." In others words, the synod authorized certain laymen to do what pastors are supposed to do.<sup>7</sup>

More than any other episode in our recent history, this decision forced Missourians once again to re-examine what the Bible and the Confessions teach about the office of the public ministry, especially in relation to the helping offices that the church creates. And one result of this re-examination has been the action of the 1995 synodical convention designed to minimize the use of this new office and basically to make it a step toward ordination.<sup>8</sup> But in spite of this action, it is not yet

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<sup>7</sup>1989 *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 3-05B, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup>1995 *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 3-07A, pp. 120-21.

clear whether synod has reached a consensus among its members about what makes the office of the public ministry distinct from auxiliary offices like that of the licensed lay minister.

As a result, then, of women's ordination outside of the Missouri Synod and the multiplication of auxiliary offices within the synod, many of us are asking today: Is it still possible to make sense of all this within the confines of Biblical and Confessional theology as we have come to understand it in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod? I think so; I hope so. But I would be less than candid if I were to say that I was absolutely certain.

So my purpose here is not to provide all the answers but simply to contribute to the conversation—to throw some light on the situation we are in from a historical perspective, to indicate some of the alternative explanations that our history proposes regarding the nature of auxiliary offices, and finally, time permitting, to listen to some of the ideas and concerns that you may have regarding helping offices in the church.

Helping offices, or auxiliary offices as they have usually been known, have a history in the Missouri Synod that goes right back to the beginning, since Synod's very first constitution made provision for Lutheran school teachers to be advisory members of synod. The constitution also indicated that synod would be responsible for maintaining institutions to prepare such teachers as well as pastors and specified the subjects in which teachers must demonstrate proficiency, including the Scriptures and the Confessions "especially the two catechisms of Luther"; but, significantly, the constitution was silent regarding calling teachers whereas it was quite explicit about calling pastors. Furthermore, pastors were to be ordained by other pastors, including the president of synod; whereas teachers were to be inducted into their office simply by the pastor of the congregation in which they served.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously, the synodical founders considered the office of school teacher different from that of pastor. The latter was a divine institution, established by God in His Church; but the former was a Hilfsamt, a helping office, a creation of the church. Synod made this clear a few years after its founding when C. F. W. Walther prepared his theses on "church and ministry" for adoption by the synodical convention in 1851. Walther addressed the question of helping offices in Thesis VIII of the second part (regarding the ministry). In J. T. Mueller's translation, we read,

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<sup>9</sup>W. G. Polack, ed., "Our First Synodical Constitution," *CHI* 16 (1943): 4, 7, 9-10. For German original, see *Die Verfassung der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten* (St Louis: Weber & Olshausen, 1846), pp. 5-8.

"The pastoral office [Predigtamt] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church."<sup>10</sup>

One of the not-so-minor controversies today revolves about the adequacy of Mueller's translation of Predigtamt in this thesis as "pastoral office" because it seems to suggest that the pastor of a congregation is the only one who really holds the office.<sup>11</sup> However, in his explanation to this thesis, Walther identifies the Predigtamt with the office that Christ instituted with the apostles and distinguishes between offices in the church that partake of the ministry of the Word and those that do not but rather support the ministry. Walther writes:

The highest office is that of the ministry of the Word, with which all other offices are also conferred at the same time. Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry, whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17) or the rulers (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration [emphasis mine].

Walther then goes on to give examples of such supporting or auxiliary offices:

The offices of Christian day school teachers, almoners, sextons, precen-tors at public worship, and others are all to be regarded as ecclesiastical and sacred, for they take over a part of the one ministry of the Word [Kirchenamt] and support the pastoral office [Predigtamt].<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. by J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: CPH, 1987), p. 289. For German original, see C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, 4th ed. (Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins der sep. evang.-luth. Gemeinden in Sachsen, 1894), p. 342. "Das Predigtamt ist das höchste Amt in der Kirche, aus welchem alle anderen Kirchenämter fließen."

<sup>11</sup>Regarding this translation, see Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance* (Ft. Wayne: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), p. 143, notes 72 and 73; and Wilbert P. Gawrisch, review of C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. by J. T. Mueller, in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 90 (1993): 313-14.

<sup>12</sup>Walther (Mueller translation), pp. 289-90; original, pp. 342-43.

Unfortunately, Mueller's translation once again creates some ambiguity regarding the nature of these supporting offices, since Walther's original does not say that school teachers, almoners, and sextons take a part of the "one ministry of the Word" – that's Mueller's formulation. Walther says that they take a part of the "one ministry of the church [einen Teil des Einen Kirchenamtes]" – and that ministry, "the one ministry of the church," is the subject of the entire thesis about which Walther writes, "When the Lord instituted the apostolate, He instituted only one office in the church, which embraces all others."

Mueller's translation, therefore, obscures the fact that Walther's "all other" church offices fall into two categories - not only those whom the Scripture calls bishops, elders, stewards, i.e., the ones who have the office of the public ministry, but also "the incumbents of subordinate offices...called, deacons, that is servants, not only of God but also of the congregation and the bishop." This second category does not include those who have "a part of the ministry of the Word" but rather those offices which "support the ministry of the Word [ein Hilfsamt, das dem Predigtamt zur Seite steht]." <sup>13</sup>

That Walther intended so to distinguish between offices of the public ministry and offices that support the public ministry is further demonstrated by his citation of the apostolic example in Acts 6. To the apostles God had transmitted the one office of the Church. Its essence was the ministry of the Word but it also included works of Christian love and service toward the widows of the congregation. But when the latter became too much for the apostles, they entrusted that work to others and so established the office of deacon, not as a part of the ministry of the Word but as an office of service to the congregation and the apostles.

This is Walther's basis, therefore, for concluding that the church can create offices that assist, serve, or help the office of the public ministry so that the Word may have "free course" throughout the church. In other words, God has established the office of the public ministry and God places men into that office through the call of the church, but the church herself may create additional offices to assist that ministry, just as the apostles did in Acts 6.

Right from the beginning, therefore, the Missouri Synod recognized the existence of helping offices in the church. In synod's subsequent history, however, it has not always been so clear as to which offices are "helping" in the strict sense after the example of the Seven in Acts 6 and which are offices of the public ministry. Or to put it another way, which positions in the church belong to the office that God

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Himself has instituted and fills and which positions are simply and solely the creation of the church?

Consider again the office of Lutheran school teacher in relation to the office of the public ministry. Is it a "helping" office like that of the seven deacons or does it partake of the one ministry of the Word? After all, teachers do teach children of the congregation the Word of God; nonetheless, it is also obvious that teachers are not pastors and that their responsibility is strictly limited. Their office is an auxiliary one, but of what kind?

Quite frankly, the historical record is ambiguous in this regard. John Wohlrabe describes it as "confusion" in his fine study of ministry in the Missouri Synod. On the one hand, as Wohlrabe points out, in 1874 at the synodical convention, when the question arose whether a teacher could be a lay representative for a congregation, the answer was "no" - which, of course, is still the situation today. Later, in 1896, synod took steps to obtain a discount for teachers from railroads that offered half-fares to clergymen. After receiving a report that argued that "our teachers are servants of the church and assistants in the preaching office, and as such are entitled to half-fare permits," the convention appointed a committee to negotiate with the railroads and obtain such permits for teachers - which they did for a period of 20 years. In 1920 the issue of discounted fares arose again and several teachers' conferences memorialized synod to list teachers as "assistant pastors" so as once again to persuade the railroads to give teachers reduced rates. Told that it would do no good, synod declined to change the listing; but clearly there was widespread conviction that teachers held an office of the public ministry.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, however, Walther's *Church and Ministry* lists the school teacher's office as one that supports the ministry of the Word and not one that has it; and in 1874, the official theological journal of the Missouri Synod, *Lehre und Wehre*, published a set of theses and elaborations thereon, prepared by E. W. Kähler for a joint conference of Ohio and Missouri Synod men, on the nature of the call to carry out specific functions of the pastoral office. In this treatise, Kähler, who would a few years later become Walther's secretary and editorial assistant, addressed the question of whether the offices of elder, sacristan, and schoolteacher, among others, "include the carrying out of the ministry of the Word [Predigtamt] in its strict sense."

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<sup>14</sup>John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri until 1962* (N.p., 1992), pp. 19-20; 1874 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 79; 1896 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 133 ("Diener der Kirche und Gehülfen in Predigtamt sind"); and 1920 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 242.

His answer is "not at all [keineswegs]." Such offices are sacred church offices and support the preaching office but are not a part of it.<sup>15</sup>

For most of her history, Synod has been able to live with an ambiguous understanding of the school teacher's office, even after the introduction of female teachers at the end of the nineteenth century, since synod treated male and female teachers differently - the former held an office in the church, the latter did not.<sup>16</sup> However, in more recent years, when offices in the church have begun to proliferate and distinctions between men and women in the teaching ministry have been obliterated,<sup>17</sup> questions have arisen anew about the precise relationship between these offices and the pastor, questions about whether such offices were or were not a part of the one, divinely established office of the public ministry.

One solution to these questions is, of course, simply to obliterate the distinction between helping offices and the office. As long as one represents the Church in preaching, teaching, or sharing the Word with others in some way, shape, or form, he is in the public ministry. Pastor and Sunday School teacher are both in the ministry. Actually, this is the position of the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>E. W. Kähler, "Hat die Gemeinde das Recht, ordentlicher Weise einen wesentlichen Theil des heiligen Predigtamtes irgend einem Laien temporär zu übertragen?" *Lehre und Wehre* 20 (1874): 336. Basically, Kähler's argument is that only those offices that exercise the key that opens and shuts heaven, those who preach, hear confessions, baptize, and commune; those who watch over the souls of the whole congregation have the office. The service of teachers is limited to children and assists the parents in educating children. See also *Lutheran Standard* March 14, 1874, p. 85. For Kähler and Walther, see Carl S. Meyer, *From Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup>In 1953, for example, synod distinguished between the two this way, "A male teacher is 'called.' He is a 'minister of education.' He is received into the calling congregation by 'rite of installation.' He is an official 'advisory member of the synod.' A woman teacher is 'appointed,' and subject to the conditions of scripture. Her calling differs from that of the male teacher in tenure since 'she is free to withdraw from her professional responsibilities to enter into matrimony.' She is not an 'advisory member of synod.'" Paul Nielsen, "The Role of Women in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod" (unpublished M. Div. thesis, Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne, 1993), p.23.

<sup>17</sup>In 1973, synod removed the distinction between men and women teachers as far as synodical membership was concerned. 1973 *Proceedings*, p. 190. Nielsen, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Erwin Scharf, "The Call to the Public Use of the Keys" in Lyle W. Lange, ed. *Our Great Heritage*, 3 vols. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) 3: 504.

Wisconsin and Missouri, though sister synods of the Synodical Conference for about ninety years, long irritated each other prior to the demise of their fellowship over the question of church and ministry;<sup>19</sup> and since the time of the breakup of that Conference, Wisconsin has very clearly articulated a theology of ministry that accommodates itself very well to the contemporary complicated situation. Indeed, it has also proved attractive to some Missouri Synod Lutherans.

Basically, what the Wisconsin Synod teaches is that while God has indeed "instituted the public ministry of the gospel," He has not instituted "any particular form of this ministry, such as the pastorate in a local congregation. Teachers, professors, synod and district presidents, administrators, etc. also receive a divine call into the public ministry no less than pastors. These are all God-pleasing forms of the divinely instituted public ministry." Anyone who represents the church in sharing the Word of God is in this ministry that God has instituted. The Christian day school teacher, even the Sunday School teacher, carries out a "form of the ministry of the Word." In short, the church herself determines the form of the office whereby God's Word is taught and the sacraments administered; and since the form is fluid, the question of "helping" offices becomes far less acute than in other circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

Very similar in content to the Wisconsin position, if not using precisely the same language, are statements coming from some Missouri Synod sources. In 1981, for example, Paul Zimmerman, former president of Concordia River Forest, concluded that in the New Testament and early church:

There is no evidence that there were exact counterparts to our present parish pastors and Christian teachers. . . . Many kinds of ministerial functions are evident without much said about structure. . . . The emphasis is on getting the Word of God out so it may grow in the hearts of men. There is the necessity of providing the sacraments and of aiding the brothers and sisters in the Christian community. This is the "ministry."

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<sup>19</sup>Harold Romoser, "The Church and the Ministry" *Faithful Word* 7, nos. 3 and 4 (Aug. - Nov., 1970): 30-68.

<sup>20</sup>John F. Brug, Edward C. Fredrich II, and Armin W. Schuetze, *WELS and Other Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), p. 18, and John F. Brug, "Current Debate Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91(1994): 38, 40.

This is what is mandated, both in word and by example. Whoever engages in these activities is in the holy ministry.<sup>21</sup>

What Zimmerman is contending for is very similar to the Wisconsin Synod's viewpoint. God has commissioned His Church to proclaim the Word, but has not mandated any specific form for how that is done. The ministry is really much more "an activity of proclaiming the Word" than it is an office like that of pastor. Teachers, DCE's, youth workers are all in the ministry since the church has commissioned them all in one way or another to proclaim the Word of God.<sup>22</sup>

Zimmerman's position is not a new one in the Missouri Synod. According to Wohlrabe again, some of synod's educational leaders had developed this position already in the 1940's under pressure from the government regarding the draft status of male teachers. Arnold C. Mueller, synod's editor of Sunday School materials from 1933 to 1966, and August C. Stellhorn, synodical executive for Christian day schools from 1921 to 1960, repudiated the concept of auxiliary offices, at least as it applied to teachers. In 1948, Mueller wrote:

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any mention of auxiliary offices. We might consider the office of the deacons whose appointment is mentioned in Acts 6 as an auxiliary office, but this office was strictly something apart from the ministry of the Word. I am ready to accept the term "auxiliary" for church functions which are an aid to the pastor but do not require proficiency in teaching the Word, but I refuse to apply this term to any servants of the Church who teach the Word, because the very concept is unscriptural.... Therefore, to avoid confusion, we should discard the term "auxiliary office" altogether and speak only of the office of the teacher, just as we speak of the office of the pastor.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul A. Zimmerman, "The Lutheran Teacher - Minister of the Church," in W. Theophil Janzow, ed., *Perspective on Ministry* (n.p.: Lutheran Education Association, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>23</sup>Arnold C. Mueller, "The Status of the Parochial School Teacher" as quoted in Wohlrabe, pp. 41-42.

## Helping Offices in the Church

More than 15 years later in his *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher*, Mueller made the same point and indicated his clear awareness that he was differing with others in the church:

Two views of the ministry have been propounded among us, and they are mutually exclusive; it is an either-or. According to one view, the pastorate is the one divinely instituted office; all other positions in the ministry stem from the pastorate and are auxiliary offices to the pastorate. According to the other view, which I believe is the Biblical one, God has instituted the office of the ministry, that is, He has commissioned His church to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments, but He has not prescribed the forms in which the church is to fulfill the commission. All forms of the ministry, including the pastorate, stem from the one divinely instituted and all-embracing office of the ministry [emphasis mine].<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, A. C. Mueller, an ecclesiastical executive of the Missouri Synod, was championing what we have called the "Wisconsin" position; but as Mueller himself realized, he was taking issue with another point of view, the one usually described as the Missouri position. Over against the fluidity of Wisconsin's "forms" of the office, Missouri's theologians have emphasized the connection of the office of the public ministry to the actual administration of the means of grace in a Christian congregation and have relegated everything else to the category of "auxiliary" or "helping offices."

The *Brief Statement of 1932* describes the Missouri position on the doctrine of the ministry this way:

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...but they are also required, by the divine order to make provision that the Word of

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<sup>24</sup>Arnold C. Mueller, *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher* (St. Louis: CPH, 1964), pp. 11-12. See Wohlrabe for the development and consequences of Mueller's formulations, pp. as quoted in Wohlrabe, pp. 39-47. James H. Pragman, *Traditions of Ministry* (St. Louis: CPH, 1983), pp. 170-76, also describes the two points of view in the Missouri Synod.

God be publicly preached in their midst and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work, whose qualifications and official functions are exactly defined in Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

Although it does not use the term "pastor," the *Brief Statement* is certainly describing the office of pastor as we experience it in the congregations of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. While it may not be absolutely clear at first whether there are others besides the pastor who are likewise in this one divinely instituted office or whether the category of "pastor" exhausts the office of the public ministry, nearly contemporaneous synodical publications indicate that in the "Missouri" position, the pastoral office is the office of the public ministry.

For example, P. E. Kretzmann of *Popular Commentary* fame, writing just two years after the *Brief Statement* was adopted, contended that "the office of the Christian ministry is the only office instituted by God...and that the one office thus established includes all functions of the ministry (also those commonly delegated to auxiliary offices) [emphasis original]" and then went on to discuss those functions in connection with the "scope of the pastor's responsibilities and duties [emphasis mine]." To make it even clearer that what he has in mind is what we think of as the pastor, Kretzmann writes, "A man holding the ministerial office proper is responsible for every soul in the congregation, in teaching, in admonishing, in reproof, in applying the Word to every condition and circumstance of life. In short, the office of the ministry (DAS PFARRAMT) is established by God [emphasis original]." Or again, "the pastor of the congregation is responsible for all the souls of the parish...is in charge of the public administration of the means of grace...is the watchman of the congregation in the Lord's stead [emphasis original]."<sup>26</sup>

In Kretzmann's formulation, therefore, "the duties [of this one office] are plainly fixed in Holy Scriptures"; but Kretzmann also argues that the church has the freedom to create auxiliary offices, the duties of which are determined by the congregation or synod that has created them; and as examples of these offices, Kretzmann lists the following positions often found in a congregation: Christian day school teacher (male or female), Sunday School teacher, elder or deacon, deaconess, and even

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<sup>25</sup>*Brief Statement*, par. 31, 1947 *Convention Proceedings*, p. 486.

<sup>26</sup>P. E. Kretzmann, "The Doctrine of the Call with Special Reference to the Auxiliary Offices in the Church," Paper presented at the Arlington Convention of the Northern Nebraska District of the Missouri Synod, August 20-24 (N.P), pp. 5, 6, 8, 13.

assistant pastor. He also lists extra-congregational positions: professors in church institutions, presidents of synods or districts, missionaries and directors of missions, chaplains and spiritual heads of hospitals, superintendents of church societies, and students acting as supply preachers.<sup>27</sup>

Kretzmann's attitude toward auxiliary offices is almost as fluid as Wisconsin's "forms of ministry"; however, in contrast to the Wisconsin position, the Missouri position, as Kretzmann expresses it, insists upon the divine institution of the pastoral office. New Testament passages refer specifically to God's giving pastors to the church (Acts 20:28 and Eph. 4:11), indicate the spiritual oversight that is entrusted to them (Acts 20:28 and Heb. 13:17), prohibit anyone from serving as a public minister without a call (Rom. 10:15), and indicate specific qualifications for their ministry (1 Tim. 3). From this perspective, the pastoral office is not simply one form among many, but the form that God has instituted.

Kretzmann's understanding of the synodical position was hardly unique. John H. C. Fritz, in his *Pastoral Theology*, equates the office of the ministry with the pastoral office and contends that "according to Scripture the Christian congregation is completely constituted when it has established the office of the ministry by having called and gotten its pastor." Similarly, J. T. Mueller, in his *Christian Dogmatics*, contends that "the public ministry is a divine appointment or ordinance" and equates it with the "pastoral office" which is supreme in the church and, quoting Luther, argues that it lays the foundation for other offices, including that of teachers.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, it is also worth noting that the Missouri position still has its advocates. Just a couple of years ago, my own colleague at Ft. Wayne, Eugene Klug, investigated this question once again on the basis of Walther and Luther and concluded "that the office of the called pastor is the distinctive office God has instituted for the sake of the church's continuance in the world [emphasis mine]." Like Kretzmann, Klug argues that all other offices of the church are auxiliary offices which the church herself creates, "They devolve from a felt existential need, and are created in Christian liberty to be of assistance to the pastoral office." As examples, Klug offers "the assistant pastor, vicar, parochial school teacher, elders, deacons, professors at synodical institutions, district and synodical presidents and other officers." Such offices may carry out "divinely ordained or instituted functions . . . . But the particular form, structure, or polity under which the congregation or group of congrega-

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 10, 12.

<sup>28</sup>John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: CPH, 1932), pp. 28-32, 309, and John T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: CPH, 1934), pp. 566-69, 580.

tions employs or structures them is a matter of Christian liberty [emphasis original]."<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, in order to bridge the gap between the two sides in the Missouri Synod, there have been efforts to broaden the concept of the office of the public ministry beyond simply that of parish pastor. For example, another of my colleagues, Kurt Marquart, in his contribution to the Preus dogmatics series leaves room for others besides pastors to hold the office of the public ministry such as professors of theological faculties and perhaps even congregational catechists but not parochial school teachers. The late Dr. Robert Preus himself also argued persuasively on historical grounds that theological professors were in the public ministry, since they were called to be teachers of God's Word to the entire church. And in 1981, Synod's Commission on Theology argued in its "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature" that district presidents, seminary professors, campus pastors, and military chaplains are all "properly said to be serving in the office of the public ministry of the church." In this connection it is interesting to note that in the Proceedings of synod's very first convention, the professor of the Ft. Wayne seminary, August Wolter, is listed as an advisory member along with the pastors of congregations that did not at first join synod.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, there is some sentiment in the Missouri Synod today for distinguishing between auxiliary offices that are strictly "helping" offices and do not exercise an essential part of the office of the public ministry and those offices that do exercise an essential part of the ministry even if they are not the office of pastor. This may well be what Walther had in mind in his Thesis VIII in *Church and Ministry*; and the Kähler theses of 1874 do seem to make use of this distinction, but still in a congregational setting, to argue that an assistant pastor has the full office but a school teacher, a sexton, and the like do not.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, by this time, you all may be wondering what precisely is at stake in this discussion—besides doctrinal clarity that is, which of course is not an incidental consideration in and of itself. In addition, however, there are some very practical

<sup>29</sup>Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther* (St. Louis: CPH, 1993), pp. 268-69.

<sup>30</sup>Marquart, pp. 122, 141-44; Robert D. Preus, *The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy* (N.p.: Luther Academy, 1991), p. 16-17; and *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (N.p.: Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS, 1981), pp. 21-22; and *1847 Convention Proceedings*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup>Kähler, pp. 267, 336.

concerns involved in this matter as well. On the one hand, if we insist upon the strict Missouri position that only pastors have the office of the public ministry, how is it that we permit, indeed, expect, all kinds of non-pastors to preach and to administer the sacraments in our congregations. Synodical officials, theology professors, missionaries — what are any of these doing in the pulpits of our churches if they do not have the preaching office? How is it that they can be asked routinely to substitute at a communion service or visit and commune the sick if they are not in the office of the ministry?

Many of you are, I am sure, familiar with the principle, "Lex orandi, lex credendi"—the way we worship determines our faith and doctrine; but this in turn is simply a specific application of a broader principle, "Lex agendi, lex credendi"—what we do in the church generally determines our faith and doctrine. By the Augsburg Confession, we agree "that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." In the light of Augustana XIV, our common practice of permitting any ordained clergyman on the roster of synod to preach and to administer indicates an implicit belief that all such are "regularly called" to do so. They may hold "auxiliary offices" in the sense that they are not parish pastors, but nonetheless to carry out these tasks, they must also be in the office of the public ministry.

On the other hand, since our practice is not consistent, neither will our doctrine be consistent. For we also act as if such offices were simply the creation of the church. Temporary calls, contracts, hiring and firing, resignations, term limits, none of which practices are appropriate for a divine institution, are commonplace with respect to all of these offices. But if an office is truly a divine institution, we believe that God places men into it as the Scriptures attest in Acts 20:28 ("the Holy Ghost has made you overseers") and Eph. 4:11 ("And He gave some pastors and teachers"). This, in turn, means, really, that only God can remove those who hold the office from their offices. What He gives He must take away.

The synodical fathers insisted, as a condition of membership in the Missouri Synod, that calls into the ministry "be proper, not temporary ones." In his *Pastoral Theology*, Walther explained:

For if God is really the One Who calls preachers, the congregations are only the instruments for separating the persons for the work to which the Lord has called them (Acts 13:1). The preacher stands in God's service and office, and no creature can dismiss God's servant from God's office unless it can be proven that God Himself has dismissed him from office

(Jer. 15:19; see Hos. 4:6), in which case the congregation is not really dismissing the preacher but is only carrying out God's clear dismissal.<sup>32</sup>

But besides pastors, who in the Missouri Synod has a permanent call? Certainly not theology professors or synodical officials. But is this correct? Are we accepting the consequences of our theology (lex credendi, lex agendi) or is expediency the order of the day? And by being expedient, can we expect any other result than a change in our doctrine (lex agendi, lex credendi)?

One of the ironies of this whole discussion is that, according to Wohlrabe, A. C. Mueller and A. C. Stelhorn initiated their attack on the old Missouri view of the ministry in order to elevate the status of the Lutheran school teachers. By obliterating the distinction between auxiliary offices and the office of the ministry, they hoped to give the teacher a status more comparable to that of the pastor.<sup>33</sup>

One could argue, however, that what actually has happened over the last generation is that of the status of the pastor has declined to the level of the teacher and that both of them have gone down together. Of course, we can hardly attribute this decline exclusively to the confusion over "helping offices" in the church; but discussions that treat pastors and Sunday School teachers as having but different forms of the same office certainly have not helped the situation any more than have ecclesiastical policies that permit parish preachers, theological teachers, eucharistic ministers, and ecclesiastical supervisors to be summarily dismissed from their posts, whether by mandatory retirement, refusing to renew contracts, or by being voted out of office.

But prestige and status are ultimately rather minor considerations in the Church, since what we are after is faithfulness to our confession, faithfulness to the Word of God. In terms of the present situation regarding helping offices, that will mean carefully analyzing what it is that we are asking office holders actually to do and then creating policies that fit the theological reality. It may very well be that some of the unordained offices, as for example, Director of Christian Education, more properly belong with the ordained clergy because of their responsibility for one or more of the essential elements of the public ministry. The opposite may also be true. But in any

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<sup>32</sup>C. F. W. Walther, *Walther's Pastorate that is American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. by John M. Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995), pp. 26-27. For Walther's original, see C. F. W. Walther, *Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: CPH, 1906), p. 41. For the constitutional requirement, see *Die Verfassung*, p. 5, and Pollack's translation, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>Wohlrabe, p. 40.

## Helping Offices in the Church

case, we need to apply biblical principles that maintain the office God has instituted and that permit the Church to create other positions that assist that one Gospel ministry.

I will not pretend that this is an easy task; but I think conferences like this can help, and I hope that this presentation has as well. Thank you very much.