

LCMS

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Table of Contents

Who's In Charge Here? A Pastor's Perspective	2
The Role of the Laity	16

Who's In Charge Here? A Pastor's Perspective

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Good afternoon! It's good to be back in the district where I started serving as a pastor fresh out of seminary in 1981. Those included also some years when the Bears were pretty good—including the Superbowl shuffle year. Now that you have Rex Grossman, who played high school ball about 45 minutes from where I live now, and Kyle Orton from Purdue, the good days may be back, thanks to a little Hoosier help!

Let me preface my remarks by saying I've come to realize that there are very few things other than being a husband to my wife and a father to my children that only I can do—and this assignment is no exception. There are many others in our Synod who could speak to the roles of pastors and laity in the church, and many have already done so, such as the homework pieces. Yet, I'm thankful for this opportunity to address the remarkable design that God has provided for the well being of His church, and I hope you will be able to reflect with me during this hour.

My assignment is to address from my perspective, as a parish pastor, the question "The Congregation's Ministry and Mission: Who's in Charge Here?" Permit me a moment to share a bit of how my perspective has been shaped. Thanks to my parents, who brought me to be baptized as an infant, I was a lay member of Zion-Friedheim congregation near Ft. Wayne, Indiana, for a little more than half of my life. As a child and teenager, several faithful pastors and teachers helped to nurture my faith and shape my understanding of how pastors and laypeople work together. While preparing to be a pastor in college and seminary, I began to explore the subject more intentionally. In the spring of 1981 the church gave me the privilege and responsibility of being a pastor through a call to St. John Lutheran Church in Pecatonica, Illinois, near Rockford, where I served 4 years. When I accepted the call to Seymour, about 60 miles south of Indianapolis, Indiana, it was as an associate pastor, a role I had for 4 years. Then, when the senior pastor accepted another call, I was called to serve in that role, and have for 16 years.

The two congregations are very different. In Pecatonica I was a sole pastor with a parttime secretary, part-time custodian, and a man named Bill Rechtenwald who was chairman for life! Our team ministry in Seymour includes an associate and assistant pastor, a vicar, a DCE, Director of Music, Principal and 22 teachers at our Lutheran School, and a number of support people at church and school. There are more than 135 members that serve elected terms on boards. Some of the things expected of me as pastor, as well as of the lay leaders, of these two congregations were very different. Yet, in each place, there is a clear understanding that the ministry and mission of the congregation works best when pastor and people are working in harmony, with mutual respect for each other.

I've served as a district vice-president the past 9 years, which has included assignments to work with pastors and lay leaders in situations where conflict or tension exists. Instead of pastor and members yoked together to get the work done, they sometimes spend a great deal of energy trying to break the yoke, or have a tug of war with it. I've seen issues break harmony and the ugly things that happen when relationships break down.

That gives you a summary of my perspective. Now, to the assignment. When initially considering having an hour to address this question, it seemed like a long time! But, as with preparing a sermon, the difficult challenge became not what to say, but what must be left out, for time's sake. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to summarize the great work of Luther,

or Walther on Church and Ministry, or to restate the significant material that has been prepared on this subject through the CTCR. However, based on Scripture and the Confessions I wish to organize my remarks around 3 points.

First, what is God's design and purpose for the congregation?

Second, who is in charge of the congregation's mission and ministry?

Third, what is the design for accountability, and why is it needed?

First, what is God's design and purpose for the congregation? The congregation is the local expression of God's creation, the church. The church is the body of Christ; it is the assembly of those whom the Holy Spirit has called and gathered through the means of grace, "establishing faith when and where it pleases God" (AC V). In any particular congregation, there may be true believers and hypocrites, but where the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered, the church will be found (AC VII, VIII). The congregation is primarily a receiver and sharer of God's gifts, which He bestows through His Word and Sacraments.

Congregations vary widely in size, situation, and context, and may state their purpose through vision statements quite differently. But generally, the mission and ministry of the local congregation includes the very things we see in New Testament congregations: *worship*, including preaching, confession and absolution, Baptism, Eucharist, and prayer; *nurture*, including teaching and catechesis; *discipline, compassion, acts of mercy, outreach, and missions*.

In what they do, and in how they do it, congregations are to be a sign to the world of how God deals with people, and how God's people love one another. A congregation may be seen as an embassy, a foothold of God's kingdom of grace in a hostile and alien world. Individual members may be considered ambassadors for Christ to each other and to the world as they care for one another, share with those in need, are devoted to the Word and worship, and bear witness

4

to others of what Christ has done. Since its members are sinners-yet-saints, the congregation is a visible project through which we expect to see people sinning, but dying to sin and rising to life; failing and offending, then confessing and forgiving.

The congregation shows God design to work through means to accomplish His purpose to bring salvation to the world. The Spirit works through the mighty but humble means of grace to bring the gifts of faith and forgiveness to people. These means of grace are handled by human beings, who thereby become instruments of God at work.

God's design for His church is that every congregation has a team ministry, even if it has just one called worker. It is a shared work, not an individual's work. As God outlines roles of family members, and so gives reason for being and the basis for community, so it is with the church. God has clearly identified roles within the church so that the church could accomplish the mission for which He has created it.

It is not the church that has determined that it needs "professionals" to be able to work efficiently. It is not because people are too busy that the church needs to have some chosen to fill the office of the ministry. The Scriptures say that God gave some to be pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-13): *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service,*

so that the body of Christ may be built up...."

Within the context of the church, God's creation, Scripture is clear in teaching two supportive doctrines--the office of the public ministry, and the priesthood of all believers. Luther said, "All are priests, yet not all are pastors" (Luther's Works, Am. Ed., vol. 13. p. 65). Walther said, "The holy ministry, or the pastoral office, is an office distinct from the priestly office, which belongs to all believers." (The Ministry, Theses 1,2,6)

By "office," of course, we do not refer to a room with desk and chair and phone, but the responsibilities and duties conferred married on a person. One of the exercises I use with couples planning to be married is a role inventory—what roles do they expect husband and wife to fulfill in the marriage? Obviously, some are by divine requirement—such as the loving headship and spiritual responsibility given to the husband. But what about writing checks, or shopping for groceries, or vacuuming the carpet, or taking out the trash, or cleaning the toilet or doing the laundry? Here we have no "thus says the Lord."

Within our Synod, there have been many debates and arguments over the roles and responsibilities of the pastoral office and the priestly office. There are questions like, "Is evangelism the work of the pastor or the laity? Was the Great Commission given to clergy or laity?" It seems to me that expecting an **either/or** answer to these questions may not be helpful. Indeed, the work given to pastors and priests differs not so much in what it *is*, as to those *for whom it is done*. Absolution, the office of the keys, speaking the Word, praying, teaching, baptizing—these are gifts *to the church*. As you need both posts at the ends of a clothesline to keep the wire taut and the clothes above the ground, so the church needs the twin offices of the public ministry and the priesthood to fulfill its mission and ministry.

The Bible uses many wonderful and helpful images regarding how God designs the church to work in a harmonious way—such as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the Temple of God made of living stones. However, they can cause problems if we do not take the time to understand the point they are to make. The church as *vineyard* does not mean it is like Napa Valley or the wine-tasting vineyards of southern Indiana. The church as *pilgrims* has nothing to do with Plymouth Rock and the Mayflower. The terms *Exiles and aliens* make us worry about people crossing our borders without documentation, instead of a people who rehearsed its bondage in Egypt and deliverance by God, or who were in captivity in Babylon. Say "priesthood" and people are likely to picture a collared and robed entourage, not a host of men, women, and children from all walks of life and all corners of the earth, who intercede, serve, and sacrifice, and yet are not pastors.

We need to be careful even with the concept of a pastor as shepherd. This Biblical model is absolutely helpful in identifying some of the important things the pastor is to do—to feed the flock, to know the sheep, to tend the lambs, to defend from the danger of wolves and false doctrine, to go after the straying and wayward.

But the image, if carried too far, may lead us to think of pastors and laypeople as being as unlike each other as are shepherds and sheep. Shepherds are people. Sheep are animals. Shepherds are courageous and smart; sheep are cowards and are stupid. The images may suggest one is more important, or superior in some way, or that somehow, there is a species change when a layman is prepared and called to the office of ministry.

We are still the same species! Pastors come from the church and are God's gifts to the church. The pastor is something like the goose at the point of the V formation when they are flying. There is a responsibility of leadership that is recognized by the rest of the geese; but the one at the point is still like them, a goose!

My son is an engineer who works for Cummins Engine Company, designing and building large diesel engines with 1200-1800 horsepower. For Christmas, he presented me with a gift using an analogy I had never heard before, describing pastors as being like a connecting rod. A connecting rod is that piece of steel between the piston and the crankshaft. To make a longer analogy short, the idea was that pastors find themselves between the powerful word of God, around which and by which the entire church exists, and the individual members of the church.

Like the pistons, the individual members all are capable of doing work, but for their work to have value for the church, it needs to be linked to the crankshaft. The pistons can produce no real power unless they are placed in the proper position and work in harmony with others, bringing power to the output, the drive shaft. The connecting rod, the pastor, needs to be strong, yet flexible, with an awareness of what the real purpose is—not just motion, going up and down, but advancing the cause for which the church was designed.

Of course, we should use care in employing illustrations from our own experience to describe the relationship of pastor and congregation. The connecting rod image is limited. So is the business model, which describes the pastor as entrepreneur or CEO, a congregation as a provider of services, members as customers to be kept or attracted, and church structures with names like Board of Directors. These miss something of the dynamic and organic relationship between the two offices God has designed, as well as the servant spirit that is to characterize our work. We should be wary of borrowing terminology and practices from those whose theology of church and ministry differs from ours as much as their doctrine the Lord's Supper. Practice often influences theology.

So, to summarize the first point: *What is God's design for the congregation?* It is to receive and to respond to His gifts. Christ has given the church its mission and ministry, as well as the tools, gifts, and resources needed to carry out that design. Even as God chooses to work to bring salvation and impart His gifts through the unimpressive elements of bread and wine and Word and water, so He has chosen in the face of a world that loves pomp and power to reveal Himself through mere mortals, pastors and priests, using the tools He has given them. The church reflects Christ's design to delegate authority and responsibility to human instruments.

Now, the second part: **Who is in charge of the mission and ministry of the congregation?** The obvious answer is Christ, who is the head of the church, His Body. He is the Bridegroom that has purified the church and made her a radiant bride through the blood He poured out on the cross. Christ is the Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. Christ called the disciples to follow Him, and then sent them out to make disciples. Christ told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to come to equip them for their task, and sent the Spirit to them, so they would not be left as orphans.

No one disagrees that Christ is ultimately in charge. But we may have questions about the day-to-day operations, and the roles of those to whom He has delegated responsibility. Likewise, most people agree that fatherhood is a noble calling. But they may not agree with how a particular father is fulfilling that role. So it is also in matters of church and ministry.

It seems that the question “*Who is in charge?*” usually comes up when something has gone wrong, or something did not get done, and someone is to blame. *Charge* is an authority word, a power word, when we see it in a business context of a person who hires and fires. Shows like *The Apprentice* with Donald Trump, or *Hell’s Kitchen*, feature “in-charge” people.

Biblically, however, *charge* is a trust word—a stewarding word. It is not authority to rule but authorization to serve in love. As Lutherans, we have a wonderful doctrine of vocation—that God places me in a station in life, and by doing so, gives me certain responsibilities and powers. Within my vocation, I am accountable to others and for others, as the Table of Duties of the Catechism shows.

Let’s look at some Biblical examples where the word “charge” has to do with a person who is responsible for other people, or for a particular task. There are several different words in the original texts that are translated “charge.”

Our first example is of Joseph and Potiphar’s household (Genesis 39:8-9): *“With me in charge,” Joseph told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am.”* Joseph was made accountable to Potiphar for managing all that needed to be done. Potiphar, who was over the household, made Joseph lord, *adonai*, over the household.

Later, Pharaoh would put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt (Genesis 41:41-42): *“So Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.’ Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger.”* The kingdom was Pharaoh’s, but he delegated authority and responsibility to Joseph, who was accountable to him.

We see the same pattern in Daniel, where Nebuchadnezzar put him in charge of the province of Babylon and his wise men (Daniel 2:48): *“Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.”*

Jesus used the concept to describe the heavenly kingdom, and how God’s chosen ones, especially those to whom he has entrusted spiritual leadership, are accountable to Him. In Matthew 24:45ff., we read: *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge [kathistemi] of all his possessions.”*

The concept of “charge” is even a part of the order of the heavenly kingdom. Jesus speaks in Matthew 25:23 concerning the faithful servants, *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

Paul follows the pattern as well in 1 Thessalonians 5:7: *“I charge [enorkizo] you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.”* Again in 1 Timothy 5:21: *“I charge [diamarturomai] you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.”*

The concept is applied directly to the ministry of the Word as Paul speaks to Timothy in

2 Timothy 4:2-3: *"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge [diamarturomai]: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction....keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."*

From these examples, there follow some applications. A "charge" is a responsibility, a commission, even a position, given by one in authority. One who is given a charge is a steward, to be found faithful to the one who has given the assignment. Authority is given to do the work assigned.

In a way, it is like deputizing—putting a badge on a man's chest, and with it giving the authority to uphold the law. Why can a sheriff's deputy pack a gun, and even use it to enforce the law? Not necessarily because he is a better person, or even has a better aim, but because that authority has been conferred on him by someone who has it to give. Why can the judge judge and the governor govern? They have been given authority to do so by those who have it to give. Why do those in the office of pastor and of the priesthood have authority to do what they do? Because God has given it so that the work He assigns can be done.

The Lord Jesus showed this approach in the calling of his disciples, and more specifically in sending the 12 and the 70. They were distinguished from others not by their worthiness or superiority, but simply by His choice. The disciples were unimpressive before Christ; but, by His authority, they preached and healed.

As I think of "who is in charge" in the mission and ministry of the congregation I serve, it is of course a both-and. On the one hand, each of the baptized is given a charge. *"You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 2:5) *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2:9)

The vocation of priest given in Baptism is accompanied by work to be done—declaring praises of God, and offering spiritual sacrifices. We see evidence in the church of Jerusalem from the beginning that the baptized were quickly engaged in the growth and expansion of the church, while at the same time there were apostles and elders and pastors.

Other portions of Scripture help to flesh out the vast work that every member of the church shares individually and collectively: bearing one another's burdens; helping the brother who is caught in a sin; forgiving as we have been forgiven; searching the Scriptures; praying; being salt and light to the world; fulfilling the roles in the body of Christ that have been given to us; serving one another in love; reaching out to those who are weak; comforting; being good neighbors to all in need; using the gifts God has given.

On the other hand, we acknowledge that God has also established the office of the ministry as an integral part of His design for the church. The Scriptures do identify certain qualifications for those the church may place in this office, such as Titus 1:6-9: *"Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quicktempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage*

others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

These qualifications do not identify superiority, but recognition that a position of responsibility and nurture can be scandalized if one’s personal history, ethical make up, theological convictions, or interpersonal manners are inconsistent with what God expects. Those who are entrusted with the office affect how people perceive it. Why is there such scrutiny when a President seeks approval of an appointment to the federal bench, or to the Supreme Court? Why the fuss about appointing John Bolton as ambassador to the United Nations? These individuals have significant authority, and how they use it reflects on the nation.

The person to whom a charge is given is responsible for carrying out the work that is always attached to it. Authority is not given without a purpose—but for the accomplishment of a job. A soldier is given a weapon, and the authorization to use it, not to do with as he pleases, but to carry out an assigned defensive or offensive task given by superior officers. The apostles were given authority appropriate for the carrying out of the mission assigned to them.

In the Augsburg Confession, Article V, this combination of authority and assignment are connected with the office of the public ministry. *“To obtain such faith, God instituted the office of preaching, giving the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, when and where He wills, in those who hear the Gospel”* (Kolb-Wengert, AC V, German text, page 40). The same Confession recognizes that God works through means in filling this office: *“Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call”* (Kolb-Wengert, AC XIV).

The pastor, then, is given charge of certain aspects of what it means to be a congregation, and the priesthood is given charge of others. I am going to speak more about the charge given to pastors than to laity, not because it is greater or lesser, but because that is my assignment.

It has been customary in our church to use the terms “distinctive functions” to describe what activities and responsibilities particularly belong to the Office of Public Ministry, or pastoral office. To use *distinctive functions* only for pastors may give the impression that these are higher and more important gifts and duties. However, there are distinctive functions of the priesthood of all believers, too, such as the priestly duties described earlier.

The distinctive functions of the public ministry are the public preaching and teaching in the congregation, including oversight of doctrine, administering the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion, and the public absolution. A recent CTCR documents says: *“Neither the Scriptures nor the Lutheran Confessions provide a detailed list of the activities required of pastors in the congregations they ‘are called to serve.’ Intrinsic to this office, however, are the following functions: ‘1) preaching in the services of the congregation; 2) leading the formal public services of worship; 3) the public administration of the sacraments; and 4) the public administration of the office of the keys.’”* *Service of Women, CTCR, p. 9*

By *public*, we mean not things which are done when others are watching, but that which is done on behalf of, by the will of, and for the sake of the congregation. I have been called upon to baptize an infant in the hospital with almost no one there; but it was a *public* Baptism in the name of the congregation, even as the “private” Communion I share with our homebound members is part of the *public* ministry.

The pastor is responsible for the preaching and teaching done for and on behalf of the congregation. That is not because he is the best speaker, because he is probably not. It is not because he is necessarily the most educated theologian, although we would hope he would be among the best in the congregation. It is because this is the charge given, the authority assigned.

If the pastor happens not to be the one teaching, then he is responsible for assuring that the Sunday school or Bible class teacher is qualified, and that the content is doctrinally correct. If, in our case, our vicar is to preach, it is my responsibility to review his sermon first. If there are cases where the pastor must be absent on a Sunday, it is his charge to make sure that the one who takes his place is qualified, and that the message is authentic.

Regarding the Lord's Supper, it is the pastor's charge to preside. The easiest part of presiding is to speak the Word's of Institution and to distribute the elements. Presiding also means the pastor is charged with seeing to it that there are opportunities for celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently; is responsible for admitting to the Supper those eligible to partake, having been instructed and examined so that they are repentant, confess that the physical body and blood of Christ are present, and are united with the church in the confession of faith.

Regarding Baptism, the pastor is charged to assure that the parents, in the case of a child, or the candidate understands the blessings and implication of Baptism, that proper records are kept and instruction made available. Regarding the Keys, the pastor is obligated to provide for confession and absolution corporately and individually.

Regarding those in team ministry with him, whether called or contracted, part time or full time, professional or lay, the pastor is to model humility and show respect for their vocation. The pastor should affirm the gifts and significance of those around him, whether they are elected leaders or called colleagues.

A pastor is to fulfill his duties in a way that honors the team ministry of lay members, who also have, in a sense, distinctive functions. We just buried a wonderful Sunday School teacher of 41 years. Sandy had a special gift for making every child feel significant and important, because she saw them as a baptized child of God. So the pastor should recognize his partnership with lay leaders in exercising the gifts that belong to all of them.

As a pastor, it is important for me to remember that any authority I have is not inherent in me, but is delegated to me by virtue of God's calling through the congregation. As Walther put it, the congregation takes what is given to it, the office of the keys, and entrusts the public use of these keys through Word and Sacrament ministry to the pastor (The Ministry, Thesis VI). It is more about *authorization* than *authority*, I believe. These are things God has given me to do—things that do not belong to me, but of which I am a steward.

I am not authorized to preach or teach what is contrary to Scripture. I am also not free to preach a doctrinally correct message in such a way that it is deliberately offensive in its language and style, for that is to undermine the purpose of preaching. If the Law offends the sinner, that is fine; if the preacher chooses to be offensive, that is contrary to Scripture in Titus and Timothy.

If pastors are to speak on Christ's behalf, we especially should bear in mind Paul's words to the Philippians about having the humble mind of Christ, and remember how our Lord washed the dirty feet of his disciples to show them that love and lording are not the same thing. To be humble is perceived by the world as being weak, but Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, "*But*

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

Standing in the place of Christ behooves one to have the attitude of Christ, pouring oneself out, not because our sacrifice adds anything, but because the servant is no great than our Master, the student not greater than the Teacher. Paul called himself the worst of sinners, undeserving, except that God chose to display His glory and power through him, as evidence of grace: Ephesians 3:7-9 *"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery...."*

The pastor will also show love for those around him. As a husband is to love his wife like Christ loved the church, so it is fitting for the pastor to know and love his people. It is no more fitting for me as a husband to compare my wife to another woman than for me as a pastor to compare the congregation I serve to another I served, or to a neighboring church. While my congregation is far from perfect, so are its pastors. My charge is to see them with hope and love as Christ does, for they are the ones Christ has redeemed; those the Holy Spirit has called; those who are under siege by the devil; those who may stray from the truth; those who may lag in zeal; those who need to be confronted for their sin; yet, those God has made priests and heirs.

Such an attitude shows. One of the theologians I admire is a layman who happens also to be my father. He's read the Bible many times and understands it pretty well. He always held our pastors in high regard, but I recall how he was deeply disturbed when, while I was in college, a new pastor came to our congregation who obviously believed we knew nothing of what it meant to be Lutheran. From the pulpit, and in personal contacts, there was an "I'm going to straighten you out" approach. Now, not everything the pastor did was bad. But he had such an abrasive, condescending way, that it was almost impossible to get past it. I almost stopped preparing for the ministry because I saw how spiritually harmful to people a pastor can be.

Yet, a pastor dare not aim to be a people pleaser, either—seeking just to be popular, even at the expense of rebuking and correcting. He needs also to remember that relationships and respect are for the sake of hearing of the Word. He is not to stand in the way of the Word, nor to fail to speak the Word in its truth.

It seems to me that when the authority of the office is considered apart from the assignment, we get into trouble. A deputy who gets a big head because he wears a badge and starts throwing his weight around may obscure the notion that he is a public servant to uphold the law. God has always made a point to keep the honor for Himself by choosing the weak, according to the world, and then confounding the world by doing things through them that seem utterly impossible! 1 Corinthians 1:28-29: *"He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."*

For the pastor, this should always be a caution about personal ambition. Egos love to be heroes. People admire the powerful and eloquent preacher that can move an audience with rhetoric, even if his message bears little semblance to God's Word; or the skilled administrator who can keep the church running like a well oiled machine, even if it is not fulfilling God's purpose; or the quick thinker who has an answer, correct or not, to any question.

And there is pressure to be “successful,” by some measure. Pastors observe how people respond to their ministry in comparison to the pastoring of others. Laypeople compare stories about their church at work or the soccer field. They have “roast preacher” for Sunday brunch. At board meetings or voters meetings, they may inject into the argument former pastors or others in the community. At such times it is good to check our own faithfulness to the calling we have to be stewards of the means of grace, and focus on the work God is doing through us. Such occasions also reinforce the value of accountability that Christ has designed for His church.

Before addressing accountability, we summarize this section. God has established the Office of the Ministry to minister—to serve—the people He has redeemed and brings to faith through His means of grace. It is a position of service, not power. A pastor is a means to an end, a fragile, common vessel that is expendable, but entrusted to handle the mysteries of God. The authority of the pastor is no more or no less than the means of grace of which God has made us stewards, vessels of clay filled with the precious Gospel, the power of God to salvation.

The purpose for the office of the ministry and the priesthood of believers is not to compete with each other and create tensions, but to fulfill the ministry of the Gospel. Using the clothesline analogy, the purpose for the clothesline poles and the line between them is not to create tension, but to allow the clothes to dry and keep them off the ground.

That brings us to the third section: **What is the design for accountability, and why is it needed?** There has been quite a bit of discussion about what role, if any, accountability plays in the relationship between pastor and laity, and among pastors. “Giving account” may seem unnecessary, or painful. There is even a resistance to accountability, as if the pastor was called directly and immediately by God, without the medium of the congregation, and answers only to God, not to the people through which God has called him.

Clearly, we are accountable to God. Ezekiel 34:9-10 says: *“Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.”* Also Hebrews 13:17 reads: *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*

Clearly, those in the office of the public ministry and those in the office of the priesthood are personally accountable to God. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But, thankfully, we also know the manner in which Christ will approach us—as those for whom He gave His very life; as those who are His beloved children; as our Advocate.

However, as God chooses to work with us through the means of grace, and to forgive us as His words are expressed by human lips, so He also provides for accountability mediately in the team ministry of those in the office of public ministry and in the priesthood. Accountability is a way of assuring that we are staying on God’s course. Both pastor and priest are sinful and will not perfectly fulfill their charge. The devil will never rest from his efforts to divide the flock by distracting the shepherd, nor will he tire of trying to immobilize a congregation by instigating nit picking and infighting. Accountability provides a Godly way for the team ministry to grow.

Accountability is intended to be a blessing, but it is not always used or perceived that

way. Sometimes it comes off as judgmental. Sometimes the standards are vague, or it is merely a comparison to others. Providing for accountability is something like parents who sit down with their children to talk over what is good and what needs to be changed. I believe it is the duty of the pastor to assure that mutual accountability is taking place. It doesn't create issues; it provides a healthy way to deal with them for the sake of growth. Accountability fits with stewardship. The one who gives us something retains the right to hold us accountable for its stewardship.

At about the time I was preparing this, I was also working on the final evaluation for our vicar. This is the 9th time I've done that. At first, it was hard for me to be direct about things that should be done differently, whether in contacts with others, or in the preparing of sermons, or conduct of worship, as this seemed "judgmental." It was more pleasant to speak about the things they were doing well. My evaluations now are more balanced because of the necessity each of us has to see our weakness and the strengths, if we are to grow.

The seminaries provide for some very structured feedback, including the responses of 6 lay leaders who answer more than 100 questions. The supervisor's evaluation is 9 pages long, and includes questions that have to do with personality, theology, skills, gifts, and relationships. In our weekly meetings, though, I made it clear to the vicar that any concerns would be expressed immediately—not as some big surprise on the final report! Why would I want to withhold feedback that is intended to be beneficial?

We have also found it to be beneficial to have methods of accountability in our congregation. Each year, we ask each of the members of our boards to fill out a "report card" to evaluate how helpful the staff person assigned to their group has been (see Appendix). Many times the responses are positive—which is good reinforcement. There have also been constructive suggestions that have helped us work together more effectively.

Our school principal conducts annual reviews with our faculty and staff based on their position descriptions, providing constructive feedback and making available resources for improvement. I am responsible for conducting an annual review with the called and contracted members of our staff, including the school principal. Our trustees conduct an annual review for me based on my call and position description (see Appendix).

If this is done in the context of a clear understanding of the mission, of the teamwork design, of the functions, and the characteristics Christ has given to His church, mutual accountability is another means through which God blesses the church and its pastors. It provides for structured feedback that is intended to be helpful, and reinforces the mutual relationship between pastor and people that God has established. If there are proper channels for talking plainly *with* one another, the talking will do more good than if it is done *about* the person.

The pastor should receive this feedback willingly and even insist that it be done. The Bereans were commended for checking to see if what Paul preached matched the Word. And though he admitted he did not have the eloquence of some of the so-called super-apostles, Paul no doubt wanted his message to communicate clearly.

Since the office belongs to the church, is conferred by the church, the one to whom it is entrusted is accountable to the church--and not just to the local congregation, but also to the circuit counselor, peers, and district president. The accountability of the pastor includes at least the things given by divine command to his office: that he preaches the Word in keeping with the Scriptures

and confessions (although there is no divinely given length for sermon!), and administers the Sacraments in keeping with Christ's institution. More specifically, that he does so in ways that honor and uphold the covenants we make as members of Synod.

The accountability process may also include many things given by human arrangement. Most pastors spend part of their time doing what belongs to them by divine arrangement, and part what is given them by human arrangement. That was true of Timothy, too, who had to preach the Word, but also was to look after the widows. Pastors spend considerable time doing Word and Sacrament ministry. We may spend time doing things also expected of us, but not part of God's command, such as keeping records, writing articles, visiting and caring for those in need. We may be assigned to help certain boards, or to work with the next pictorial directory, or to organize an anniversary celebration, or to conduct annual staff reviews, or various other administrative functions. Though not distinctive to the pastoral office, they may fit our God-given gifts as priests.

Accountability has to do not just with what the pastor *does*, but also with his conduct—whether or not he has acted above reproach. Accountability is not expected to be entirely negative; it should also reinforce what is good. Those to whom the congregation has given this charge—usually the elders or officers should provide accountability. And it should be done regularly enough to provide for adjustments as needed. The conversation may go both ways, allowing the pastor to speak to what seem to be unfair expectations or comparisons.

Some years ago I visited with a pastor who was at a standoff with his elders. They had asked him to report to them concerning the number of visits he was making—not wanting to know *who*, and *why*, but just *that* he was visiting the sick and the shut-in. They asked him also to account to them for mileage for which he was reimbursed. He refused, saying that to give such information was to break confidences. It was no business of theirs how he conducted his ministry!

When I talked with him privately, I told him I disagreed. The pastor was doing this work on behalf of the congregation that called him. He was not a hireling, but it was their business jointly. The more he refused to give the information, the more certain they were that he was holding back something, and not doing his job. Thankfully, once they got talking with each other, he found the elders did not want to tell the pastor how to do his job, and that, with a few exceptions that could be fixed, the pastor was doing what they expected.

It reminded me of a conversation with a member of our congregation whose high school son is a talented golfer. He could drive the ball 300 yards, but was struggling with his accuracy. He went to a golf pro that observed his stance and swing, and gave him one small piece of advice: *"Don't grip the club so tightly."*

I believe that statement can apply to authority, too. As you listen to reasons for conflict in congregations, they may include breaches of trust, poor work habits, insensitivity to the people or the community, unfair expectations on both sides, unforgiveness, unfair comparisons to predecessors, and the like. Sometimes the underlying cause is gripping authority too tightly.

The pastor may feel threatened by criticisms, especially if there is some truth in what is being said. So he may appeal to a higher authority—his call. He, after all, is the shepherd; and who ever heard of the sheep calling a meeting and refusing to follow the shepherd where he is leading! He may even resort to threats of excommunication—after all, he is in charge of the congregation, and the hearers owe him to listen and heed!

On the other hand, members of the congregation may feel that the health of the congregation of which they have been a part all their lives is at stake. So they may appeal to the duties given them in the constitution as leaders; they may appeal to the higher authority of their experience in the community. There is an escalation of the struggle, even to the point of saying, “We called you, and we can dismiss you! We are in charge, ultimately!” This develops a sense of antagonism, where lay leaders see their duty as keeping an eye on the pastor, or to keep him in check, instead of working with him willingly.

There were ministry issues in the early church, for Peter also wrote: *“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”* (1 Peter 4:2-4)

Accountability can be a blessing in the congregation, even as it is in a family, where husband and wife are accountable to each other. I am by no means always right. Just ask my wife! It is good for my integrity to admit when I am wrong, or have failed to do something. I have also found that honesty diffuses conflict by modeling confession and forgiveness. I am willing to account for the time I spend on behalf of the congregation, for my leaders are the ones that then hold me accountable to balance time between my official duties and my family.

Now it is to be expected that for every good gift of God, Satan offers one or more counterfeits. God intends the life-long union of man and wife in marriage to be a great blessing; yet, Satan does all he can to portray it as a far-too-restrictive relationship that impinges on freedom and self-determination. Who wants to submit in love?

So also with the church. The mutual, God-given roles of pastor and people, minister and church, are intended to be a great blessing. But because of sin, the relationship breaks down, either in order to find who is at fault or to blame, or in a struggle for power and control of the affairs of the congregation.

Accountability keeps our partnership intact with each other and reminds us of our stewardship toward God. It keeps us focused on the mission and ministry of the church, and the God who chooses to work through frail and imperfect pastors and priests to advance His kingdom of grace. Accountability provides a proper structure for rebuke and encouragement, confession and forgiveness, reinforcement and constructive criticism. It provides a way through which the Gospel we proclaim, Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of us poor sinners, can be not only *proclaimed* by the congregation, but also *practiced* within it.

The same kinds of sinful dynamics that cause discord in families also threaten congregations—including disrespect, distraction, disillusion, distrust, disobedience, and the devil himself. Likewise, the keys to overcoming the sins that hamper families can be of great help for the church: accountability and mutual respect; confession and forgiveness, and a focus on the mission to which God has called us to work.

What we believe about church and ministry helps to shape what life in a congregation is like. As Christ is present and establishes and equips the church through the means of grace, so

through the office of pastor, and office of priest, He carries out the design for his church—discipling, caring, tending, defending, reaching, teaching. As with a family, where each member has important roles, God intends the offices given to pastor and priest to be complementary. In this team ministry between pastor and priest, Christ is in charge of His church, and He leads and directs those given responsibility to fulfill its mission, so we may, as Paul says: *“As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:12-17.*

**Pastor Ralph Blumenberg, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Seymour, Indiana
Northern Illinois District, February, 2006**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

The Role of the Laity

Peter Hessler

THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE CONGREGATION'S MINISTRY AND MISSION

I. Introduction

Who said this:

“Take away my factories and my warehouses; take away my ships and my railroads; take away my money and my possessions; but leave me my people – and I’ll gain them all back again, and more.”

It was Andrew Carnegie. I love the significance of what that statement conveys. It’s all about the confidence in the people we live with, work with, and struggle with in our daily pursuits.

Now, think of that idea in terms of God and His kingdom. How would He express this? How about:

“Take away friendly governments and stable economies; take away favorable tax laws and the latest in creature comforts; take away Social Security and Medicare, but leave me my people – and, together, we will turn the whole world upside down.”

Doesn’t that make us feel awfully important? Isn’t that, in effect, what God said when He called Israel His “treasured possession” in Exodus 19? Isn’t that what Peter meant when he called his fellow Christians, “a people belonging to God?” (1 Peter 2:9) We are the church; hard at work – to turn the whole world upside down. That’s what Jesus left for us to do.

But, the Bible doesn’t give us clear and definitive advice on how to do church. We know that we are the church, the body of Christ, but just how do we do it? I believe that the lack of such specific advice is purposeful. It suggests that there is more than one way to organize and operate; that there is not a “one and only” way. We can be creative. There certainly are and have been many differing examples of how to organize as church. So, what do we as lay people and leaders in our church do? What’s our role?

Add to this the fact that society today is entirely different than it was even decades ago, let alone centuries or millennia ago. The times and culture Paul, Barnabas and the apostles faced shortly after Jesus’ ascension was way different than the Reformation world Martin Luther turned upside down which, of course, was way different than today’s world. Just as Americans, today, struggle to understand how our Founding Fathers would have dealt with our perplexing contemporary issues, so, too, Lutheran Christians struggle to understand how Peter, Paul and their contemporaries, as well as Luther, Melancthon and theirs, and even Walther and his would deal with the troubling issues facing us here and now. We know and are quick to reaffirm that God Himself and His word are timeless and unchangeable, but everything else seems to be relative and changeable. How does the gospel engage our culture so that we in the church can best promote that good news? How do we best reach our dying world?

There's something else to consider; that is, that the laity is more highly educated, today, than ever before. The pastor is no longer the most educated in the community as well as the pastor of the local congregation. This places additional strain on the relationship between the pastor and the laity?

Well, let's consider these issues in the context of God's word and our Lutheran heritage. I'm going to offer this presentation of *The Role of the Laity in the Congregation's Ministry and Mission* in three parts: First, a series of guiding principles; secondly, a listing of the responsibilities of the lay people, especially the lay leaders of today's congregations; and thirdly, several practical applications so as to address an oft cited criticism that comes after presentations of this nature – and that is that we need more than theory and general principles; we need practical ideas that meet directly the issues so many of us are struggling with in our congregations, here and now – and into the foreseeable future.

II. Guiding Principles

When God gives an assignment to more than one person, their respective roles are designed to complement one another rather than compete against the other. The earliest example in Genesis, God's charge to Adam and Eve to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-30; 2:18-24), anticipated the complementary roles of man and woman, husband and wife. Other examples - Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, Hezekiah and Isaiah, the apostles and the deacons, John the Baptist and Jesus, Paul and Barnabas - leave us with the same point. Of course, our God - as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is the perfect example: three persons of the Trinity whose roles as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier are wholly complementary.

The charge Jesus gave in Matthew 28, restated in Acts 1, calls upon all of God's chosen people to participate: *[G]o and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. and [Y]ou will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* And, both describe our charge, together, in ways that complement, not compete, with one another. In Acts, the early church recognized: 1) the responsibility of the apostles to preach and teach, because they had been actual witnesses of the resurrected Christ; 2) the responsibility of the Seven, some call them deacons (led, apparently, by Stephen), to relieve the burden on the apostles so that they could continue their preaching; and 3) the responsibility of the rest to pray over and support their fellow believers (who were growing in number day by day) even by selling their possessions and sharing the proceeds with the faithful. Each role complemented the others and, even in the face of persecution, the church grew. And, there was no doubt over who was in charge – *We must obey God rather than men*, the apostles had declared in the presence of the Sanhedrin. It was, after all, the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul trained Timothy, Titus and others as pastors and faithfully instructed the members of the congregations throughout Asia and Europe, encouraging them in faithfulness and commitment – service together. Consider the wholeness of Paul's imagery of the body of Christ in his first letter to the Corinthians (12:18-20 and 25-27). These passages emphasize the entirely complementary and supportive role of each person as part of the body of Christ.

So, today, the church remains, as does the charge Jesus uttered some 2000 years ago: *Go . . . make disciples . . . baptize . . . and teach. Be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth.* Notice that these are action (not passive) verbs: Go, make, baptize, teach, witness. And, to carry this out, He has

blessed His church with pastors, teachers and others whose roles complement rather than compete with one another. Again, Paul makes this same point in I Corinthians 12:28-30.

I submit to you three general principles, each of which is integral to the command or charge we all are responsible to carry forward and which directly relate to the role of the laity in our congregations. The first is what I've already suggested – the roles of pastor and lay person are complementary, not competitive.

The second is that the pastor and lay people in a congregation of believers are accountable to each other **and** they are accountable for each other. What does this mean? If a pastor recognizes that he is accountable to the lay people of the congregation he serves for the faithful fulfillment of his responsibility, **and** recognizes that he is accountable for their faithfulness (or lack thereof), his service is bound to be wrapped in humility and entirely dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. Pride, control and domination have no place. Likewise, if the lay people, especially the leaders, recognize that they are accountable to their pastor for the fulfillment of their responsibility **and** that they are accountable for him, even for his shortcomings, they, too, will be bound by attitudes of service, support and love. The mission of the church will be furthered and, even in the reality of human frailty, frustration and failure, God will continue His good work in, through, among and with His church. We're in this together – we'll sink or swim together.

This principle of accountability is well-understood in our society and culture, at least the idea of being accountable to another. Our whole understanding of governance, politically and otherwise, is established on this premise. But, what about the responsibility of being accountable for someone else, even for their failings? That's naturally foreign to us. Well, the best Biblical example of this, of course, is Jesus Himself. He became accountable for each and every one of us, accountable for our very sins and even paid the ultimate price for them. We would do well to imitate that example among our fellow Christians. Recall Jesus' words to His disciples on the night He was betrayed? He challenged them by saying, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) We usually think of that as a willingness to throw ourselves in front of an oncoming vehicle to save the life of another. Or, to risk our life to save a drowning child. But, think of Jesus' words in the context of what He was doing for us. He wasn't just sacrificing His life for others – other men and women have done that, nobly and willingly, down through the centuries. Rather, Jesus was accepting accountability for our failures and shortcomings – taking them entirely upon Himself. Now that's real love – a willingness to accept responsibility for the shortcomings and failures of even those who are accountable to us; that is, being accountable for them. Such a willingness; such "love" adds a whole new dimension to our understanding of what Jesus has done for each of us and how we relate to and with one another, including as pastor and lay people.

The third principle comes from Jesus' charge to servanthood in Matthew 20:25- 27: *[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.* And Jesus, Himself, lived that charge, coming to earth to serve, not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28) Authority, power, influence, responsibility and other measurements or principles of headship are understood in the kingdom of God entirely in the context of servanthood. As Jesus reminded His disciples, we're not to be or act like others: *The Gentiles*, He said, *lord it over [their people]. Their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.* Conflict and tension arise only as one succumbs to the temptation of greed, jealousy or selfish pride. Examples of this include Joseph and his brothers, King Saul and the great prophet, Samuel, Judas and the other disciples, even (to an extent) Paul and Barnabas, as they were about to leave on their second missionary journey. As Jesus, in fact, lived the example of servanthood, Paul commands us to adopt the very same attitude: "[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider

equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (Phil. 2:5-7)

III. Responsibilities of the Laity (Lay Leaders)

Now, given these three principles, what exactly is the role of the lay person in the congregation? I submit that this question can be discussed and debated in an entirely less threatening manner given these three guiding principles. Conflict and tension are especially debilitating in the setting of pastor and lay people because, together, we are God’s church - to us He has delegated the work begun by His Son (our Lord and Savior) and to be carried out by us until His coming again. We are unlike any other team or organization or, for that matter, any shared relationship which is subject to conflict, division and even separation. And Satan knows it. He knows that if our mission and purpose is hindered, the consequences may be eternal in his favor.

I also recognize that we cannot define the role of the laity without an understanding of the role of the pastor. And we have heard and received the presentation of Pastor Blumenberg on that subject. I agree with him and take as a given that the pastor indeed does have a role that is unique and God-given. The office of the public ministry is a separate office, filled by those called by God and His people, and distinct from the rest of us, men and women, who share with these men responsibility for the public ministry. In this respect, then, there is a difference between the public ministry, over which we all share responsibility, and the office of the public ministry, which is reserved for those we call pastors.

Consider, too, that pastors are members with the rest of us of the priesthood of all believers. Therefore, we’re all called to strive for the same end or goal; we all share the same desire – it’s our calling as Church - to bring all people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior and the only way to eternal life and to nourish, support, sustain and grow those who already share that gift.

So, what is then the role of the laity in our congregations?

1. Remember our place and engage in the work. Always remember whose church this is! But, also recognize that just because the church belongs to Christ does not mean that we can sit back and leave the work to Him, or to others for that matter. Just because works don’t save us doesn’t mean we don’t have work to do. If that weren’t the case, Jesus wouldn’t have left us here to do his bidding and He wouldn’t have sent us the Holy Spirit to empower us. So, we have work to do – and because we’re doing His work, we owe Him an accounting. Again, we’re accountable, all of us: pastor, teacher, deaconess, lay leader – every one of us. So, if we’re in this together – and we are – then let’s work together. Paul described this relationship between “the saints,” on the one hand, and their “overseers and deacons,” on the other, as a “partnership in the gospel” (Phil. 1:1); a partnership we can be confident God will carry to completion until the day Christ returns. And, as demonstrated throughout the New Testament, Jesus calls men and women, old and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated to serve in His church. So, in our partnership with each other, let’s be accountable to one another – and let’s be willing to accept responsibility for the other’s shortcomings; that is, be accountable for the other.
2. Let’s concern ourselves first with our responsibility, before we call others to task for theirs. I think it was St. Francis of Assisi who repeatedly prayed that God would change the hearts of the members of the church he had been called to serve, because of their weakness of faith

and lack of spiritual maturity. However, it was not until he began to pray, instead, that God would change his heart that his ministry flourished. The role of the laity is critical to the work of Christ's church, and we as lay people need to focus on that and seek God's blessing in changing our hearts. This principle applies as well within our congregations where we strive to work together and accommodate each other in doing so. As lay people, we need to understand that our church is the source of hope in our communities. And, more importantly, we need to act like we really believe that. The church, unlike any other institution known to man, is the only one that has something of eternal value to offer. Wow! Take that, GE! Take that, MicroSoft! What a privilege to be partners in this great work. We don't aspire to be "the Apprentice." We're co-workers in the greatest job of all – the church of Jesus Christ!

3. Understand the reason for the pastoral office and the role of the man filling it. Do you recall what Paul and Barnabas did near the close of their first missionary journey? Luke recorded it in Acts 14. They doubled back over the route they had traveled in order to revisit the churches they had established earlier in their trip and to encourage the members. And, then, they "appointed elders [pastors] in each church." This office was established by God Himself. The pastors were to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ [would] be built up." (Eph. 4:12) Consider, then, these four points and the conclusion following:
 - a) Accept your pastor's instruction. He publicly preaches from the word of God and administers the sacraments. He's responsible for the teaching ministry and the worship life of the congregation and publicly administers the office of the keys. Through these distinctive functions, seek inspiration for the ongoing effort to fulfill our role in the church.
 - b) Assure that the pastor fills the role and carries out his responsibility – the work of the church depends upon it just as it depends upon the dedicated service of its lay people. If we're truly accountable for our pastor, then see to it that he carries out his responsibility to prepare and equip the saints for service and ministry. And, allow him to do it.
 - c) Do not forfeit the responsibility Christ has given to us as His church to carry out the basic charge we've been given: that is, to bring people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior and the only way to eternal life **and** to nourish, support, sustain and grow those who already share that gift of faith. We need to take charge of our charge! In complementing the role of the pastor, we don't need a "nod" from him to carry out our purpose for being – nor should we expect him to be the initiator of the church's action. The pastor should not be expected to fill a default function typified by the "Don't worry, pastor'll do it" mentality. That's not fair to the pastor and it's not fair to the Holy Spirit. Congregations with pastoral vacancies often learn or recognize that the congregation's life does not go into suspended animation once a pastor leaves and until God sends another one. The ministry and mission go on and the lay leaders of the congregation must carry it on. And, when the new pastor is installed, that is no excuse for the lay leaders to relax or revert to automatic pilot. I chafe in those circumstances where, after an extended vacancy is filled, a lay leader sighs and comments that now he or she can relax. I know they're often kidding, but the underlying sentiment is troubling. This, I believe, is where the role of elder as we understand that role is important – the responsibility of a group of spiritually driven,

mature men of faith to promote the fulfillment of the church's purposes. Luke actually recorded the same criteria for the choosing of the Seven in Acts, chapter 6: "[C]hoose . . . men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom;" (v. 3) men who are "full of faith." (v. 5) Such a group should serve to partner with the pastor(s) in the congregation, even as they assist, encourage, support and, when appropriate, admonish him (them) in their ministry together, and see to it that the spiritual health of the congregation and its members is monitored and nurtured.

- d) Recognize that a pastor has no excuse for spiritual immaturity. Being a sinner is one thing – wallowing in immaturity is another. A pastor isn't supposed to paralyze a congregation; he's to help energize it. Lay people, expect spiritual maturity from your pastor, and if you don't get it, do something about it:
 - i. But, don't dump on him, publicly criticize him or try to get rid of him too quickly – Remember, you're accountable for him;
 - ii. Pray with him and for him;
 - iii. Urge him to Bible study and fellowship with other leaders in the congregation and with pastors in his circuit - don't allow him to become an island unto himself; and
 - iv. Support and encourage him (e.g. assign a small group of congregation leaders to meet with him on a regular basis to address specific issues with him).

To conclude this point, demand of your pastor the performance of his role, for it's a role established by Christ for His church. But, in doing so, demonstrate a willingness to submit to him. Remember our call to servanthood – our willingness to be a slave. This right attitude will help us understand that no man can excel at every task expected of him as pastor; he has weaknesses; he can not be gifted in every aspect of the office. We are, after all, accountable to him – and for him.

Unfortunately, however, this may not be the end of the story. We need to be prepared, in the event our pastor continues in his failure to perform his role, to remove him from the office – for the well-being of the congregation and, very possibly, for his own well-being. The essential work of the congregation is more important than keeping the man in the office of public ministry, especially if the pastor is robbing the cross of its power in that place. But, in doing so, take steps to provide for his on-going needs, both spiritually and physically. We remain accountable for him, even (if not especially) under such circumstances.

- 4. Assure attention to the church's essential purpose. Keep everyone on task. Strive to place people in positions where their abilities and gifts can best be used. Don't saddle people beyond their capabilities; yet, encourage people to serve as teachers, administrators, on various boards and committees (e.g. human care, evangelism, stewardship, worship, youth, etc.) and in any number of other mission and ministry roles. And, don't get stuck in a rut. What works well in Billings, Montana, might not in Toledo, Ohio. A Sunday School curriculum effective in rural Michigan might not be the answer in a diverse culture of new Christians in New Orleans.
- 5. Seek ways to solve problems; don't create or add to them. I'm reminded of a recent cartoon where one person arrogantly says to another, "I'd rather be a big part of the problem than a

small part of the solution.” You know there are too many people like that. Well, not so with Christians; not so with churchly people. Strive to examine and explore how new ideas or programs might be implemented or adjusted for use in the congregation, rather than rejecting them out-of-hand or seeking first to torpedo them by detailing all the reasons why the idea won’t work.

6. Impress upon all members that membership matters. It means something (for me) to be a member of Christ’s church at Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church in Parma, Ohio. It means something to be a member congregation of the LC-MS. Christ’s church is the only hope for our community and the world – and we’re members of it. What we’re doing really matters. We’re not to be sleepy little churches, comfortably situated in our communities. What was said of Jason in Thessalonica should be said of us, today: He and his fellow believers had turned the world upside down. (Acts 17:5-9) Now, consider again God’s Andrew Carnegie quote. What if God said this:

“Take away friendly governments and stable economies; take away favorable tax laws and the latest in creature comforts; take away Social Security and Medicare, but leave me the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod – and, together, we’ll turn the whole world upside down.”

We might chuckle at this, but I say, “If we don’t believe this, then shame on us. If we do, then what are we doing to prove it?”

7. Focus on what you can do, not on what you shouldn’t do. Jesus seemed to have a running feud with the Pharisees of His day who continually sought out instances where Jesus and His disciples did what they weren’t supposed to do. Think of the energy the Pharisees wasted over such concerns. We, also, spend entirely too much energy in our church over such issues. We spend too much time arguing over what we can’t and shouldn’t do and not enough time figuring out what we can and should be doing in spreading God’s word. And this applies not only to a number of our pastors at the circuit, district and synodical levels, but also to lay people who suddenly become paralyzed when someone remarks that, “We’ve never done it that way before.” Let’s get on with the work Christ left for us to do. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of people: those with their hands out and those with their hands up; those who step back and those who step up. Well, as lay leaders in our congregation, let’s urge our fellow members to raise their hands and step up for service in the kingdom.
8. Don’t presume God’s purpose or place ourselves in His way. I like the account Luke gives us in Acts 5, where the Sanhedrin is trying to figure out how to stop Peter and John from publicly speaking of Jesus as the Messiah. Gamaliel, a man of great wisdom, advises them to be careful – “If Jesus was like any number of other rabble rousers or false claimants in the recent history of the day,” he suggests, “then don’t worry; this movement will naturally die now that Jesus is dead. But, if Jesus is who they claim He is; if this is of God’s design and purpose, then there isn’t anything we can do effectively to stop this.” This was good advice. The Sanhedrin chose not to allow for the possibility that Jesus’ claims (or the claims of His followers) were valid and in so doing, placed themselves in the way of or against God’s will. We must never do such a thing. Rather, we must continually seek God’s will and trust His promises. God, through His prophet, Jeremiah, urged Israel to “call upon me, and I will listen to you . . .” God promised this after declaring that He had plans for His people, plans to

prosper them, not to harm them, plans to give them hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11-12) Those plans are for us, too. Big plans! We, therefore, need to trust God's promises – for us.

9. Similarly, consider the other side of this proverbial coin. Always seek God's will. And, just what is His will? Recall the only instance in Jesus' recorded ministry that He prayed for us. It was the night He was betrayed – His prayer for those, like us, who would believe in Him through the gospel message of His disciples. What did He ask of His Father for us, over and over again? – that we would be one *Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know . . .* (John 17:20-23) Now, I can't believe Jesus would pray for something that He didn't believe could be accomplished, especially after He had just promised His disciples that whatever they would ask of the Father in Jesus' name would be given to them. (John 16:23) Let not us be the reason Jesus' own prayer, maybe His only prayer for us, is not answered. Because if His prayer isn't answered, it certainly isn't Jesus' fault!

In recent years, we have not exactly been perceived as a church in unity – at least by some. (To be fair, I suppose any number of church bodies are struggling over unity.) As I mentioned before, we spend way too much time and energy fighting with each other and, forgive my saying so, but pastors by and large, you are leading the charge. I shudder at the time too many of our pastors put into these internal squabbles. What could be accomplished if that time, energy, intelligence and passion were put into outreach and nurturing? And, maybe it's time for the lay people in our congregations (throughout our Synod) to demand our church back by saying, "Enough already! Stop all this fighting! Get back to pastoring – and forget the posturing, already!" We're not very pretty to the people on the outside who even care to look in on us and the witness we're giving to the world suffers as a result. It's our church, too and let's demand if not lead the charge that we carry out our responsibility as Christ's church. What does this mean? Here's a practical example: We may honestly disagree over what exactly is a civic event and whether participation in it constitutes public worship, but let's not bring our church to her knees over it. We must move on. We have to stop spending so much time making so little difference in and to a dying world. And, lay people, it's up to us to address this and do something about it.

10. Pray, pray, and pray some more. The Bible calls us to pray continuously. (1 Thess. 5:17) Jesus prayed often and at critical times in His ministry: after He met substantial criticism and learned of the tragic death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:23); in the midst of the pressure brought by the crowds following after Him (Luke 5:15-16); throughout the night before He called His disciples and designated them as apostles (Luke 6:12-13); immediately before His transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29); as He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42); and, of course, during the night prior to his arrest and crucifixion - and even from the cross. He prayed for Himself, for His disciples, for us, for His enemies and, always, for the will of His Father to be done. Indeed, He taught His disciples to pray. Further, the writer of Proverbs tells us that the prayer of an upright person pleases God. (Pr. 15:8) James assures us that the prayers of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16 - KJV) And, St. Paul, in Philippians 4:6-7 says, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* So, don't just pray, pray with a thankful heart. God gave us a great job to do, the only one that matters eternally.

11. Don't feel overwhelmed or insignificant. Remember Jesus' words, "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (Luke 15:7) Make a positive difference for Jesus in one person's life and the result is eternal. And repeat these lines, often, from the old hymn: "If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul . . . ; You can be like faithful Aaron, holding up the prophet's arms." So, "Let none hear you idly saying, 'There is nothing I can do.'" Why? "[T]he multitudes are dying; And the Master calls for you." (*Hark, The Voice of Jesus, Crying*) God didn't waste His time in creating any of us. Each and every one of us has a role to play in God's kingdom. And, although God may occasionally give us a glimpse of the difference we might make here in His kingdom on earth, we more often may never understand on this side of eternity the difference we make for Jesus in the lives of others. And, there's no retiring from the work in God's kingdom. That word is not in God's vocabulary. "Rest" is, and we're commanded to recognize and practice the Sabbath, but its purpose is to restore and energize us. We can't store up our efforts so as to "retire" and live off our previous efforts in the kingdom – there are no 401(k) plans or retirement accounts, or even Social Security to live off of in God's kingdom during our twilight years on earth. Forget Social Security - our reward is eternal security and our on-going, never ending responsibility as God's chosen people is to do what we can to spread this good news to everyone. So, do whatever you can, whenever you can, however you can, wherever you can, with whomever you can, for whoever you can! Our Lutheran theology is all about liberation. I call it the great anomaly – we've been freed from sin; free to serve, free to be a slave. I like Paul's letter to Philemon. Onesimus, a slave, had run away from his master, Philemon, a wealthy Christian in Colosse. Onesimus eventually turned up in Rome where he had come to faith under the instruction of Paul who was under arrest, awaiting trial. Now that Onesimus had become free in Christ, Paul pleads with Philemon to accept Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a dear brother in Christ. Why? So that Onesimus could be free and off on his own? No, so that he could be free to serve both Paul and Philemon, but now, "as a man and as a brother in the Lord." (v.16) Likewise, we, too, are free – free to serve one another as men and women and as brothers and sisters in the Lord.
12. Now, and this is related to the point I just made and may be the most important point of all. If you forget everything else I have said or is brought up at this conference, remember this: "Don't quit!" There's no room for quitting in Christ's church. A little over a year ago, in my congregation – at a series of congregational meetings called to explain and explore possible solutions to a serious financial crisis facing us, I announced that no one was allowed to quit; that anyone who quit would be shot! No one quit. You don't solve anything by quitting. We must not follow the example of infamous quitters in the Bible, like Esau, Jonah, even John Mark, although he later rallied and finished strong.

IV. Practical Applications

1. If your pastor is spending entirely too much time fussing over other pastors and church leaders or politicking throughout the synod, tell him to cut it out and if there's not enough to keep him busy in the congregation, then to get out in the community and lead the charge in witnessing to others and touching new souls with God's love and care for them. And, be willing to go out with him!
2. Examine your congregation's organizational structure and determine if it's still suited to your present challenges as a congregation. Again, what works in one location may not in another. And what worked decades ago may need to be revised to allow more flexibility and

- accountability, today. Consider such questions as: are elections the best way to select elders and deacons; do elections place the members in offices or positions particularly suited to their gifts and abilities; should certain sensitive or, even, divisive issues be aired publicly; do clear lines of authority exist between and among the various positions of responsibility in the congregation? Make sure your governing documents serve your cause in Christ's church, not the other way around.
3. Be creative in the way you present God's word. Our most dominant sense is sight. Encourage your pastor and worship and Bible study leaders to use visual aids, such as PowerPoint®, and other interactive devices in sermons, Bible studies and other teaching presentations. What's more important than the effective presentation of God's word? People, today, do not retain much of what they only hear. So, let's present the word in ways that enhance the receivers' recollection of it. Think back to your high school and college days. How good a student would you have been if all you had done was sit back and listen to a class lecture? No doubt, by taking notes and with the teacher's or professor's use of visual aids, your retention of the material increased dramatically and you learned better. We want our members and inquiring visitors to learn better, too. Insist that your pastor use outlines as part of his sermon presentations and you, lay people, use them in the Bible studies offered in your congregation. Consider using drama, for example, to engage people with such a talent and to connect with those who enjoy that type of presentation. It can be powerful! Keep analyzing what might work best in your setting.
 4. Offer Bible studies at various levels of complexity so as to increase the Bible literacy of your people at every level of maturity. It matters that people know their Bible! *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and other popular series that seem to have captivated the imaginations of so many people, today, have nothing over the Bible in interest and, certainly not, in substance. And, don't make or expect your pastor to do it all. Help him.
 5. If your congregation has a school, assure that your called and contracted teachers and principal are integral parts of the whole ministry of the congregation – not just of the school. Such involvement is vital to the wholeness of the body of Christ and serves as a powerful example to the children they teach every day in their classrooms.
 6. Be proactive, not reactive. Look out for concerns affecting called and other key personnel, utilizing the services of district and synodical directors of ministerial health. Don't wait for them to beg for help or to crack under the pressures they bear. I alluded to this earlier. Consider forming a group of mature and caring Christians to tend to your pastor's well-being; a group he can go to who's responsible to assist him and advocate for him even as they hold him accountable in a positive way for him, them and their ministry together.
 7. Adopt written policies that provide for accountability. Too many of our congregations have suffered in debilitating ways over pastors and other leaders who have gone wrong. Too often we ignore signs of trouble, remain oblivious, or operate under the benign assumption that "nothing like that can happen here." Well, I'm here to tell you, it can. And, too often, it does.
 8. Be vigilant, even jealous, of the integrity and credibility of the congregation as the people of God. If it becomes necessary to remove the pastor, principal or other called worker for the sustained failure to perform his or her role or due to an especially egregious sin, do it the right way. Be sure to follow Biblical principles and apply synodical, district and

- congregational bylaws and regulations in doing so. Be attentive to the called worker and his or her family, even providing for their on-going needs and take affirmative steps to address any harm caused to victims of any wrongful conduct and their families. Times like this threaten to tear a congregation in opposite directions as sides are taken and motives are poisoned by anger, revenge, the sense of betrayal, fear of repercussions, and the like. As a consequence, this may be the most important, yet most difficult, time to act in the likeness of Christ.
9. Don't flee a growing or festering problem in your congregation by running away from it or even quitting. Too often, long-time established (even core) members grow understandably weary of a tyrannical pastor or lay leader or a pressing financial crisis and, eventually, throw up their hands in disgust or frustration and transfer to another congregation or, even worse, quit the church altogether. I've seen situations where, as this happens, the trend catches on with others and the natural result is that good people leave and the wrong-headed leaders gain their way or the pressing financial crisis crushes the remnant of the congregation. There goes any effective ministry in that place!
 10. Take steps to utilize the services of everyone in your congregation, no matter their age. Some of the most productive years in the lives of God's people are near the ends of their lives. Don't let anybody coast home. At the same time, don't discount the youth in your congregation and the contributions they can make. In fact, no one has an excuse from service in God's kingdom. Encourage everyone to offer the first fruits of what they have, including the service they can render, to God's work through your congregation's ministries and programs. The only free ride in God's kingdom is our ticket to glory! Otherwise, we – all of God's children – have important work to do. (And, another thing – when you're recruiting someone for a particular position or office, don't tell him or her how easy it is or how little they'll have to do. Come on! How lame is that? What does that say about service in the greatest organization that ever existed?)
 11. Work with other Christians, even within other denominations. In this sense, we need to remember - and focus on – who the real enemy is; it's not our fellow Christian brothers and sisters (misguided as some of them might be), it's the damned devil! I know the whole issue of inter-Christian involvement and participation is extremely troubling for our pastors and, to a lesser extent, our other rostered workers in the synod. Don't let it be for you lay people. Feel free to join other Christian-based efforts sponsored by such organizations as Focus on the Family, Campus Crusade for Christ, and others (locally and nationally) which may reach people who might otherwise not be reached with the precious name of Jesus. After all, it's a war out there – for Jesus; we're a church militant, engaged in a series of real battles. I liken it to a football game. When the game is over, don't you want to walk off that field having made a real difference, sweating and with mud and grass stains, even blood if need be, on your uniform and helmet? We don't want to be that guy standing on the sidelines with a clean and shiny uniform who doesn't even need to take a shower. He may certainly look good, but he didn't make a difference. Christians have to make a difference! Recall the instance when John reported to Jesus that the disciples had tried to stop a man who was driving out demons in Jesus' name because he wasn't "one of us." Jesus got after his disciples and said, "Do not stop him . . . for whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:38-41) We in the Lutheran Church are not the only ones fighting in Jesus' name.
 12. Confront poor stewardship in your congregation – and deal with it. In preaching and teaching about it, don't be afraid to utter the dreaded "tithe" word. There's nothing

- heretical about urging the members of your congregation toward and even beyond this standard. And, as importantly, practice it yourself, first (if you don't already). Have you ever seen how some newer Christians in certain foreign countries literally dance their way to the altar with their tithes and offerings? Wow! And I'm talking about Lutherans. (Now don't get nervous. What works in those places may not work, say, in Lincoln, Nebraska. But, the principle is the same.)
13. Expand the meaning and richness of your worship services by engaging lay members in significant participatory roles. Reading the lessons, conducting children's sermons or object lessons, opening the service by extending greetings and introducing the theme of the day, playing various instruments, participating in chancel dramas, offering personal "faith" stories, and the like are great opportunities to connect with significant numbers of members who are then more likely to "own" the worship experiences within the congregation. You know, worship means work. We have to resist the trend in our society toward the expectation of sitting back to be entertained. We've become all too passive a society. Not so for our church. We must never be passive.
 14. Take missions seriously! Consider coordinating with district and synod officials the congregation's support of a missionary – at home or abroad.
 15. Wrap yourself around prayer. It is our response to God's invitation to dialogue with Him. Pray for each other. Pray together over decisions that need to be made. Pray before and after significant votes are taken by boards, committees and voters' assemblies, in order continually to demonstrate to your members that we do not undertake important decisions without seeking God's will and direction. Form prayer groups and schedule periodic prayer vigils in the congregation. Engage others in prayer times so that the effort is engaging and inclusive. And don't "say" a prayer; pray! But, avoid any temptation to pray and, then, sit back. Prayer should energize us for action, just as it did Jesus. Remember, we have a lot of work to do.
 16. Urge your pastor to preach on Old Testament themes and offer Bible studies accordingly. Sure, the New Testament may ultimately be where it's at, but it is so much richer in light of the experiences and accounts recorded by the authors of the Old Testament books. After all, the Holy Spirit, didn't inspire them to write for nothing, or only for a limited time and purpose. The Old Testament and the examples and lessons gleaned from its accounts matter. People like Nehemiah, Esther, Joseph, Ruth, Mordecai, and the widow of Zarephath inspire us to service in God's kingdom and, you know what? – each one of them was a lay person!
 17. Consider implementing attendance requirements at worship and Sunday School for children in the congregation who receive tuition discounts at the elementary or high school your congregation supports. It emphasizes, again, that membership matters and serves as a curb against those who might be tempted to "game the system" – that is, join the congregation solely to take advantage of the tuition discount offered to members. Be careful, though, and evaluate this closely. If you've ever taught Sunday School, you know that having one or more kids in attendance who are only there because of such a requirement and could care less about the lesson, can really dampen the interest and enthusiasm of the others. Keep in mind that well-intentioned regulations can have equal, opposite and unintended consequences.

18. Be an example to those who follow after you. Ken Klaus shared some Rather revealing statistics two months ago in his *The Lutheran Hour* Father's Day sermon. He reported that in families where neither parent attends church regularly, there is but a 6% chance that a child in that home will attend church when he or she grows up. If the mother attends church regularly, the percentage increases to 15%. If the father attends church regularly, there exists a 55% probability that his child will attend regularly during adulthood. If both mother and father attend regularly, that probability jumps to 75%.

The conclusion to draw from this is apparent: set the example for your own children (and grandchildren). Further, for lay people who are active in leadership roles in their congregation, I have to believe that their children will, likewise, be more inclined to participate actively in the mission and ministry of their congregations. In other words, convince your kids that we've been given a great job to do.

V. Conclusion

Just two months or so after Moses, Aaron and the Israelites had escaped Egypt and approached Mount Sinai, God declared His desire that they become his "treasured possession . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5-6) Indeed, there was something special about His chosen people. Hundreds and hundreds of years later, Peter picked up on the same imagery in referring to his fellow Christians as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light." Through Christ, we have become "the people of God." (1 Peter 2:9-10) We are His "treasured possession." As followers of Christ - men and women, pastors, teachers and lay people, young and old, new Christians and life-long Christians - we have been called to carry on the work of Christ's church, which He began and which He has entrusted to us so that we, all of us, together, may join in His priestly work of reconciling God and man. That sums up the work we are to do.

So, the Master's calling – and we answer, gladly, "Send me, send me." And, we just might turn the whole world upside down. Now, let's all get back to work! Holy Spirit, help us!

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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