



2013 RESOLUTION 4-06A TASK FORCE

Report to the Synod



In the Name of Jesus

The 2013 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod adopted Resolution 4-06A To Address Questions Re Service of Licensed Lay Deacons. Its final two paragraphs state:

Resolved, That the President of the Synod establish a task force consisting of members from the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, the Council of Presidents, the Praesidium, and seminary faculties to develop a plan anchored in the Word, in consultation with licensed lay deacons and those who supervise and are served by them, to resolve questions about the service of licensed lay deacons serving congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with the Word and Sacraments of Christ; and be it finally

Resolved, That the plan and its proposed implementation be reported to the Synod one year before the 2016 convention.

The following report has been prepared in response to the convention's resolution.

Introduction (*The Church Lives by the Word and Sacraments of Christ*)

When the eleven disciples gathered together with the risen Lord Jesus Christ in Galilee, He sent them forth with the command to go to the nations and to make disciples, baptizing and teaching, promising to be present with them to the end of the age (Matt 28:16-20). St. Luke tells us that Jesus also reminded the apostles that their eye-witness testimony to fulfillment of the Old Testament's promises in His suffering, death, and resurrection would be the ongoing basis for the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins—a preaching that would be empowered by the Holy Spirit's "power from on high" (Luke 24:44-49; see also Acts 1:7-8). So it is that Christ has given "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers" (Eph 4:11).¹

The Lord's promised presence and His command to preach the saving Gospel to the nations establish both the daily witness of the entire church and the office of preaching² in the church. Acts 8:4-25 and 11:19-26 tell of persecution that followed the death of Stephen in Jerusalem and how the early church was scattered around the Mediterranean world. Christ's holy people were scattered, but not silenced. As believers sought refuge, they also spoke the Word of life and salvation in Christ Jesus, first to Jews, then Samaritans, and then, increasingly, to Gentiles. Ordinary Christians did what every Christian is called to do, attesting to their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip, one of the men who had been designated to assist in the care of widows (Acts 6:1-6) was one of the scattered flock who proclaimed the Gospel in Samaria and through whom the Holy Spirit worked signs of exorcism and healing (8:5-8).³ As word of conversions in Samaria came to the apostles, they traveled to Samaria to affirm the evangelistic outreach that had taken place.

In Acts 11, set in Antioch, scattered believers again told of Christ and, as they spoke, the Holy Spirit confirmed His assurance that faith comes by hearing (Rom 10:17). Once again, new believers were added to the people of God. The

¹ Though Ephesians 4 uses the aorist tense, it is not merely referring to what Christ did in the past. He who ascended continues to give ministers to His church.

² In this report the term "office of preaching" is used with the same meaning as "Office of the Holy Ministry" or "Office of the Public Ministry."

³ John N. Collins argues that the men of Acts 6 received apostolic appointment to *minister at the tables* and *not to wait on tables*. That is, Collins argues that the "deacons" of Acts 6 were the next generation of ministers for evangelizing among the Greeks. See *Are All Christians Ministers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 36-40. While remaining neutral about this particular point, what is evident is that both Stephen and Philip were adjudged to be "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5) and, by means of the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6) receive apostolic affirmation for ministry that includes evangelism (see Acts 21:8).

Jerusalem church then sent the preacher, Barnabas, who rejoiced in the work of God’s grace, nurtured and exhorted them in their new found confession. Barnabas soon called the apostle Paul to join him, to teach the growing church.

In Acts 14:21-23 Luke shows how the apostolic ministry of Paul and Barnabas included both evangelization of new believers and also solidification of the church. The apostolic proclamation of the Word of God served to confirm or “strengthen the souls” of the new disciples and to “encourage”⁴ them to hold the true faith—all this in order to face the sobering reality that it is through tribulation that believers enter the Kingdom (v. 22). Because this proclamation cannot be left to chance, Paul and Barnabas also were instrumental in establishing the office of preaching by means of the appointment⁵ of elders in each of the newly established churches (v. 23).

The Word of God declares all Christ’s people to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God’s] own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). By hearing the Gospel from scattered believers who proclaimed “the excellencies of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light,” others were called from darkness into “marvelous light” in Samaria and Antioch. By the office of preaching and the sacraments these new believers were nurtured in faith and the church was established as the gathering of those who were hearing the Gospel preached and receiving the blessed sacraments from Christ’s authorized ministers. Then as now, both the priesthood of the baptized and the preaching office were instrumental in the work of adding believers—Christians—and establishing the church, Christ’s holy people, in ever new locations. The office of preaching in the church and the proclamation of ordinary believers in daily life do not compete, but correlate with and complement one another.

Because it is by means of the saving Word and sacraments that believers are added and nurtured in faith and the church continues its growth, we pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his fields (Matt 9:37-38)—men whose vocation will be the public ministry. So that faith may be nurtured, congregations obey Christ and seek under-shepherds (pastors) to preach, teach, and administer Christ’s holy sacraments, even as Christ called and sent his apostles to build the church as they preached and taught, administered the sacraments, and forgave sins in His name (Matt 28:19-20; John 20:21-23). These same apostles ensured that the preaching office (office of the ministry) would continue as the church grew and a second generation of Christians was born (2 Tim 2:1-2; Titus 1:5-9). They also affirmed the proclamation of the laity in daily life (see above on Acts 8 and 11). The church lives by the power of the Gospel in witness, preaching, and sacraments. So she needs the daily testimony of the priesthood of believers and also the pastoral office. In so doing Christ builds His church and the gates of hell do not prevail against it (Matt 16:18).

These biblical passages and events relate to truth confessed in the Augsburg Confession. Following its central confession of the Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Christ (Article IV), Article V affirms that people come to saving faith because “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, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”⁶ Since the same Lord Jesus who establishes the church also establishes the office of preaching, it is neither an optional, pragmatic convenience nor a responsibility delegated by the church for the sake of good order (see Luke 10:1 where the Lord appoints [ἀναδείκνυμι] 72 preachers). Article VII adds: “It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”⁷

Therefore, when a congregation has no pastor, a very real and pressing need exists that must be met. Throughout its history, the church has addressed this need by preparing men to be ministers of the Gospel who are faithful to the Gospel and Scriptures, of high moral character, and—especially—“able to teach” the saving truth of Christ with clarity, competence, and gentleness (see 1 Tim 3:2-3; 2 Tim 2:1-2; 2:24-26). Lutheran churches have addressed the need for pastors by seminary training and in various other ways.⁸

4 ESV, v. 22. The participle of ἐπιστηρίζω, means to strengthen or establish; while παρακαλέω refers to exhorting, urging, or encouraging here. Both terms identify an effect of the preaching of the Word in Acts (see also 15:32; 15:41; 16:39; 18:23; 19:31).

5 While the details of method of the appointment are not explicitly provided, it is worth noting that the verb implies some sort of vote or raising of the hands whereby in church after church the men appointed as elders received not only the endorsement of Paul and Barnabas, but of the churches. (BDAG defines the verb χειροτονέω as “choose (or elect) by raising hands” and “appoint.”)

6 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 40.

7 Kolb and Wengert, 42.

8 Such ways have included individual instruction according to an “apprenticeship” model and streamlined programs such as those Löhe designed for *Nothelfer*.

Providing pastoral care has often been challenging, however. At present in the LCMS, several difficulties may be mentioned.

- (1) *Financial Challenges*: Many smaller congregations have inadequate resources to provide for a full-time pastor (and sometimes even for a part-time pastor) to serve them and are struggling to find or afford even temporary pastoral service.⁹
- (2) *Geographical Challenges*: In other locales, small, isolated congregations in remote areas face not only a similar financial challenge, but also find it difficult to find pastors who are in geographic proximity to them.
- (3) *Demographic Challenges*: Urban, minority, and ethnically diverse congregations and missions—particularly those located in areas with few retired pastors—may have no practical options to fill their pastoral needs with ordained, synodically rostered pastors.

Background (*Laymen Serving in a Pastoral Role in the LCMS*)

The LCMS has, since its inception, recognized our Lord’s mandate for the pastoral office, as attested to in Scripture and the Confessions. Originally published in 1852 as *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, Walther’s “*Church and Ministry*” lays forth quite clearly a scriptural and confessional case for distinguishing the office of the ministry from the priesthood of believers, emphasizing that the ministry¹⁰ is a particular office established by God which the church is bound to uphold by divine command and not on an arbitrary or optional basis.¹¹ *Church and Ministry* anchors this teaching in a multitude of scriptural witnesses, and AC V, AC XIV, AC XXVIII, AAC XIII, the Treatise, and FC SD XII among other confessional sources. In addition, Walther cites Luther and many Lutheran fathers to make his case. Such an array of biblical, confessional, and historical witnesses to the necessity of a rightly called office of the ministry has led many in the LCMS to voice significant discomfort and objections to the practice of lay preaching and administration of the sacraments which is present in some LCMS congregations.

As a consequence of such circumstances, two valid concerns are seemingly entangled: the need for people to have access to God’s saving means of grace and the necessity of regular pastoral administration of those means. These two valid concerns and the tension that may ensue from them is not unique to the Missouri Synod or new to Lutherans. Historically, the Synod has sought to serve small congregations and missions or other churches in challenging circumstances and locales primarily by having pastors serve in dual or multi-point parishes. It has also addressed other challenges by providing alternative, non-residential training programs for clergy such as Distance Education Leading to Ordination (DELTO) and its recent replacement, Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) training, the Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT), Center for Hispanic Studies (CHS), and the Cross-Cultural Institute of Concordia Seminary centered at Concordia, Irvine. More recently, an increasing number of laymen have been serving in congregations and ministries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in ways that involve pastoral responsibilities such as preaching and the administration of the sacraments. Sometimes laymen serve only infrequently when a pastor is ill or unavailable for a Sunday by, for example, reading a sermon prepared by the pastor. In other cases, however, laymen receive some training on the district level and serve as deacons in an ongoing pastoral role, but under varying levels of supervision by ordained pastors of the Synod.

Various levels of schooling exist for training pastors in international Lutheranism, including seminary level training and countless less ambitious programs.

⁹ There may be circumstances where very small congregations may need to consider merging with a nearby church or sharing a pastor with another congregation (see Recommendation 4 below), but that does not diminish the reality that many small congregations are struggling to provide pastoral care. Given overall LCMS demographics, it seems certain that such circumstances will only increase in the future.

¹⁰ Although the term “ministry” (*diakonia*) is occasionally used in a general sense as service, in this context the word is used in the narrow sense to refer to the office of the called and ordained servant of the Word and its responsibility to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments.

¹¹ Two English editions of Walther’s *Kirche und Amt* are now widely used in the LCMS. The first is *Church and Ministry (Kirche und Amt): Witnesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), cf. Part Two: Thesis I, 161-176 for Walther’s discussion of the distinction between the priesthood of believers and the pastoral office. Second, there is the recent revision of J.T. Mueller’s translation newly edited and annotated by Matthew C. Harrison, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry: Kirche und Amt: The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Office* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012) which has Part Two: Thesis I on 151-166. Later theses focus on the divine institution of the ministry, its necessity, character, authority, and responsibilities.

The practice of non-ordained men serving pastorally has resulted in questions, objections, and debate. Concerns have been raised, primarily, because of the Synod's shared commitment to Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession which states: "Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call."¹²

The passage of 1989 Resolution 3-05B increased these discussions and debates. The genesis of the resolution was the report of a Lay Worker Study Committee (hereafter referred to as Committee) appointed in 1987 and asked to make recommendations to the Synod regarding "consecrated lay workers" of the LCMS. The Committee was asked to consider three needs in particular:

- (1) for church workers to plant new congregations,
- (2) for outreach to minorities and non-English speaking groups, and
- (3) for the care of isolated congregations.¹³

The Committee considered such issues as the training of such workers, whether those who are called to positions that involve pastoral functions should be ordained, and what nomenclature should be used for these workers, specifically mentioning the idea of "renaming 'lay minister' and 'lay ministry' as 'deacon' and 'diaconate.'"¹⁴

In its report to the 1989 Convention, the Committee focused on three areas of "lay ministry" (using the term ministry in a broad sense as all types of service in the church). Its first focus was "the question of pastoral services, functions, and responsibilities being carried out by men who have not completed a seminary program and who are not ordained." Second, matters "of nomenclature, preparation, deployment, and supervision" were addressed. Third, the report explored ways of involving the laity in expanded service to the church "and especially in the planting of new missions."¹⁵

The report recommended that Synod continue its programs for "Certified Professional Church Workers, Lay," and also recommended district-sponsored training programs for laity with standards to be developed appropriate to the needs laity would fill. The report held to the ideal that only an ordained pastor should preach and administer the sacraments. It also, however, indicated a need for laymen to serve *temporarily* in preaching and the administration of the sacraments, recommending that the title "deacon" be used for such men while serving "in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies." (It noted that such pastoral services were already being exercised by about 135 laymen under Synod's approval in special situations at that time.) Distinguishing four functions of the office of public ministry—preaching, leading public worship, administration of the sacraments in worship, and exercising the Office of the Keys (absolution)—the report recommended that only the first three functions be exercised by deacons, prepared and licensed for up to two years by their districts, and that such pastoral responsibilities be carried out only while under the supervision of an ordained pastor.¹⁶

1989 Resolution 3-05B adopted the Lay Worker Study Committee recommendations and guidelines as indicated in the foregoing paragraphs. The resolution included a final section on bylaw review recommending that Synod provide a means of placement, supervision, listing and referral for all "Certified Church Workers, Lay," that the Council of Presidents provide the necessary arrangements for such Synod services, and that the necessary bylaws for such actions be prepared for the 1992 convention.

Debate at the 1989 convention over this resolution was vigorous and protracted. It continued thereafter, with objections to the resolution raised by a partner church body, by LCMS districts, and by pastors and congregations. Subsequent LCMS conventions featured further studies, proposals, and resolutions that attempted to address concerns raised by the 1989 resolution. In 1992 provision was made for laymen who had served for ten years or more in a pastoral capacity to apply for colloquy (Res. 3-08).¹⁷ 1995 Resolution 3-07A required laymen performing pastoral functions

¹² KW, 46

¹³ Letter of appointment to the study committee from President Ralph Bohlmann. Quoted in unpublished CTCR Staff report, "1989 Resolution 3-05B" (February 16, 2006), 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ LCMS *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures* (1989), 69.

¹⁶ Ibid., 70. The explicit rationale for restricting deacons from "the personal pronouncement of the absolution as it pertains to church discipline and possible excommunication" stems from the resolution's perspective that deacons "do not hold the office of public ministry" and that this function could always be provided by "those who hold the office of public ministry" (Res. 3-05B; *1989 Convention Proceedings*, 113).

¹⁷ The 1992 Convention resolved to establish a committee to study questions such as this, but an amendment to address the specific matter of an office of perma-

“to apply for admission into the pastoral ministry in the Synod” within two years unless there were “extreme and unusual circumstances” preventing such application—a resolution which, in effect, ended LCMS endorsement of the LLD programs. The 1998 convention called for a task force to study the “growing number of congregations whose pastoral needs cannot be provided by full-time pastors” (Res. 5-09). The task force reported to the 2001 convention and suggested a mediating approach to the theological and practical concerns, an approach that would have rescinded the 1989 and 1995 convention actions regarding laymen serving in a pastoral capacity. A resolution to act on the task force recommendations was presented, but a substitute resolution from the floor was passed instead, rescinding only 1995 Res. 3-07A and authorizing the districts of the Synod to continue training lay deacons “as directed by the spirit of the 1989 Wichita Res. 3-05B.” It also called for the appointment of an oversight Committee to revise DELTO “in order to help address the needs to recruit and train more ordained pastors.”¹⁸

2004 Res. 5-09 “To Affirm District Programs that Equip Laity for Ministry” affirmed the LCMS District lay training programs “for mission work.” The resolution addressed “ministry” in a general sense, without specifically referring to preaching or the administration of the sacraments. It also resolved that “the new Board for Pastoral Education with the guidance of the seminary faculties develop a standardized core curriculum for District lay-training programs and coordinate a national listing of participants.”¹⁹

The study of revisions needed for DELTO, called for in 2001, was completed by the 2007 convention which established the Specific Ministry Pastor program (SMP) as a successor to DELTO. SMP was designed to provide a way of training candidates for specialized ministries, including the kinds of ministries in which the deacons of various LCMS districts were serving (2007 Res. 5-01B). In addition, 2007 Res. 5-02 asked the Board of Parish Education and Council of Presidents “to study the situations currently served by licensed lay deacons to determine whether there continues to be a genuine need for this program” and to report its findings to the 2010 convention. Based on its report, a resolution to the 2010 convention was proposed (2010 Res 5-03A “To Address Lay Deacons”). After extensive debate, the resolution was returned to its floor committee without convention vote.

The 2013 LCMS convention once again took up this matter and called for the CTCR to develop resources on this topic and for the president to promote its study and to establish a task force that would “resolve questions about the service of licensed lay deacons” in LCMS congregations (Res. 4-06A). The task force report was to be submitted to the members of Synod one year in advance of the 2016 convention. President Matthew Harrison appointed the members of the task force (TF 4-06A) in the fall of 2013. They are Deacon Jason Kiefer (NJ District), Dr. Herbert Mueller (Praesidium), Dr. Roger Paavola (Mid-South District president), Rev. Russ Sommerfeld (NE District president), Dr. James Voelz (CS-St. Louis faculty member), Dr. Roland Ziegler (member of the faculty of CTS-Fort Wayne and the CTCR), and Rev. Larry Vogel (CTCR staff and chairman of the task force). The members of the task force have sought to fulfill their assigned responsibilities and are hereby reporting to the convention as required.

In assessing our responsibilities, TF 4-06A recognizes that the matter of licensing lay deacons for preaching and sacramental administration has been a divisive, polarizing aspect of Synod’s life for over a quarter century. Sadly, in some cases ill-will and animosity have developed. Therefore the task force has attempted to take seriously its assignment to address the concerns and causes of division. We have sought to determine the extent to which laymen are currently serving in a pastoral capacity and the stated reasons for such service, to understand the nature of the theological concerns that are relevant to this matter, to remove stereotypes of both proponents and critics of the service of deacons, and to suggest a way forward that is faithful to Scripture and the Confessions, nurtures the mission and ministry of the church, and promotes the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

18 2001 Res. 3-08B “To Address Needs and Opportunities for Pastoral Ministry in Specialized Situations,” in LCMS, *2001 Convention Proceedings*, 138-139.

19 LCMS *2004 Convention Proceedings*, 143.

Current Status

A Spring 2014 survey of LCMS districts found that about 525 individuals have completed district training programs for lay deacons²⁰ and are currently involved in congregational ministries or mission efforts (see Appendix A). Of these, 331 men are serving in some pastoral capacity in the Synod as licensed lay deacons (LLD)—either regularly or occasionally preaching and/or administering the sacraments—and 194 individuals (men and women) are serving in various ways other than preaching or administration of sacraments. (By comparison, in 2009 540 individuals were then involved in mission or ministry in general terms, with 320 preaching or administering sacraments and 220 involved in other ways.)

Visitations of six districts with the largest number of active deacons and/or graduates of district training programs provided helpful insights. The rationale for the programs emphasized during the visits generally included three points.

- First, most frequently mentioned was the number of *small congregations*—particularly those in rural and urban areas—that are *unable to support a pastor* financially and have difficulty finding supply or vacancy pastors to serve them.
- Second in importance was the shortage of ordained pastors available to serve LCMS congregations in certain *isolated geographic locales*, both in terms of their availability for calls and also their ability to serve with minimal remuneration.
- Third, few LCMS pastors are equipped for ministry, church planting, and mission *outreach in urban settings and elsewhere among racial and ethnic minorities*. Moreover, such missions tend to have minimal financial resources and frequently cannot support the costs of a full-time minister.

Proponents of the districts' programs frequently mentioned the need for and value of specially trained laymen who work under pastoral supervision to supply these needs. They often suggested that such programs have developed a neglected aspect of pastoral responsibility because the pastors who serve as mentors to deacons exercise *episcopate*—pastoral supervision—of the deacons and also, thereby, expand their pastoral scope beyond what they can do by themselves.

One district president suggested that deacons trained within the district better understood the cultural environment and people than individuals who came from outside the district. Similarly, a mentor pastor indicated his belief that a deacon from his congregation would understand the church and could serve in his absence better than an ordained supply or vacancy pastor from elsewhere. Others believe that the Scriptures refer to an office of deacon in Philippians 1:1 and in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and believe the establishment or maintenance of such an office is needed.²¹ Moreover, the number of individuals who served as a Licensed Deacon and then went on to become an ordained LCMS pastor, via colloquy or seminary programs, was emphasized in nearly every district visitation.²² Lastly, proponents of the district deacon training programs pointed out the inherent value of the study programs in themselves and emphasized the benefit of having specially-trained lay people available to help in various pastoral capacities in ordinary settings as well as during times of more extraordinary needs.

With the approval of about ten districts, congregations facing such challenges have appointed a layman to preach, baptize, and preside at the Lord's Table either in established congregations or in developing missions or church plants. Such districts have designed and implemented programs for training leaders in theology and pastoral practice in an attempt to prepare the lay workers. Deacon is the formal title for such workers, but other titles (e.g., "lay minister," "lay pastor," and simply "pastor") are also used, sometimes formally and other times informally.

Over time, the utilization of lay deacons has sometimes gone beyond the provisions of 1989 Res. 3-05B, which anticipated and endorsed the practice of laymen preaching and administering the sacraments only in emergencies or exceptional

20 Not all those who have completed district diaconal training programs are deacons or licensed to preach. Some assist congregations in other ways and, often, are referred to as parish assistant or another title. The Atlantic District refers to all its graduates as deacons, but, in almost every case, the deacons do not preach or administer the sacraments (only one man does so at present).

21 It is certainly the case that the Bible refers to deacons, however, there is no indication within the texts regarding the service that deacons provide. They are associated with bishops ("overseers" or ἐπίσκοποι), respectable and reputable, and clear about the faith, but beyond that there is nothing about what the "office" implies or involves. For that reason it is not surprising that deacons are not a constant in church history and that their role varies dramatically in different times and places. John Collins simply says "it is unlikely that this section of 1 Timothy can provide any more precise idea of the diaconate" (*Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], 238). None of this denies that the church is free to have or not have an office of deacon, but the definition of that office would be a matter of human authority, not divine authority, and it should not create confusion about the necessity of the one office of preaching.

22 Without questioning this assertion, it should be noted that the Task Force is unaware of any data that indicates how many men have gone on to be ordained under the auspices of seminary training or colloquy.

circumstances. The majority of deacons serve in settings where there are significant if not extreme financial, geographic, or demographic challenges. However, there are also cases in which deacons preach and administer (both occasionally and as “vacancy pastors”) even though ordained ministers—retired and/or active—are readily available to serve. In addition, some women graduates of deacon-training programs have served liturgically in ways that the Synod has formally discouraged and that has also created confusion and misunderstanding (see 1989 Res. 3-10; 1989 Res. 3-14).²³

As noted above, a central assumption of LLD programs has been the idea that the practice of a pastor supervising deacons who carry out pastoral functions, such as preaching and sacramental administration under his (the pastor’s) authority, is a recovery of a New Testament emphasis on exercising “oversight.” Therefore the Task Force on Licensed Lay Deacons believes the matter of oversight must be addressed specifically.

The words “overseer,” “overseeing,” and “oversight” are a translation of the ἐπισκεπ- stem of noun and verb forms, usually in a form of the noun ἐπίσκοπος, “overseer.” It is important to observe several things.

1. Words that related to this ἐπισκεπ- stem are not the main descriptors of the Office of the Holy Ministry, either of the officeholder or of his function. Holders of the office are described as ἐπίσκοποι only 4 times in the entire NT (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7), and the verb ἐπισκέπτομαι is never used to describe the activity of the office holder. Words related to this stem are not used of Jesus as he deals with his people (with the possible exception of Luke 19:44, which speaks of his “visitation” to Israel).
2. Much more frequent within this context are stems related to shepherd/ shepherding (ποιμήν/ποιμαίνω) and sheep/flock (πρόβατα/ποιμῖον/ποιμνή). These, related to the office and its functions, occur at least 64 times (18 for “pastors” and their people, 46 for Jesus as he deals with his people [21 times in the Gospel of John alone]).
3. Thus, the pressure of the linguistic usage of the NT is not in the direction of understanding men in the Office of the Holy Ministry as being and functioning principally as overseers. Rather, these men are seen as being and functioning principally as *shepherds*, men who personally tend, care for, and even give their lives for their sheep. Indeed, the people under the care of the holder of the Office of the Holy Ministry are never called “those overseen”; they are regularly called the “sheep” or the “flock.”
4. Furthermore, what are overseen by “overseers” in the NT, when the noun is used, are not other leaders. Rather, it is the sheep themselves. This can be seen in Acts 20:28: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as *overseers, to engage in shepherding* (ποιμαίνειν, present infinitive) the church of God...” *One oversees by acting as a shepherd among the people whom God has commended to one’s charge, not by overseeing others doing the work of shepherding.* A corporate, delegation model is not at all in view.

The members of TF 4-06A want to address several false stereotypes that are sometimes heard in the Synod’s debates about LLD programs. To be sure, any time there is debate and controversy, one may find “bad examples” on the “opposing side.” But, in a time of debate, should we emphasize the worst of our opponent’s behavior and exaggerate its significance, or should we put the best construction on those with whom we differ?

Therefore, we would first emphasize that the concerns underlying the establishment of district lay training programs are valid. Proponents of LLD training and implementation are not, in general, theologically cavalier or unconcerned with faithfulness to Scripture or subscription to the Confessions. Their over-riding desire is that people in LCMS congregations would be able to hear the Gospel preached and receive the sacraments of Christ. They are aware that the circumstances for rightly calling ministers in past times have dictated different approaches to the selection of pastors (Treatise, 70). There is little evidence that laymen serving as deacons are seeking to usurp authority or responsibility from pastors, rather, there is ample evidence that most simply wish to serve the church and willingly accept the need to do so under a pastor’s supervision.

The Task Force also hastens to emphasize that those with theological concerns about the LLD programs are not, in general, doing so because they think mission and ministry is unimportant or that the congregations filling their pastoral needs with deacons have no real challenges. There is little evidence that pastors who raise concerns about LLD

²³ The TF has no basis to judge how widespread are the practices identified in this paragraph. It has no authority or responsibility for ecclesiastical supervision and has not discovered these examples via any “investigation.” In every case, the practices have been reported by deacons or mentors.

programs do so to “protect their turf” or otherwise to engage in clerical elitism. The emphasis, rather, on the part of those who question the programs is for fidelity to our biblical and confessional commitments and a desire to address the problems of underserved congregations and missions without compromise to those commitments. Those who question the LLD programs note that the practice of laymen serving as pastors without ordination, whether or not they are supervised by an ordained minister, is a recent innovation that has no historical substantiation.²⁴

We pray that such false perspectives about those on either “side” of the debates might be removed. Our Synod needs to move forward together with deep concern for fidelity to the Word of Christ as we confess it together and for faithfulness in the mission Christ has given to his church.

How Is “rite vocatus” to Be Understood? (AC XIV)

Central to the theological debate regarding LLD practices is the understanding of AC XIV, referred to above. Since the Augsburg Confession was written in both German and Latin, both languages are translated in recent scholarly editions of *The Book of Concord*. A comparison of translations from German and Latin shows there is no difference in substance. The translation from German in the Kolb-Wengert edition reads: “Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call.” The translation from the Latin is: “Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called.” The restriction within this article is the relevant point: “without a proper [public] call” is based on the German *ohn[e] ordentlich Beruf* and “unless properly called” is based on the Latin phrase *nisi rite vocatus*.²⁵ Public ministry—preaching, teaching, and sacramental administration in and on behalf of the church—is restricted only to those with a proper call, or, in other words, to those properly called. So what does that phrase “rite vocatus” mean? What is a proper call?

While the question about the proper understanding of the phrase *rite vocatus* is, in large measure, a topic we must consider from within the realm of our *confessional* commitments, we should not ignore the *biblical* texts underpinning Article XIV. As confessional Lutherans, we subscribe the Confessions *because* they rightly express *Scripture’s* teaching. Thus, C.F.W. Walther properly grounded the Office of the Ministry not in custom or good order (as much as they may play a role), but in the Word of God. It is the Word which restricts those who should preach, even though the Word also affirms that every Christian is a priest (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10), that all Christians are “taught by God” (John 5:45), and that, as Luther explained, when any Christian is with those who do not know Christ “it is his duty to preach and to teach the gospel.” “In such a case a Christian looks with brotherly love at the need of the poor and perishing souls and does not wait until he is given a command or letter from a prince or bishop. For need breaks all laws and has none.”²⁶ There is no biblical restriction on sharing the faith in one’s daily vocation in the world.

In the Christian church, however, “there is an office to teach, feed, and rule, which Christians by virtue of their general Christian calling do not possess.”²⁷ The texts are clear: Paul asks rhetorically whether all are apostles, prophets, or teachers in 1 Corinthians 12:29, knowing that the answer is No, for God Himself appoints (sets in place) different people in different offices for the well-being of the whole church (1 Cor 12:28).²⁸ Paul himself declared that he was “appointed” to his office as preacher, apostle and teacher (1 Tim 2:7, cp. 1 Tim 1:12).

This truth pervades the whole of Scripture. God, not man, calls each of us to proclaim the message of His redeeming love in Christ Jesus, yet God the Son also establishes this particular “office” in which He gives specific men to preach,

24 Some have suggested that references to the office of deacon in the history of the broader church and in Lutheran churches (e.g., AC XXIII, 10; XXIV, 37;) are evidence of such a practice. In fact, however, deacons during the Reformation era Lutheran churches—and at many other points in church tradition—were often part of the ordained clergy, though of a lesser rank (comparable to an assistant pastor today). Such deacons were not considered laymen. However, in other Reformation settings, “deacon” referred to unpaid laymen who took care of the poor and supervised the common chest. See Martin Krarup, *Ordination in Wittenberg* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 97-100.

25 KW 46 and 47. Cp. BKS 69. The Tappert edition reads, for the German, “without a regular call” and, for the Latin, “unless he is regularly called.” See Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 36. The Bente English translation from *The Concordia Triglotia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), reads “unless he be regularly called.” *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2005), while based on Bente, translates the phrase “a rightly ordered call” (65).

26 AE 39:310.

27 C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Office*, Thesis I on the Office, 152.

28 The Greek verb τίθημι, used in verse 28, means to establish something or to appoint someone.

teach, baptize, and commune His holy people. He called prophets in the Old Testament and then promised through them that He would give shepherds (pastors) also in his new covenant to “feed” His people “with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). The Lord Jesus Himself saw to the fulfillment of this promise when He called His apostles and commanded them to feed His sheep (John 21:15-17; cf. also Matt 10; 28:18-20; Lk 9:1-10; Mark 16:15; John 20:21-23). The apostles were unique as eyewitnesses, but not as appointed preachers—for the office of public preaching and teaching and sacramental administration would not end with them. Rather they assured the growing church that their pastors/elders/bishops (the name of the office and varied) had been placed in their office by the Holy Spirit, not human decision, in order that God’s church would be nurtured (Acts 20:28; cf. Eph 4:11). Moreover, the apostles, who had been called directly (immediately called) by Christ Himself did not exalt themselves over those whom God later called and appointed through the church (indirectly or mediately). Rather, Peter exhorts elders “as a fellow elder” (1 Pet 5:1).²⁹

It should be clear, then, that this responsibility—the Office of the Public Ministry, as we are accustomed to refer to it in the LCMS—is not optional, but commanded. Walther emphasizes that in his Thesis III on the Ministry/Office, yet he immediately also reminds us that this vital office is not in opposition to the priesthood of believers or a sign of superior holiness, but one of service (Thesis IV). AC XIV stands on firm scriptural ground as it restricts the public preaching and teaching of the Gospel and its sacramental administration to those who have been appointed to such duties.

How does that appointment—that right and proper public calling—take place? In a variety of ways. No one particular method of providing the Office of the Ministry has been followed either through the tradition of the church catholic or in Lutheran tradition. What is vital is that the public ministry be filled in a way that is in keeping with the requirements of Scripture and the Confessions. The proper calling—*rite vocatus*—involves several aspects. The Task Force commends to the Synod the understanding of this phrase that was emphasized in the CTCR’s 2003 report *Theology and Practice of “the Divine Call.”*³⁰ The report’s focus is “placement into the office of the public ministry”—that is, the “divine call” or “call and ordination.”³¹ The report speaks of “the divinely established office referred to in Scripture as ‘shepherd,’ ‘elder,’ or ‘overseer,’” or, as “the office of the public ministry.”

After examining the scriptural evidence for the call into ministry, the report summarizes by noting that placement into the office of Word and Sacrament occurs in several different ways and that the texts which describe these methods provide guidance only inferentially. It also notes that the New Testament is less concerned with procedure than with the qualifications of ministers and the importance “for the church to know that the man who occupies the pastoral office has been placed there by God.”³² Prefatory to its examination of the Confessions, *Divine Call* notes: “In general, the Confessions stress two points: pastors are not self-appointed; and, bishops are not the exclusive ones who may ordain.”³³ The latter point is especially emphasized in the Treatise: “Philip Melanchthon’s treatise is a theological rationale for Lutherans to undertake the ordaining of their own pastors.”³⁴ Melanchthon also obliquely addresses the development of the diaconate as a step toward the Roman view of a necessary hierarchy in ministry. The report affirms Melanchthon’s view that, “Regardless of their title (pastor, elder, teacher [doctor], preacher, minister, and occasionally bishop, though almost never priest), all ordained clergymen have the same basic authority to discharge the duties of their office (AC XXVIII, 8, 21; Tr 60-61, 74).”³⁵ Noting Melanchthon’s references to the rights of calling, choosing (or electing), and ordaining, *Divine Call* argues that, “Taken together, the terms used by the Treatise constitute and explain the ‘rightly called’ (*rite vocatus*) of AC XIV.”³⁶ Further, *Divine Call* suggests how the three aspects of “rightly called” may be distinguished:

The “right of choosing” (*jus eligendi*) refers to the nomination and selection of an individual. The “right of calling” (*jus vocandi*) designates the actual request or call of the individual to serve. The “right of ordaining” (*jus ordinandi*) refers to the act by which one is placed into the public office of ministry.³⁷

29 References are largely from *Church and Office*, 168.

30 Online at lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=410; abbreviated as *Divine Call*.

31 *Ibid.*, 5.

32 *Ibid.*, 10.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*, 12. Note well: the rationale is for Lutherans to *ordain*, not to dispense with ordination, something they insisted they did not want. See Ap XIV and the section that follows.

35 *Ibid.*, 13.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, 14. It should be noted, then, that the term “call” is being used in a twofold manner. In AC XIV, “called” is used to refer to an entire, three-fold process of placing a man into the public office of the ministry. The reference to a “right of calling” is a more narrow designation of the specific congregational call to an eligible candidate who is or will be ordained. On this understanding of the term “call” that can apply to both an individual congregation’s decision and also to

Therefore, the confessional understanding of *rite vocatus* involves three elements: examination (or certification), call, and ordination. The examination identifies an individual who has been properly prepared in terms of doctrine and whose life will be in keeping with the office he is to hold. The call is the congregation's affirmation that God has called this individual to serve them as their pastor. The ordination provides the means by which the wider church—the Synod in our case— recognizes the examination and call of the individual and places him into the ministry of the church. Thus, the congregation's call is the local affirmation of an individual's ministry and ordination is the transparochial affirmation of the same. So the CTCR said in 1981:

We stress the fact that ordination is the declaration of the whole confessional fellowship. In the end, a single congregation or an agency representing larger segments of the church does issue the call. Nevertheless, in a synod of congregations bound by a common confession and loyalty, good order demands that admission into the pastoral office or into its closely allied auxiliary offices is not the act of a single congregation or agency. Various ways can be found to establish this approval of the whole church. Presently the certification of suitability for the ministry by the faculty members who have taught the candidates and the assigning of first calls by the Council of Presidents is workable and does express the transparochial nature of the ministry.³⁸

Please note, how a church examines, calls, and ordains has been done in various ways through the ages. Our church has made determinations for how best to do these different things for the sake of good order. Examination takes place via seminary faculties or colloquy process. Calls are issued, in most cases, by action of the congregation alone, acting to fill its pastoral vacancy. Ordination is conducted on behalf of the whole church by the District President or his representative after due examination and call. During the ordination, the calling congregation speaks on behalf of the whole church to receive the candidate as a duly called and ordained pastor.³⁹ *Rite vocatus* includes this whole process. None of these three aspects is negotiable or unnecessary, even though they do not occur simultaneously and they may be implemented in various ways.⁴⁰ Moreover, these three aspects are not wooden nor are they understood legalistically. For example, as candidates for the ministry are being prepared (in the examination process) for call and ordination, they are required, as vicars (or “interns”), to preach, albeit under the supervision and authority of their supervising pastor.

Specifically, Why Ordination?

We have noted earlier Walther's emphasis that the Office of the Ministry is not a position of superiority. It is not to be exalted over the office every Christian holds by virtue of Baptism. Luther was just as emphatic. Referring to the public ministers by the term “priest” as was still current at his time, Luther writes: “... whoever does not preach the Word, though he was called by the church to do this very thing, is no priest at all, and that the sacrament of ordination can be nothing else than a certain rite by which the church chooses its preachers.”⁴¹ Walther is therefore following this understanding of ordination when he says of it: “The ordination of those who are called with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but an apostolic, churchly order and only a solemn public confirmation of the call.”⁴²

Because of such statements in our tradition, some have questioned the importance of ordination. The practice of unordained men preaching and teaching publicly is often connected with this perspective and such quotes from Luther and Walther are sometimes used to promote the service of lay preaching and sacramental administration. Why is

the call *process* of the wider church see also CTCR, *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, Nomenclature* (1981) which says on page 30: “The term ‘call’ should be used for those who have specifically been equipped to perform certain ecclesiastical functions and have made a commitment to dedicate their lives to that service unless or until God directs them to other callings. The term ‘call’ should not be used where such commitment is lacking, and those who serve the church other than under a call should be referred to simply as ‘lay workers.’ Furthermore, in a synodical form of church fellowship and congregational interdependence, those who are ‘called’ must be under the supervision of the whole church.”

38 *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, Nomenclature* (1981), 30. Emphasis added

39 *LSB Agenda*, Rite of Ordination. 167.

40 Apology XIV.1 in *The Book of Concord* makes it evident that ordination was an aspect of *rite vocatus*. Every English version refers to “canonical ordination” as something the reformers fully support, even as they condemn the Roman church for preventing them from maintaining ordination in the usual manner. See KW, 222-223; also the Theodore G. Tappert translation: “With the proviso that we employ canonical ordination, they [the authors of the Roman Confutation] accept Article XIV, where we say that no one should be allowed to administer the Word and the sacraments in the church unless he is duly called.” Furthermore, *Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* (William Hermann Theodore Dau, Gerhard Friedrich Bente, trans.; St. Louis: CPH, 2005) comments on page 212, “Here Melancthon affirms Lutheranism's desire to maintain whatever best contributes to good order, peace and harmony in the Church. Therefore, Lutherans have insisted on a rightly ordered call and ordination for those who will serve the Church as ministers of Word and Sacrament.”

41 AE 36:113.

42 *Church and Office*, Thesis VI, 209.

ordination important, even if it not a mandate from our Lord, but “an apostolic, churchly order and only a solemn public confirmation of the call”?

To answer this question we need to look at the qualifications for pastors. The Pastoral Epistles summarize the qualities the church must look for in her pastoral servants.⁴³ Above all, they must be “above reproach” so as not to put obstacles in the way of the Gospel and must be “able to teach” so that they proclaim Law and Gospel clearly. Self chosen good works quickly become idolatry.⁴⁴ Therefore, no one is able to certify himself or declare himself qualified for ministry, but the Church as the Bride of Christ is to put in place the structures necessary to assure herself that her ministers are qualified. No one should set himself up as pastor, so churches develop procedures by which pastors are called. We believe God calls, but through the congregation(s). And because our congregations are members of a confessional fellowship, we seek to recognize in a public way through the participation of the wider church that a pastor is properly called.⁴⁵

Ordination is the public rite of the Church, living in Christ, that proclaims openly all these elements.⁴⁶ Candidates for ordination must be examined or certified by the church (in our Synod, by one of the seminary faculties or by the Colloquy Committee) as “able to teach” and fit for pastoral ministry according 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Candidates for ordination must also be properly called—no one is ordained without a valid call. So our district presidents may ordain (or authorize the ordination of) only such men as have been properly certified (or examined) and rightly called.

The rite of ordination does not confer a special character or power on the person. It is also, as Walther emphasized, an apostolic custom and not a divine mandate. But such important qualifications of the practice should not lead us to assume it is unimportant or a mere formality. The Confessors never dispute the practice of ordination to the Holy Ministry, even while insisting that they have adopted a different manner of ordination because of the unwillingness of Roman bishops to ordain pastors for their churches (SC III:10 [KW 323-324]; see also Ap XIV, 1-3). In the Augsburg Confession ordination is public recognition of the call by the wider Church (beyond the individual congregation) testifying that the man is qualified and has been properly called to be a pastor. It is the call, we believe, that makes a man a pastor of a particular congregation. Ordination, as a rite, is not mandated by the Lord. However, the Church is mandated to put a man “under orders” to Jesus in the Office of the Holy Ministry through the church’s right calling. Our Lord Jesus thereby puts a man into the Office for His use. Therefore, because our congregations are part of a wider fellowship, we call only such men as are properly certified, and we seek the recognition of the wider Church by ordaining (and publicly installing) them to office. We believe omitting any of these elements would be schismatic and contrary to the “catholicity”⁴⁷ of the Church and the unity of our Synodical fellowship. Why?

1. The rite of ordination publicly witnesses that a man is found by the church to be “able to teach” and fit for ministry and has been properly called to the office by the Lord through His church.
2. The rite of ordination extracts from the candidate for ordination a very serious vow, making clear for the man and to the congregation what the Lord through His church is charging him to be and to do. He is not to lord it over the flock, but to serve. He is not to make up his own message, but is to proclaim what he has been given, according to Scripture and the Confessions.
3. In the rite of ordination the church, by the Word of God and prayer, puts the man in office and makes clear that he is to be pastor, and that his task is the public (i.e., on behalf of all) administration of the Word and Sacraments.⁴⁸

43 See 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9; see also 2 Timothy 2:15.

44 See Augustana XV and Apology XV.

45 It is certainly true that if the wider church does not make it possible to provide pastors, then a congregation has every right to act on its own to appoint a minister from among themselves. Because Rome would not ordain pastors for Reformation churches, this became a central point in the Treatise and in Luther.

46 See an excellent essay by Joel P. Okamoto, “The Office of the Holy Ministry,” in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70 (2006): 97-111. This paper was presented at two joint meetings of the Systematics departments of both LCMS seminaries and represents a consensus of these departments on the subject. It also appeared in *Concordia Journal*, published by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. A significant point in the essay is that the ministry requires and receives its necessary authority only from Jesus.

47 “Catholicity” here refers not to the Roman Catholic Church, but “catholic” in the sense of the universal church, found wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and the Sacraments administered.

48 Other Scriptures cited regarding ordination include 1 Timothy 4:14 – “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you” and 2 Timothy 1:6 – “Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” What is the gift imparted by the apostolic custom of the laying on of hands? Is it the Spirit, with gifts for pastoral work? Is it the office itself? Our church has been reticent to say more than the text, but it is clear that something is given. Perhaps the best understanding is that through the whole process of examination, call and ordination the office of pastor is entrusted to an individual, not to lift him above the people, but to charge him humbly to serve in the stead of Christ. The risen Lord has given “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:11).

4. In the rite of ordination, the congregation, on behalf of the whole church, receives the man as a minister of Word and Sacrament, and also, on behalf of the church, pledges itself to support the pastoral office with love, honor and obedience in the Lord (when the pastor brings God’s Word), as well as with gifts and fervent prayers.

The practical purpose of ordination is to **make clear** to the people in both the congregation and the wider Church that a man is set apart to be pastor, as well as to **make clear** to both the man and the people what he is to be and to do in their midst.

Confusion Over Licensed Lay Deacons

With the adoption of 1989 Resolution 3-05B, the Synod sought to bring some order to practices taking place unofficially.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the result has been confusion and division, rather than order and harmony. The practice of licensing lay deacons to preach and teach and preside for the Supper is, at its core, not clear. In an important paper considered by the systematic faculties of both our seminaries, Dr. Joel Okamoto concludes that “call and ordination are essential for conduct of the ministry. Ministers do things in the place of Christ. They forgive and retain sins. They judge doctrine. They administer the signs of God’s favor. They warn and admonish against sin and error. They exclude and include particular persons. In all these things they stand over against others, and so the question follows naturally: By what right? On whose authority? What is the sign of authority for ministers today? It is their call and ordination, which assure that they act by divine right and on the authority of Christ.”⁵⁰

In essence, licensed lay deacons are *locally* certified as “able to teach” rather than certified by the whole Synodical fellowship. While there is a call of sorts by the congregation, when the church inducts a licensed lay deacon, it specifically does *not* place the man into the pastoral office. Yet the church is telling the man to go and to do pastoral work (albeit under supervision). The people see the man behaving as their pastor, yet they are not to call him pastor, but deacon.⁵¹

Although it is often noted that “oversight” (*episcopate*) is a pastoral responsibility and that at various times in history deacons have served under a pastor’s (or bishop’s) oversight, such practices have not been widespread in Lutheran tradition. Where the office of deacon has occurred it has been defined and practiced with great variety and, most often, with its sole focus on serving the physical needs of believers. Moreover, the practice of licensing preachers has historically been condemned by Lutheran fathers (Walther, for example). Given such historical uncertainties, it is not surprising that the practice of licensing lay deacons to provide some pastoral responsibilities has led to confusion and strenuous debate rather than order and harmony (see above pages 4ff.).

Our concern here has nothing to do with the power of the Word or the efficacy of the Sacraments. The Word of God is the Word of God whoever speaks it. The Sacraments are sure and certain because of the Word and promise of Christ, not the character or position of the officiant (cp. AC VIII). Yet when the church tells a man to do pastoral work, i.e., to publicly administer Word and Sacrament, but does not recognize the man as a pastor, the church is not being clear (or fair!) to the man or to the people. This, we believe, is the real source of the unease in the Synod regarding the sending of licensed lay deacons to publicly preach, teach and preside. This is not the fault of the licensed lay deacon or of the congregation simply seeking to provide for Word and Sacrament in its midst. Instead, it is the Synod itself that has allowed this unclear situation to continue. Therefore, it behooves the Synod to provide a path forward toward a more unified and unifying approach for everyone, faithful to the Word of God and our confessions—something more clearly consonant with Augustana XIV.

The task force recognizes that without agreement regarding the theological understanding of the ministry as it is taught in Holy Scripture and confessed in *The Book of Concord*, divisions within the Synod will remain over this particular issue and that such dissension and misunderstanding will continue to distract us from the missionary mandate of our Lord. Moreover, because the Lay Deacon programs are designed and administered by LCMS districts, the task force

49 At that point it was estimated that approximately 135 “lay ministers” were “serving in the Synod in an ongoing Word and Sacrament ministry without the benefit of synodical guidelines for their service” (1989 Resolution 3-05B, 1989 Proceedings, p. 111).

50 Okamoto, pp. 110f.

51 Those who serve on Synod’s Colloquy Committee, report that when they ask licensed lay deacons what the people of the congregation they serve call him, the response is often, “They call me pastor.” This indicates that laity recognize the Office of the Ministry, even when an individual has not been placed into it in a public manner.

sought guidance and reactions from the Council of Presidents on several occasions. While various district presidents have expressed reservations about how to address various practical aspects of the proposals offered below, no one on the Council has expressed any theological objections to the understanding of *rite vocatus* provided in the preceding sections. It is our prayer, then, that the Synod can move forward in its practice on the basis of a common theological understanding of the need to rightly train, examine, call, and affirm the ministerial validity of those who will preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments in our congregations and missions.

The Role of Colloquy in the Synod

There are essentially two means by which a man can be certified for call, placement and ordination into the *ministerium* of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

- (1) He may be certified by one of our two seminary faculties through one of several degree or certificate programs offered by that seminary (Master of Divinity, Alternate Route, SMP, EIIT, CHS, etc.).
- (2) He may be certified by the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry (consisting of the First Vice President as Chairman, one district president selected by the Council of Presidents and the presidents of our two seminaries, or their representatives).

Colloquy is from the Latin, *colloquium*, essentially a conversation. So, a man entering the ministry of the Synod by colloquy submits an application package through a district, the Colloquy Committee decides whether or not the man is eligible to proceed and, if the person qualifies, the Colloquy Committee invites him for an interview, a colloquy. On the basis of the application and the colloquy interview, the Colloquy Committee decides whether to certify the man, or to decline the application, or to require the completion of further study. Further study might include a reading program, seminary classes, SMP classes, a vicarage or various combinations of the same. As one might expect, colloquy is highly individualistic, and can vary greatly, depending on the needs of the particular applicant. The goal, however, is always to ensure that the individual is “able to teach” and will think and act as a Lutheran pastor.

Who is eligible for colloquy? In addition to the general characteristics necessary for the pastoral office laid down in Scripture (See 1 Timothy 3:1-7; also 4:1-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:5-9, etc.) there are three categories of individuals presently eligible to apply for colloquy:

- (1) Ordained men who are currently active pastors in good standing of another church body, and who have completed a recognized academic program leading to ordination;
- (2) Men who have been members in good standing of a Missouri Synod parish for at least two years, who possess a Master of Divinity or equivalent from a recognized academic program leading to ordination; and
- (3) Licensed Lay Deacons of the Missouri Synod who have been serving in full Word and Sacrament ministry for at least ten years.

All others, including LCMS commissioned ministers and life-long LCMS members who have received the Master of Divinity degree from schools outside the LCMS, are directed to one of the seminaries for the “alternate route” program.⁵²

Though the details have varied through the years, the Missouri Synod has always admitted pastors to its *ministerium* by a colloquy of one form or another. The 1854 Constitution of the Synod states: “If pastors, candidates for the ministry, or schoolteachers apply for membership in Synod, who have previously not been members of recognized orthodox church bodies, they must first submit themselves to a *colloquy* by the examination commission or substitutes appointed by it.”⁵³ The Constitution then called for two examination commissions to ensure that the applicants were “able to teach”—does the man think and act as a Lutheran pastor?⁵⁴

52 Policy Manual of the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry, p. 6, see lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1106

53 Quoted in *Moving Frontiers*, Carl S. Meyer, ed., (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis 1964), p. 152.

54 The 1854 Constitution lists the requirements for the examination: “The examinations shall be both oral and written. Written work is to be: a sermon on an assigned text; an essay on a dogmatical and church-historical topic; and finally a brief biography and a trustworthy character testimonial. The oral examination is conducted in the following subjects: Bible knowledge and Scripture interpretation; Christian doctrine; knowledge of the Symbolical Books and of the teachings of erring church bodies; church history, especially Reformation history; and practical care of souls; likewise the candidate has to deliver the sermon he handed in, and a catechization. All this, as previously noted, is done publicly. Above all, the examiners are to inquire whether the candidate has a thorough understanding of the right distinction between Law and Gospel (2 Timothy 2:15), also whether he is apt to teach, [and] also if he is sound and firm in the true confession,” *ibid*, p. 155.

The path to ordination proposed below uses this time-honored process in a modified way to address the specific needs of lay deacons who have been licensed for Word and Sacrament ministry. The goal is to provide a means by which every congregation is served by a pastor, and every man whom we charge to do pastoral work—to administer Word and Sacrament on behalf of God’s people—is recognized by the wider church as a pastor.

Basic Proposal Regarding the Current Service of Licensed Lay Deacons

Resolution 4-06A charged the President of the Synod to appoint a task force to “develop a plan anchored in the Word, in consultation with licensed lay deacons and those who supervise and are served by them, to resolve questions about the service of licensed lay deacons serving congregations of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod with the Word and Sacraments of Christ.”⁵⁵ The present task force believes that the Synod, by such a plan, should provide a clear path forward to certify,⁵⁶ call and ordain men presently serving as licensed lay deacons.⁵⁷

The priorities of the task force as it has met, prayed, and worked together are the following:

1. Remaining faithful to Scripture and the Confessions
2. Promoting and facilitating the mission of proclaiming the Gospel in our congregations and communities
3. Promoting greater concord within the LCMS
4. Promoting greater implementation of existing assets:
 1. SMP
 2. EIIT, CHS, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center
 3. Multi-point ministries
 4. Inactive pastors
 5. District training programs for laity
5. Encouraging and facilitating increased lay involvement in the mission of the church, especially in evangelism.

While the foregoing are not necessarily in order of priority, the task force believes it is necessary to say that the first two points mentioned should not be placed in conflict with each other. Without theological faithfulness, there is no clear missionary mandate. Without the work of mission—proclaiming the Gospel to the world in and outside of our churches—theology is hollow and the church is being unfaithful to Scripture and the Confessions.

The following proposal is designed to address both questions about the service of Licensed Lay Deacons in keeping with 1989 Resolution 3-05B and also to eliminate possible abuses of the resolution. It would eliminate, for example, two reported practices in particular, both of which are in violation of 1989 Resolution 3-05B and existing Licensed Lay Deacon programs: first, the improper use of Licensed Lay Deacons in congregations when pastors are serving or are readily available to serve and, second, the improper use of Licensed Lay Deacons to fill pastoral vacancies at neighboring congregations where they are not licensed to serve. (Moreover, although this report’s task is to address concerns and controversy over Licensed Lay Deacons, it should be added that the occasional practice of commissioned ministers—DCEs, DCOs, Teachers, commissioned Lay Ministers, etc.—preaching or administering the sacraments, filling vacancies, and so forth, rather than ordained ministers, is also illegitimate.⁵⁸)

The path forward outlined below is clearly meant to replace and make unnecessary in our Synod the practice of licensing lay deacons *for Word and Sacrament ministry* which the Synod began to allow with the adoption of Resolution 3-05B in 1989.⁵⁹ This proposal allows for an adequate transition period to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to avail themselves of this opportunity. However, there will be a *terminus ad quem*. In other words, there will need to

⁵⁵ 2013 Proceedings, page 132.

⁵⁶ In this document the terms “certify” and “examine” are used synonymously.

⁵⁷ The Synod will also do well to recognize those things called for by 1989 Resolution 3-05B it did NOT do, e.g., conferences for leaders involved in training deacons, a clear distinction between locally trained workers and Certified Church Workers – Lay, deacons were considered a temporary solution in special circumstances, and clear bylaws were to be written to cover (and perhaps roster) licensed lay deacons.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that, according to the distinction between the Office of the Public Ministry and auxiliary offices, no commissioned ministry office includes the work of public preaching and sacramental administration, even though every commissioned minister is a minister of the Word.

⁵⁹ This does *not* address or restrict the training or the work of congregational deacons who assist their churches and pastors in other roles such as human care, liturgy, evangelism, assimilation, catechesis and Christian education, and so forth.

be a date after which lay deacons will no longer be licensed by districts for Word and Sacrament ministry. The task force recommends that no new lay deacons be licensed to preach or administer the sacraments after January 1, 2018.

A central theological concern of the task force is the biblical requirement that those who serve in the office of preaching (the public ministry) must be able to teach the whole counsel of God (cf., 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2, 24). This requirement, not mere custom, is the reason our churches have emphasized the most thorough preparation possible for pastors and has established seminaries. It is true that our seminaries provide a challenging residential program that is not always a realistic means of pastoral formation for every potential candidate, but it is also true that our Synod has provided very well-designed alternatives to residential programs that still maintain high standards of theological and personal preparation for the holy ministry that the Synod can endorse as a whole. Therefore our task force is strongly recommending that, moving forward, such programs—namely, SMP, EIIT, CHS, Cross-Cultural Ministry Center—be fully utilized to provide the best possible pastoral formation for individuals who may have in recent years sought to be licensed lay deacons instead.

These recommendations should not be misunderstood. The task force’s work is not in any way intended to demean or discount the commitment or the efforts of current lay deacons. Lay deacons have been humbly serving their Lord and His church, often without remuneration, to the full extent of their abilities and training. Such commitment deserves commendation and honor. Moreover, some deacons have surely attained a level of theological competence equal to seminary-trained pastors, just as surely as some seminary-trained pastors are of limited theological and practical competence. For these reasons, the task force recommends that all those Licensed Deacons who are presently serving as *de facto* pastors of congregations—regularly preaching and administering the sacraments—should be eligible for a colloquy examination to judge their theological understanding, pastoral capabilities, and commitment to Scripture and the Confessions.

Just as the following recommendations are not intended to belittle the commitment of current Licensed Lay Deacons, so also, the task force does not intend to disparage in any way the value of the training programs designed by various districts. Such programs have provided significant benefit not only within given districts, but in the Synod as a whole, as witnessed by the fact that the ten-course competencies are the basis for admission into SMP and several of the courses within the programs meet requirements for residential seminary admission. Whether the training programs were equipping deacons or other certified parish workers or individuals who took classes on a case-by-case basis, they enabled individuals to grow in the Word of God and in an understanding of Lutheran doctrine and practice. For these reasons the task force wishes to retain the training programs and, especially, to emphasize the potential for them to serve in training and equipping laity for evangelism.

Recommendation 1 (Colloquy for Licensed Lay Deacons)

The task force recommends that those licensed lay deacons who are regularly preaching and administering the sacraments be required to apply for a colloquy to examine their ability to teach and overall fitness for ministry. Upon certification by the Colloquy Committee they will be called by the congregations where they have been serving, ordained into the Office of the Public Ministry, and placed on the roster of Specific Ministry Pastors.⁶⁰

What does this mean? How is this done? First, some general thoughts: of course, licensed lay deacons may always (and many do) apply to one of our seminaries to prepare for “alternate route” or Master of Divinity certification. Licensed lay deacons and others unable to leave their present situations are encouraged to prepare for ordination through the “specific ministry pastor” (SMP) program. SMP pastors are called and ordained pastors (*de jure divino*) but always work under the supervision of a “general pastor” in specific circumstances (*de jure humano*).

In those situations where licensed lay deacons have been used in the past, congregations and districts should use the seminary SMP program wherever possible. Recognizing, however, that completing SMP is not always possible or realistic, the TF submits this proposal to colloquize men onto the SMP roster. Since former licensed lay deacons who would be ordained under this recommendation already serve under full supervision,⁶¹ the practical dimensions of

⁶⁰ See LCMS *Handbook 2013*, bylaw 2.13.1.

⁶¹ LCMS *Handbook 2013*, bylaw 2.13.1, page 65.

the service of these men will change very little. They will, however, be fully recognized and rostered as pastors of the LCMS and will serve without the prior restriction on their practice imposed by the LLD programs in which they were not to pronounce the absolution of the repentant.⁶²

Elements of the Colloquy Proposal

A. General Eligibility

This process is for those lay deacons licensed by districts for the administration of Word and Sacrament in congregations of the Synod who are presently functioning regularly in that role. The same standards of character and life necessary for all pastors shall apply also to these applicants. The policy manual of the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry states:

Applicants for colloquy must be male, men of good moral character who have been prepared for the pastoral ministry in some manner **apart from** the various routes leading to ordination existing within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. An applicant must “*be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil*” (1 Timothy 3:2-7; See also 4:1-16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:5-9, etc.). The Colloquy Committee for Pastoral Ministry will, as it considers each applicant, be the final authority for determining eligibility according to these Biblical requirements.⁶³

Not every current licensed lay deacon will be eligible to apply for colloquy. For example, one district uses the term deacon for both men and women who have completed its training program, although that district’s policy does not allow any of its deacons to preach or administer the sacraments with only a single exception (a man who regularly preaches). Regular preaching is the critical aspect for eligibility. One criterion to apply for SMP colloquy should be that the individual regularly serves a congregation as the man who is chiefly responsible to preach and lead worship more than half of all Sundays for the past two or more years.⁶⁴ In addition, the congregation that is served by such a deacon should show that it has been and will likely continue to be unable to secure the services of a rostered pastor.

The task force is confident that most, if not all, of the licensed lay deacons who are serving in a pastoral capacity are teaching and preaching in keeping with Scripture and the Confessions. At the same time, the task force is not recommending or implying that all current licensed lay deacons are automatically qualified for ordination. The possibility that an applicant for SMP colloquy would be completely unable to meet the biblical requirements of being able to teach or above reproach cannot be ruled out. Similarly, it is possible that an applicant would be ineligible for colloquy because of a persistent unwillingness to teach the Word of God in a way that is consistent with the LCMS’s confessional standards.

B. Application Process

1. The applicant shall authorize the district president to request a complete background check through “Protect My Ministry.” The applicant shall tender payment for all “Protect My Ministry” fees with the completed authorization form to the district in which application is being made (fees are established by each district). A copy of this report (minus the Social Security Number) shall be provided as part of the application package.

⁶² 1989 Resolution 3-05B, while allowing licensed deacons to preach and to preside for the Lord’s Supper, also stated: “The administration of the Office of the Keys by means of the personal pronouncement of the absolution as it pertains to church discipline, and possible excommunication, ought not be carried out by those who do not hold the office of public ministry, since this can always be provided for on behalf of the congregation by those who hold the office of public ministry.” 1989 *Proceedings*, 113.

⁶³ LCMS Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry, *Policy Manual*, 4f.

⁶⁴ This does not directly address the question of the status of current LLDs who serve *occasionally* as preachers or in administering the sacraments. Such individuals who wish to serve in the preaching office are urged to consider seminary or, where appropriate, an application to SMP or EIIT.

2. The applicant shall complete the form “Application for Admission to the Colloquy Program for Specific Ministry Pastors” (a modified version of the regular application for colloquy). Specific elements to be included with this application form are:

- a. A detailed description of the applicant’s current service as a lay deacon licensed for Word and Sacrament ministry.
- b. Three sermons, written or recorded.
- c. Demonstration of a thorough knowledge of Luther’s *Small Catechism*.
- d. Documentation that the applicant has passed the seminaries’ basic entry tests in the Old Testament and New Testament or equivalent (also a requirement for entering the seminary SMP program) available on the seminary’s web site.
- e. Completion of an intensive course on the Lutheran approach to Scripture and doctrine offered regionally by the seminary faculties (see item E. below).

3. The district president and applicant (and, if married, his wife) shall sign the application where indicated. The district president needs to indicate his strong support for the applicant to be placed in an SMP call to the congregation he is serving.

4. In addition to the information required to complete the application form, the applicant shall prepare an autobiographical statement including his experience as a licensed lay deacon.

5. The applicant shall arrange for written testimonials, sent directly to the district president, which assess the applicant’s Christian character and life, personality, abilities and previous service (especially with regard to how he has conducted himself as a licensed lay deacon). These testimonials shall come from no fewer than three references who have known and observed the applicant for at least the two years immediately preceding his application. Non-US citizens will be required to provide proof of legal residency in the United States (and a work permit if he will be paid).

6. In addition to the letter of endorsement from the district president, one of these testimonial letters must come from the circuit visitor of the circuit where the applicant has been serving as a licensed lay deacon assessing his current and past service.

7. The congregation served by the licensed lay deacon shall prepare an official letter to be included in the application package indicating their commitment to extend a call to the deacon once he is certified for call and placement. Placement in a call shall be by action of the Board of Assignments (the Council of Presidents) according to its normal procedures.

8. The district president shall arrange for an interview of the applicant with an interview committee within the district. The report of the interview committee is to include a detailed assessment of the applicant’s suitability, and a recommendation whether the applicant should be declared qualified (or not) for a call as a “specific ministry pastor” in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod upon completion of the colloquy process. A written copy of this report shall be included in the application package.

9. The applicant shall arrange for transmission to the district president of official (original) transcripts from all colleges and seminaries he may have attended. The applicant also shall furnish evidence of earned continuing education units (CEUs) and of other non-credit academic and professional experiences completed. The Colloquy Committee reserves the right to seek independent validation of credit.

10. The district president shall attach a cover letter to the application package which declares his strong endorsement and sponsorship of the applicant. The district president’s letter must also give clear and cogent reasons why the colloquy applicant cannot enter the seminary alternate route or the seminary SMP program. The district president shall make sure all requested information has been provided and shall send the completed package with appropriate signatures to the First Vice-President of the Synod as chairman of the Pastoral Colloquy Committee. The applicant (and, if married, his wife) and the sponsoring district president must sign this application form where indicated.

C. Expanded colloquy committee

According to the Bylaws of the Synod, the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry consists of four individuals—a representative of the COP, the two seminary presidents (or their representatives) and the First Vice President. A process for licensed lay deacons to enter the SMP roster by colloquy would require expanded colloquy interview committees. The Task Force proposes the creation of at least two colloquy interview committees (in addition to the regular Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry) specifically tasked with interviewing licensed lay deacon applicants for colloquy to the SMP roster. The membership of these two extra committees would include

- two additional district presidents selected by the Council of Presidents (emeritus district presidents would be eligible to serve), one for each committee;
- two additional seminary professors (normally the head of each seminary’s SMP program to provide continuity; emeritus seminary professors would qualify);
- two parish pastors who have experience with licensed lay deacons, appointed by the President of the Synod.⁶⁵

These additional Colloquy Committees appointed to work with the districts to colloquize licensed lay deacons to the SMP roster could meet in the parts of the country convenient to the deacons applying (e.g. not only St. Louis, MO, but also Portland, OR; Irvine, CA, etc.). Other ordained men should be asked to help with the interviews on an ad hoc basis as needed (as is done now with the regular colloquy interview process). In fact, the Task Force believes this feature of our recommendations will be essential for understanding the context in which the colloquy applicants are working and the specific needs of the congregations these deacons presently serve. In other words, pastors who are more familiar with the cultures of a *specific* area should be involved in the certification process of these men, as they are colloquized to the *Specific* Ministry Pastor roster. The process (including selection of the *ad hoc* assistants for the interviews) would still be generally overseen by the first vice president as Chair of the Colloquy Committee for the Pastoral Ministry, who would need to allocate time adequate to the task. Such oversight would help to assure transparochial examination and approval.

Extensive revisions are needed to the Colloquy Policy Manual to reflect these changes. For instance, the current policy manual allows for application for colloquy by licensed lay deacons, but only after ten year’s service in full responsibility for Word and Sacrament. The proposal outlined in this report *requires* all present licensed lay deacons, if they do not enter a seminary program, to undergo colloquy to be ordained and placed on the roster of pastors as SMP.

D. Colloquy Interview

Each application, once received would be reviewed by one of the special Colloquy Committees and, if acceptable, the applicant would be invited to an interview (these could take place at locations other than St. Louis). The interview committee would have authority to certify immediately; to certify while also requiring additional study after certification; to require further study before certification; to require further study with eventual reconsideration; or to decline to certify. Men who take the vow of ordination pledging faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions must know what they are promising by that vow.

E. Theological Preparation, Continuing Education, and Ongoing Supervision

Because colloquy is based on individual capabilities and needs, some and perhaps many candidates will exhibit a fully acceptable level of theological competence and would then be immediately certified for congregational call, ordination, and rostering. It may also be that many other applicants for SMP colloquy will require further study to enable them to be “able to teach” at a basic level. At its discretion, the Colloquy Committee may require such study either prior to or after certification for ordination. To insure some uniformity of preparation and for the sake of efficiency, however, the Task Force proposes that the seminary faculties jointly prepare an intensive (one week) course for all SMP colloquy candidates,⁶⁶ taught by two professors (one from each seminary), and offered in

⁶⁵ If additional colloquy committees are established then each new committee would be established by this same formula.

⁶⁶ Exceptions to the attendance requirement may be made at the discretion of the chairman of the Colloquy Committee.

geographic locales that make participation simple and viable. The course would be offered in a retreat setting and would focus on the Lutheran approach to Scripture and doctrine. This course may also be an aid to identifying areas of required future study.

Further study beyond such an intensive course should be individually determined and may be engaged under the guidance of a mentor (perhaps utilizing the establishment of a cohort of LLDs preparing for ordination) according to the determination of needs by the Colloquy Committee. *Moreover, after ordination, as SMP pastors, these colloquized men will continue to serve under a mentor for the duration of their ministry.* Gaps in the preparation of candidates may readily be filled by mentored readings based on the application and the interview. As an individualized process, the Colloquy Committee must endeavor to take into account the particular abilities, needs, attitudes and level of knowledge of each individual applicant. However, the mentored study requirements should not be arbitrary and the Task Force proposes that the Colloquy Committee also develop standard reading courses for the applicants to work on as a form of continuing education with their mentors, utilizing basic resources (for example, the entire *Book of Concord*, Koehler's *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Luther's 1535 Lectures on Galatians (AE 26-27), Walther's *Law and Gospel*, *The Lutheran Difference*, in-depth studies of Biblical books, *Christian Dogmatics*, etc.). Sponsoring district presidents should recommend necessary mentors and be kept informed as to the progress made by the applicant, sharing that progress in regular reports to the Synod's Colloquy Committee.

It must be recognized that while SMP colloquy applicants must meet a minimum level of understanding to make with integrity the promises required by the ordination vow, these men most likely will not possess the same level of knowledge as a general pastor. Of course, it is also true that not all seminary-trained pastors are equal in their ability to teach and that competent ministry involves more than intellectual or doctrinal understanding. The Task Force fully expects that the godly men who are serving as deacons today will serve with commitment and competence as they join and enhance the ministerium of the LCMS. The goal of pastoral formation and preparation of every type is always to enable a man to be "able to teach" and to serve faithfully as a Lutheran pastor in the ministry to which he has been called.

F. Limitations on Colloquized SMP Clergy

Only those male deacons who are age 55 or older will ordinarily be admitted to the SMP Colloquy program.⁶⁷ SMP Colloquy Pastors will be either bi-vocational or retired from another profession. Pastors colloquized as SMP will be limited to the place to which they were initially called. If they wish to move, they will need to enter the alternate route at one of our seminaries. Deacons under the age of 55 who are currently serving on a regular basis in preaching and officiating over the sacraments and are not eligible for colloquy will be required to enter SMP or another seminary-provided alternate route.

G. Transition Period

Certainly an adequate transition period will be needed. Congregations, licensed lay deacons and district presidents will need time to digest and implement the details of the plan outlined herein. The Task Force proposes that the Synod adopt the following schedule to enable this to take place:

- 1) No new deacons will be licensed by district presidents for Word and Sacrament ministry after January 1, 2018.
- 2) Lay deacons licensed for Word and Sacrament ministry prior to July 1, 2017 will have until July 1, 2018 to do one of the following:
 - a. Apply to one of the seminaries for an "alternate route" or the Master of Divinity degree.
 - b. Apply to one of the seminaries for the regular SMP program at the seminary.
 - c. Apply to the Colloquy Committee for admission to the SMP roster by colloquy in the manner herein described.
 - d. Allow his license to lapse and discontinue service as a licensed lay deacon by July 1, 2018.

⁶⁷ Any age restriction is somewhat arbitrary. 55 was chosen here with the idea that, if the time required to finish an SMP colloquy is one to two years, the man might expect to have approximately 10-12 years of service. Exceptions regarding age will be approved at the sole discretion of the Colloquy Committee at the recommendation of the sponsoring district president.

3) Deacons licensed for Word and Sacrament ministry between July 1, 2017 and January 1, 2018 will be required to enter the full seminary SMP program or to apply to the “alternate route” or Master of Divinity program.

4) Lay deacons licensed for Word and Sacrament ministry who have applied for colloquy to the SMP roster prior to July 1, 2018 shall continue to serve under their current district licensure until the colloquy process is complete and certification is given by the Colloquy Committee.

The Task Force cautions those who may believe that there should be an immediate cessation of Licensed Lay Deacon programs and the current practice, in some places, of having deacons serving congregations in a pastoral capacity. Concern for practice that is fully consistent with doctrine is always appropriate, but it is also necessary to recognize that teaching and “convincing” require time. It is most important that there be a theological consensus on this matter within our Synod that is scriptural and confessional. Only on that basis can real progress toward common practices be achieved. While this report seeks to lay forth a measured, responsible plan to address concerns about the practice of licensing Lay Deacons based on biblical truth, no synodical plan, proposal, or resolution can take the place of joint study of God’s Word and our confessions with respectful and prayerful discussions that enable us to achieve genuine agreement and appropriate practices (1 Cor 1:10).

H. Certification, Call and Placement

Men certified by the special Colloquy Committee for the “Specific Ministry Pastor” roster will be called by their congregation and placed in that call by the Council of Presidents in the normal manner. Then, to the joy of these men, their congregations, and the wider church, these pastors will be ordained, blessed by the gifts given through the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6), committed by vow to their sacred responsibilities, and assured of the prayers and support of their congregation.

I. General Comments Regarding Further Education and Certification

Individuals colloquized as SMP Pastors are strongly encouraged to attend all circuit and district conferences thus engaging in continuing education. It is also incumbent on the Synod to provide opportunities for continuing education for pastors who are part-time and working other jobs. Distance learning opportunities may be helpful here (e.g., iTunes U at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis). Should the applicant wish, a path to further education and certification through the seminary programs must be provided (SMP and MDiv). Men colloquized to the SMP roster should be able at some point to apply at least to the normal SMP route and, if academically qualified, to the seminary for Alternate Route or MDiv to be a “general pastor.” Continuing education in some form is strongly recommended for all pastors, but should be required of men colloquized to the SMP roster, the content determined by their supervising pastor in consultation with the district president.

Process for the Future

The Task Force recognizes that congregations and missions will continue to experience the challenges we have identified (financial, geographic, and demographic) and the Synod must address the need to provide the ministry of Word and Sacrament in such circumstances. There will always be a need for men to serve part time, under supervision of a “general pastor,” to serve small out of the way places. In such cases, the Seminary SMP programs should be the normal means (beyond July 1, 2018) by which the Church raises up and prepares pastors “on site.”

However, the Synod has always recognized the existence of difficult and exceptional cases. Other solutions may also be explored. Perhaps it may be desirable for the Synod to provide an on-going means for a limited number of individuals to be colloquized to the SMP roster of pastors in difficult cases (once the present pool of licensed lay deacons has been brought through the colloquy process). Certainly, there will be new questions and challenging circumstances will continue to arise. What will a small, remote congregation do at the time of the retirement of a colloquized SMP

pastor who has served them for years? What mechanism will provide for their needs if they remain unable to call a full time pastor or a seminary trained SMP Pastor? Will a locally trained (i.e., trained in the district) leader be able to be colloquized to the SMP roster? Some questions are beyond the purview of this task force, and will need to be answered in the future. For example, the Task Force leaves open such questions as whether there may arise special situations of an extreme nature that require expeditious approaches in order to authorize a man to preach and/or administer the sacraments to a group that cannot be served for the foreseeable future by a called and ordained minister.⁶⁸ However, this principle should always apply: If we ask a man to go and do pastoral work, we should make him a pastor, certified as “able to teach” in a manner appropriate to the situation, of good character (“above reproach”), properly called, pledged to Scripture and the Confessions, set apart to be a pastor, affirmed by the congregation’s call and the ordination of the wider church, and thus making clear to him and to his people what he is to be and do. That is, he should in some public, mutually agreeable manner, be examined for fitness, called by a congregation, and ordained to the Office of the Ministry.

Recommendation 2 (Further Utilization of SMP Program with Financial Support)

The TF recommends that the Synod’s SMP program be fully utilized since it has been developed as an approach to theological education especially for those settings where finances and/or geography are obstacles to preparation. Synod must ensure that financial constraints do not prevent any eligible candidate from participating in the SMP.

Recommendation 3 (Further utilization of Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology [EIIT], Center for Hispanic Studies [CHS], and Cross-Cultural Institute)

The TF recommends that the Synod’s EIIT, CHS, and Cross-Cultural Institute be fully utilized to supply training for pastors in cross-cultural settings since they have been developed to provide a means for theological education especially for those from various cultures and backgrounds. Synod must ensure that financial constraints do not prevent any eligible candidate from participating in these programs.

The second and third recommendations are strong endorsements of current Synodical programs designed to address the need for pastoral training in atypical circumstances. SMP is intended to address such problems as education for second career (and especially older) ministry candidates, distance education for individuals who already play a critical role in a congregation’s ministry, and other circumstances that prevent or inhibit resident seminary education. The various approaches to pastoral training referred to in the third recommendation are LCMS attempts to address the special needs and circumstances of mission and church planting in an increasingly diverse America. The Church needs each one of these means to raise up pastors for the future.

The Task Force realizes that the use of SMP and the Synod’s programs for training pastors from other ethnic backgrounds have sometimes presented financial obstacles that prevent utilization in the circumstances for which they were created. Theological education is costly, whether residential or via distance education. The second and third recommendations indicate the need for the LCMS to address financial challenges. Inherent in these recommendations are two types of financial challenge.

First is the cost of the recommended intensive course in a retreat setting proposed above in item E. under Recommendation 1. As noted, colloquy candidates may benefit from a formative course taught by seminary professors and such intensive courses around the country will involve some expense. The Task Force proposes that Synod’s Pastoral Education Department bear *at least* 50% of the cost for these courses and the remaining 50% be funded by a combination of the resources of district, congregation, and individual candidates.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Such questions might involve such circumstances as an immigrant group that has already gathered, has “a preacher,” and wishes to be a ministry of the LCMS or an isolated community that continues to go unserved by a rostered pastor despite the best efforts of the congregation, District and Synod.

⁶⁹ Any exception to the funding model would be at the discretion of the Synod’s Pastoral Education Department. Synodical financial resources adequate to provide such assistance are available.

Further mentored courses and readings that are required by the Colloquy Committee would also involve expenses for materials and an honorarium for the mentor. Such costs should be standardized and funded according to the same breakdown as the intensive course.

Second, going forward, it should be anticipated that there will continue to be candidates for the ministry for whom SMP or other specialized non-residential training approaches are needed but for whom the costs of the programs make them financially unfeasible or impossible. In such instances there will be cases in which financial assistance is required. In such cases the district president should be responsible to determine the level of need and request assistance from the Synod's Pastoral Education Department.⁷⁰

Meeting Needs Addressed by Licensed Lay Deacons Through Other Means

The Synod has utilized its clergy and technology in various ways to meet some of the challenges we have identified. Among these are the establishment of multi-point parishes and wider use of technological innovation.

Recommendation 4 (Multi-point Ministries)

The Task Force recommends that the Districts of the Synod vigorously encourage and facilitate the establishment of multi-point parishes where that is geographically and financially feasible and when individual congregations can no longer provide for a pastor.

Several districts that have numerous congregations facing the problems of distance and economics have promoted multi-point parishes. That is, of course, an old idea—one that is very familiar to the Synod from its past and has been and continues to be used both in the U.S. and in world Lutheranism. Indeed, multi-point ministry is a means of addressing pastoral needs that is being utilized with greater frequency today than a generation ago in the LCMS. Some districts have been intent to guide small congregations to form multi-point ministries. In other settings, larger congregations are establishing the functional equivalent of multi-point parishes by means of “satellite” churches or churches with more than one campus/facility. In still other settings, there are examples for a group of individual congregations served by a team of two pastors who are jointly called to serve the entire group of churches. While some form or another of multi-point ministry may not always be feasible, it is certainly one way that congregations may be served on an ongoing basis by a pastor. A frequent obstacle is the understandable reluctance of a congregation that enjoyed the full-time attention of its own individual pastor to accept that given present realities such a new approach—a multipoint arrangement with another congregation—is now the best means of providing pastoral service. Given the tendency for geographically isolated and financially limited congregations to be small, the personal pastoral needs of two or more congregations may be no greater or even less than those of a larger congregation that is able to support an individual pastor on its own.

Recommendation 5 (Utilization of current technology and past approaches)

In some cases, despite the best efforts of congregations, a pastor will be unavailable. In various ways congregations of the Synod currently make use of technology to aid in ministry. In such instances technological resources (e.g., live-streaming a sermon or service) may be a helpful aid, coupled with lay-led readings and prayers. Other temporary aids may be rescheduling service times to allow an area pastor to serve, lay men reading sermons prepared for the congregation by a pastor, or laity leading services of readings, prayers, and praise.

Corollaries to multi-point ministry may also expand an individual pastor's ministerial “reach.” Another alternative given the growing possibilities of technology is to employ live-streaming, videos of sermons prepared earlier, or other resources to provide access to preaching. Several LCMS districts incorporate the use of live-streaming videos

⁷⁰ Such assistance from Synod's Pastoral Education Department would not generally exceed 50% of the need.

into multi-point ministries, which is particularly beneficial when the two (or more) congregations in a multi-point arrangement are long distances apart and meet at the same time. A single pastor can serve in a revolving way week-by-week in terms of his physical presence and his ability to offer the Sacrament of the Altar, while preaching in each congregation each week.

Emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances will occur that will make it impossible for a pastor to serve his congregation on a given Sunday. The time-honored approach to such occasions has been to designate a man (typically an elder or perhaps another called auxiliary minister) to conduct Matins or another service from the hymnal so that the congregation has opportunity to hear the Word of God, to pray together, and to sing praise (1 Tim 4:4-5). A proactive approach to such occasional needs is important. On most occasions a sermon can be prepared by the pastor to be read in the service. Of course, another way to address pastoral absence is for congregations to re-schedule their service times, if that allows a neighboring pastor to be available.

In all such cases where it is simply impossible for a pastor to preach or conduct worship, care should be taken so that an exceptional circumstance does not create confusion or become a precedent for errant practices. Though “emergency knows no law,”⁷¹ it should not be an excuse for disorder. Thus, even in such difficult circumstances, every attempt should be made to address the problem in an orderly way that is consonant with Scripture and does not cause offense or misunderstanding. For example, while an emergency pastoral absence may necessitate having a layman lead a service of the Word and read a sermon prepared by the pastor, our congregations should heed the Synod’s counsel for women not to exercise liturgical leadership.⁷² Moreover, it would be good to distinguish between an emergency and ongoing challenges. A pastor’s illness and unavoidable absence on a given Sunday presents an emergency need. But, when there will be no pastor for the foreseeable future, a thoughtfully considered, theologically orthodox answer, rather than “emergency” remedies, is needed.

Recommendation 6 (Re-engaging inactive pastors)

The task force recommends that the Synod and Districts recruit and encourage eligible inactive status pastors (retirees as well as others eligible for calls) to be available for service in congregations and missions of the Synod on a full or part-time basis or bi-vocationally, particularly in those congregations facing financial, geographic, and demographic challenges.

In terms of the ratio of rostered LCMS pastors to its laity, it might initially appear to be easy to provide rostered pastors for all Synod congregations. That assumption, however, founders on the fact that many rostered pastors are on inactive status due to retirement or for other reasons that make it impractical for them to be candidates for calls. Other pastors are inactive because they are available to serve in only a particular locale. Also, LCMS pastors are not evenly located around the country, so that some areas have far more pastors than there are positions of service while other regions have significantly fewer pastors available for supply preaching or who are willing to consider a call to congregations in their area (this immobility may be due to a host of reasons).

Despite these obstacles, many inactive pastors do wish to serve and are willing to move to new places to do so. Given the increasing longevity of Americans, including called church workers, many retirees may also need to supplement their income after retirement. Service to small churches may be one way to do that. A more concerted effort to utilize our inactive pastors is in order. Many retired pastors retain the desire to serve insofar as they are able. A widespread general plea to retirees to consider the needs facing our church in the future and the potential for them to help address some of those needs is in order.

71 Luther, “Sermon on John 3,” AE 22:338. Luther is never reckless with this dictum, however. Rather, he protested vigorously against those who accused him of abolishing the ministry or confusing it with the priesthood of believers. “You also lie that I have made all laymen bishops, priests, and spiritual in such a way that they may exercise the office without a call. But, as godly as you are, you conceal the fact that I added that no one should undertake this office without a call unless it be an extreme emergency.” “Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig—Including Some Thoughts Concerning His Companion, the Fool Murner,” AE 32:174.

72 See 1989 Res 3-10 and also *CTCR Review of 2005 Task Force Guidelines for the Service of Women in Congregational Offices* (2014), at lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3286.

Training and Engaging Laity in the Work of Evangelism

As noted earlier, the task force is aware of the many significant ways that district-sponsored lay training programs have equipped and motivated individuals to serve the church. Lay Deacon training is most notable among the reasons such schools were established, but their benefits go far beyond training for licensed lay deacons.

Recommendation 7 (Retention and Affirmation of District Lay Training Programs)

District lay training programs are to be commended with thanksgiving for the many willing lay servants who seek further theological education and desire to serve in various capacities in their congregations. The task force recommends that a major emphasis in lay training programs be placed on the role of evangelist and the task of outreach in the increasingly diverse and challenging world of the U.S.

While specific programs designed to license laymen to preach and administer the sacraments will end, the need to offer biblical and theological training for laity will continue. Individuals are involved in current district training programs often simply for personal edification. Others are preparing for SMP admission. Still others intend to provide service in specific areas of congregational life such as Christian education, visitation, nursing home ministries, children and family ministries, evangelism, administration and so forth. Such training programs are needed and are to be encouraged.

Recommendations 1-3 indicate that training for the purpose of licensing lay deacons, *per se*, will no longer continue. These recommendations should not be interpreted as criticisms of efforts to increase theological training for laity, however. Lay leadership training is important for the future health of our Synod. First of all, pastors are always called to teach, to instruct and catechize their members in the Word of God. The true doctrine (teaching) of Christ must be *taught*, as Paul instructed Timothy: “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. . . . Command and teach these things. . . . Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. . . . Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:6, 11, 13, 16).

The purpose of Synod and its districts is to support congregations and pastors in their God-given work. To this end, many districts have implemented lay leadership training efforts on a district level. This is beneficial for the church and should be encouraged. District lay training programs provide a supplement to the pastor’s instruction so that people hear the Word of God from another source. Districts, for instance, often bring together pastors and elders for specific training, teaching, conversation and instruction in the role of elders in our congregations. Lay leadership training for congregational chairmen, secretaries and treasurers should be a blessing to all. The varied resources of a group of congregations can be put to service for all in the efforts to help mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, etc., in their vocations. Doing this through the districts in an organized fashion can be a great blessing to both congregation and pastor.

Various districts also prepare lay people to serve in roles that assist the pastor in a variety of ways, particularly in evangelistic (witness) and mercy (diaconal) work. These efforts sponsored by districts are an important means of equipping the priesthood of the baptized for their service in Christ’s name and are to be encouraged wherever possible.

Such courses of study on the district level can provide a foundation or an impetus for some to go on to the even more in-depth study required of men entering an SMP program or the usual seminary routes to the pastoral office. District study courses often are and can continue to be the first steps to prepare men to enter an SMP program.

All this is beneficial and should be encouraged wherever districts have the resources for it. Synod has said as much in various resolutions over the years. Most notably, 2004 Resolution 5-09 affirmed “the role of the laity in expanding the mission of the church and recognize[d] the need further to equip laypersons for mission work.”⁷³ More recently,

⁷³ 2004 Convention Proceedings, 143. It should be noted, however, that the Synod did not truly follow through on the last resolved of the resolution in question: “Resolved, That for the sake of good order, the Council of Presidents of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the new Board for Pastoral Education with the guidance of the seminary faculties develop a standardized core curriculum for District lay-training programs and coordinate a national listing of participants.”

the Synod in 2013 resolved that “every pastor and congregation be encouraged to participate in the study of God’s Word and of the Lutheran Confessions and Lutheran Apologetics in defense of their Christian faith.”⁷⁴ The same 2013 Convention also directed “the Office of National Mission to work aggressively to increase awareness of its services and resources for the Synod’s congregations, institutions, schools, and professional church workers for training and equipping all God’s people, members, and families for joyful evangelization, sharing with confidence and courage their hope in Christ—namely, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in His name.”⁷⁵

However, the focus of this training, if it is truly to serve the mission of the church to bring the Gospel to lost people, ought not be on training lay people to do pastoral work (as though that were the only “real” ministry). Rather, a more important *focus should be in helping all the baptized to evangelize—witnessing to Christ and sharing the Christian faith within their vocation.*⁷⁶ Though we charge pastors in the rite of ordination to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5), the best evangelists are often lay people gifted and hopefully trained to tell the good news of Jesus wherever their vocations take them. Evangelists or witnesses⁷⁷ within all walks of life are essential for reaching the lost and for the church to grow. Pastors, of course, need to be out in the community making connections with people, always ready to apply God’s Word of Law and Gospel. Lay evangelists, however, are able to go far more places to bring the Word of Jesus to far more people.

District lay leadership training efforts are a great blessing when they help people, especially lay leaders in congregations, understand the true mission of the church and grow as evangelists always “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). We do not need to make lay people think they are doing “real” ministry only when they are doing things the pastor does, but we do need lay evangelists, lay leaders, lay men and women who can teach others the Word of God within their vocation, men and women who serve in appropriate leadership positions in the congregation, but most importantly, baptized people of God who speak of the good news of Jesus at every opportunity God gives them in their vocation. This is where district programs can be most helpful in the broader mission of the church. Equipping the baptized people of God to fulfill their vocation as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9) is an essential need that district lay training programs can help to address.

Therefore, while training for the specific role of “licensed lay deacon” will no longer continue, the Task Force instead recommends that a major emphasis in lay training programs be placed on the role of evangelist and the task of outreach in the increasingly diverse and challenging world of the U.S. Such programs need to be highlighted, strengthened and encouraged. The Task Force is not recommending that, at least at this point, a synodically recognized “office of evangelist” be established. Rather, this recommendation intends to emphasize the evangelistic or witnessing task within the everyday vocations of all LCMS laity (see also Recommendation 8).⁷⁸

Recommendation 8 (Identification and Training of Laity for the Role of Evangelist)

In conjunction with recommendation 7, the task force recommends that congregations and districts be encouraged to identify individuals for special training in and attention to evangelism. As individuals are identified, we encourage congregations and districts to facilitate their training both through existing synodical efforts and programs and in special, intensive training through district lay programs.

This report has noted that three reasons have been advanced since the mid-1980’s for licensed lay deacons to serve in the LCMS. First, there is the shortage of ordained pastors available to serve in certain locales. Second, is the reality that

⁷⁴ 2013 Convention Proceedings, Resolution 1-09A, 103

⁷⁵ 2013 Convention Proceedings, Resolution 1-05A, 101.

⁷⁶ The Synod’s Witness and Outreach Ministry has developed, “A Simple Way,” a tool for training laity in sharing their faith. It would be an effective center-piece for training in evangelism or witnessing in District programs or lay training schools.

⁷⁷ In this report we are using the term “evangelize” and its cognates for every form of sharing the faith with others. The terms are not used in contradistinction from words such as “witness” or “outreach.”

⁷⁸ It should be noted that the Synod does have a recognized auxiliary office, Director of Christian Outreach (DCO), that might be understood as akin to an office of evangelist. Moreover, the Task Force recognizes that it may, at some point, be advisable to establish a rostered synodical office of “evangelist” *de iure humano*. That would, of course, involve careful consideration of both theological and practical matters, such as the current DCO program. It should not, however, impact the vital work of witnessing or evangelism within one’s everyday vocations.

some congregations, particularly those in rural and urban areas are unable to financially support a full-time pastor and have difficulty even finding temporary supply pastors. And third, few LCMS pastors are equipped for mission outreach and church planting in urban settings as well as among various ethnic, racial and immigrant groups where there is also limited financial resources to support a full-time ordained pastor.

This portion of the report is focused on this third reason for employing the services of licensed lay deacons and offers both an observation and recommendation for the use of the New Testament *role* of evangelists in the twenty-first century. There are growing and significant opportunities in the United States for outreach by Christians with the saving actions Jesus proclaimed in word and deed.

On May 12, 2015, the Pew Research Center posted its new Religious Landscape Study, the first complete revision since an earlier 2007 study.⁷⁹ The study draws on a massive sample size of more than 35,000 Americans to offer a detailed look at the current religious composition of U.S. adults. The following are five key findings from that study, depicting the state of the current mission field in the United States.

1. In 2007, 78.4% of U.S. adults identified with Christian groups, such as Protestants, Catholics, and others⁸⁰; seven years later, that percentage has fallen to 70.6%. Accounting for overall population growth in that period, that means there are roughly 173 million Christian adults in the U.S. today, down from about 178 million in 2007.
2. Within Christianity, the biggest declines have been in the mainline Protestant tradition and among Catholics. Mainline Protestants represented 14.7% of U.S. adults in 2014, down from 18.1% in 2007, while the Catholic share of the population fell to 20.8% from 23.9% over the same period. By comparison, evangelical Protestants have been more stable, declining only about 1 percentage point between 2007 and 2014 (from 26.3% to 25.4%).
3. The decline of Christians in the U.S. has corresponded with the continued rise in the share of Americans with no religious affiliation (religious “nones”). People who self-identify as atheists or agnostics (about 7% of all U.S. adults), as well as those who say their religion is “nothing in particular,” now account for a combined 22.8% of U.S. adults – up from 16.1% in 2007. The growth of the “nones” has been powered in part by religious switching. Nearly one-in-five U.S. adults (18%) were raised as Christians or members of some other religion, but now say they have no religious affiliation.
4. There are clear differences between certain demographic groups when it comes to religious affiliation. For example, younger adults are far more likely than older Americans to identify as religious “nones,” men are more likely than women to be religiously unaffiliated, and whites are more likely than blacks or Hispanics to identify as “non-religious.” But despite these differences, the major trends seen in American religion since 2007– the decline of Christians and rise of the “nones” – have occurred in some form across many demographic groups, including men and women, older and younger Americans, people with different levels of education, and different races and ethnicities.
5. The share of Americans who identify with non-Christian faiths, such as Islam and Hinduism, has grown modestly in recent years, from 4.7% in 2007 to 5.9% in 2014. Muslims now account for 0.9% of the U.S. adult population (up from 0.4% in the 2007 Landscape Study), while Hindus make up 0.7% of U.S. adults (up from 0.4% in 2007).

Indeed, this is an era ripe for Christians to be always prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks [them] for a reason for the hope that is in [them]; yet to do so with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15). The pastors who serve LCMS congregations are well-trained to preach, teach, properly administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as well as offer sound biblical pastoral care. They typically find themselves occupied with the demands of caring and providing pastoral leadership for a congregation of active and inactive church members. They are also committed to outreach to the lost with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ into the mission fields in which they and their church members live. But the demand for outreach activity frequently outpaces the supply of energy and time that most pastors possess. There is truly a need for those who can serve in the fertile mission fields of the United States.

⁷⁹ The survey was conducted between June 4 and September 30, 2014. It is available online in an interactive version: Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, *America’s Changing Religious Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow* (May 12, 2015), pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/. For the printable pdf version, see pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-05-08-full-report.pdf.

⁸⁰ The inclusion by Pew Research of groups that have split off from classical Christian teaching and openly deny trinitarian dogma, such as Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, reflects the approach of the Pew Study and not the Task Force understanding of Christianity.

Therefore, Task Force 4-06A not only considered the theology of the public ministry and its practice in the LCMS, but also examined the possibilities for expanding mission reach by considering the role of evangelists (or witnesses) in the New Testament with an eye to their role in the twenty-first century.

The New Testament of God's Word references "evangelists" three times. In Acts 21:8 we learn of Philip the "evangelist." "On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him." He is the same Philip who left Jerusalem in haste earlier due to the persecution of Christians described in Acts 8:4-6 and preached Christ in Samaria.

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.

Indeed, Philip also goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza in Acts 8:26-40 at the direction of an angel of the Lord to encounter the Ethiopian eunuch and interpret the prophecy of Isaiah so that the Holy Spirit leads the Ethiopian to ask for Christian Baptism.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul was inspired by the Spirit to call upon Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim 4:5).

It is also Paul the Apostle who in his letter to the Ephesians 4:11 described the Lord's gifts to His Church, including evangelists. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...."

It has been observed that the term "evangelist" has circulated in the Church's vocabulary for nearly 2000 years. That acquaintance, as is often the case, has made the word popular but left it without precise definition.⁸¹ The question has been asked, "Is 'evangelist' an office or a gift in the New Testament?" While the biblical record may not detail a specific office of evangelist, it does describe the work of an evangelist and even encourages it.

This being said, it is the purpose of this section of the Task Force's report to consider the need for the development of the role of "evangelists" in the LCMS. There is a great opportunity for evangelists and evangelism by congregational members who can be trained to team with the ordained and commissioned church workers of LCMS for intentional and targeted outreach among specific people groups with the saving and powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even as Solomon was inspired to observe that "there is nothing new under the sun," (Ecclesiastes 1:9) the recognition of such opportunities is not new in the LCMS. The first president of the LCMS, Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther preached a sermon in 1842, in which he proclaimed,

Thus, my dear ones, you see: the office of Preacher or Caretaker of souls has not been instituted so that no one else is responsible for teaching or the care of souls. No, the whole congregation is to be a holy people, a royal priesthood. Each Christian should bear the needs of the soul of his neighbor in his heart and assist in the advance of the salvific Gospel (*in the lives*) of men so that the kingdom of Satan in the world is destroyed and the Kingdom of God expanded. Oh, how differently things would look; how much greater and more wonderful would be the blessing of the Word of God, if each Christian recognized his holy calling and administered his royal priesthood. With that in mind the Apostle cries to the Corinthians, "*Strive to love. Be zealous for the spiritual gifts, but primarily for the gift of prophesying Christ's message of salvation.*" [*The German imperative is plural, denoting all of the people.*]⁸²

Walther's preaching is not surprising in light of the biblical reality that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was spread by Apostles (Acts 6) as well as by God's people of various vocations due to the persecution of the Jerusalem Christians (Acts 8). Michael Green noted in his *Evangelism in the Early Church*:

One of the most striking features in evangelism in the early days was the people who engaged in it. Communicating the faith was not regarded as the preserve of the very zealous or of the officially designated evangelist. Evangelism was the prerogative and the duty of every church member. We have seen apostles and wandering prophets, nobles and paupers, intellectuals and fishermen all taking part enthusiastically in this the primary task committed by Christ

81 Tom Lyon, "The Office of Evangelist in the New Testament," *WRS Journal*, Vol. 2, (August 1995), 18-20.

82 C. F. W. Walther, "Holy Desire and Duty of All Christians to Lead Souls to Christ." This sermon, preached in 1842, was published in Walther's sermon collection, *Gnadenjahr. Predigten über die Evangelien des Kirchenjahrs* (Saint Louis. Concordia, 1891) translated by Bruce Cameron for *Missio Apostolica*, May 1998 (vol 6, no. 1), p. 10.

to his Church. The ordinary people of the Church saw it as their job: Christianity was supremely a lay movement, spread by informal missionaries. The clergy of the Church saw it as their responsibility, too: bishops and presbyters, together with doctors of the Church like Origen and Clement, and philosophers like Justin and Tatian, saw the propagation of the gospel as their prime concern.⁸³

Green further related this observation from the early church through its first, second and third centuries to this twenty-first century with a challenge:

Unless there is a transformation of contemporary church life so that once again the task of evangelism is something which is seen as incumbent on every baptized Christian, and is backed up by a quality of living which outshines the best that unbelief can muster, we are unlikely to make much headway through techniques of evangelism. People will not believe that Christians have good news to share until they find that bishops and bakers, university professors and housewives, bus drivers and street corner preachers are all alike keen to pass it on, however different their methods may be. And they will continue to believe that the Church is an introverted society composed of 'respectable' people and bent on its own preservation until they see in church groupings and individual Christians the caring, the joy, the fellowship, the self-sacrifice and the openness which marked the early Church at its best.⁸⁴

As the LCMS once again examines the various ways that people serve in ministry, it is a prime opportunity to consider the engagement of the baptized, ordained and commissioned of the LCMS in God's mission of bringing salvation to the world through Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that Lutheran church bodies in East Africa, such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Sudan, each utilize evangelists to advance the mission of spreading the Spirit-powered truth of the Gospel to awaken the hearts of people to rely on Christ and Christ alone for forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. It is not unusual for such unpaid evangelists to receive training to teach the basic biblical tenets of the Christian faith and demonstrate the gifts of the Spirit for Christian living and witness. It is also not uncommon for them to be assigned by pastors to specific communities for the spreading of the Gospel so that new congregations can be gathered and eventually call their own pastor.

The Task Force observes that such a focus on evangelism could be of great value for LCMS congregations and pastors in their efforts to advance the Gospel in the current United States mission field. The Task Force recommends that men and women who are members of LCMS congregations be identified by their congregations and pastors to be trained. This training can include how to engage in Christian witness conversations within the vocations to which God has called them. It can also include teaching the Christian faith as well as assisting a gathering group to become a potential church start under the supervision of the pastor. Such individuals would not preach in formal worship settings.⁸⁵ However, they would converse, teach, lead Bible studies, and offer meditations prepared from Scriptures with pastoral supervision and organize a group for Christian mission to start a church.

The Task Force recommends that the LCMS explore in depth how other Lutheran church bodies are selecting, training and supervising such voluntary evangelism servants. The Task Force further recommends that the training be created so that there are LCMS standards established for all LCMS districts. This could possibly be accomplished through the LCMS Office of National Mission working with the Concordia University System. Basic training in outreach conversations, outreach teaching and organizing could be delivered on-line through the various Concordias with the individual district lay leadership programs providing specific outreach training for specific people groups and cultures in their particular mission fields. Lutheran Hour Ministries outreach resources could also become very useful.

It is suggested that those who train be examined and approved by their congregation and its pastor and placed into accountability to the congregation and its pastor for assignment to specific mission fields and people groups in their local area. It is also suggested that they be known as evangelist assistants to the pastor and be publicly recognized as such in their congregations. Continuing education and ongoing congregational approval would need to be developed.

⁸³ Michael Greene, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 380-381.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Of course, the word "preach" can be used in different ways. Anyone speaking the Gospel to others may be said to be preaching in a sense for they are proclaiming Christ and preaching and proclaiming may be used synonymously. However, the word "preach" in common usage refers not to individuals sharing the faith individually or even in a small group discussion or study session, but to the proclamation that takes place in a gathering of the church for worship. In common usage then, the evangelistic work the task force is envisioning is not "preaching" and is a form of sharing the Gospel for both clergy and laity, male and female, young and old.

Conclusion

The LCMS has for too long experienced conflict and polarization over the matter of AC XIV and the service of laymen in the office of preaching. The Holy Spirit's appeal through the inspired apostle Paul is His plea also to us: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10).

Can we not agree that our Confessions remind us that the Office of the Ministry and the Royal Priesthood stand together in a complementary relationship, but also not one without distinction? The Lord of the church has given ministers to His church so that the church may be served faithfully and competently. Those who preach and administer Christ's gifts must be examined in their personal life and in their ability to teach rightly. They are not to be imposed on congregations, but freely chosen by the flock that will be served by them. Yet, because the church is not to be a sect living in willing isolation, its pastors and their commitment to the truth are also affirmed by the wider church, represented by fellow pastors and those who have oversight of their teaching and life. Examination by the church's teachers, local call, ordination/installation—these aspects of the holy ministry deserve our uniform agreement, for by such means Christ appoints His ministers, even though the "how" of pastoral training and preparation may exhibit significant variety.

The Synod needs to affirm clearly that all the men who are given the task of the public administration of Word and Sacrament are actually placed in the office of pastor. Certification (examination) as "able to teach," call, and ordination are of one piece and serve to communicate clearly to the man and to the congregation what he is to be and to do as pastor. SMP Pastors are fully pastors (*de jure divino*) but under supervision with limitations (*de jure humano*). We believe the approach outlined regarding lay deacons and the recommendation to give concerted attention to training laity as evangelists will provide for greater unity and a more common approach in our beloved Synod.

These are high standards—and necessarily so. Yet, they also present practical problems in some cases. Competent, committed laborers are worthy of their hire, but what of congregations too poor or small to afford to provide the necessary means required? What of congregations that can find no one to heed their call to "Come over... and help us?" (Acts 16:9) because they are in areas of the country or parts of cities that are unattractive or threatening? What of congregations or missions that need a pastor who can serve in a specific language and cultural milieu? The Synod needs to respond to the needs of congregations in specialized circumstances in a manner consonant with our confession, but it must respond nonetheless. Specialized training is required not only now, but will be needed even more in the future. Pastors must be equipped for and committed to serve among the poor, in challenging urban and rural settings, and cross-culturally, both in our residential programs and by other means. Commitment and, yes, sacrifice, are required of congregations, individual pastors, district and Synod representatives and officials. Faithfulness to Christ's missionary call requires concerted attention to this need with Synod, its schools, and its districts working together in unity to address it.

At the same time, for the Synod to be faithful to the mission opportunities before us, we dare not suppose that our pastors will be the sole solution. Rather, the Gospel call to an unconverted America is a task that, in many ways, has been and always will be accomplished first through the laity—as royal priests serving in their daily vocations at home, at work, and in society. By faithful lives mothers and fathers bring their children to Baptism and nurture them at home. Living faithfully at work, a light shines that brings glory to God. In their daily witness, men and women speak of the reason for the faith, hope, and love that are present in their lives. By their willing service as members of the Body of Christ in a local congregation and its work, lay people lead and strengthen their fellowship in countless ways. As the church in Africa and China and many other places shows so well, royal priests can be powerful evangelists with the potential to study God's Word and pray together with family and friends and acquaintances, and—according to the good and gracious will of the Holy Spirit—eventually to gather together saints who become a congregation, served and strengthened by a called and ordained pastor.

This is a worthy vision for our Synod, one which we can and should share. It is a vision which can be the basis for unity and concord, not division or distrust.

Appendix A

2014 LCMS District Report on Licensed Lay Deacons

DISTRICT	Rpt Date	Autonomous regular W/S	Autonomous regular W	Supervised regular W/S	Supervised regular W	Supervised P/T W/S	Supervised P/T W	Supervised reg non W/S	Supervised P/T non W/S	Totals by District	X-cult	Surv.	REGION
Atlantic	14-Mar	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	85	88	15	1	E-SE
California-Nevada-Hawaii	15-Apr	1	0	12	0	4	1	0	0	18	5	10	W-SW
Central Illinois	21-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Central
Eastern	17-Mar	0	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	8	4	7	E-SE
English	8-Apr	7	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	13	3	10	English
Florida-Georgia	12-Mar	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	4	0	1	E-SE
Indiana	15-Apr	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	Central
Iowa East	16-Apr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Great Lakes
Iowa West	13-Mar	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	5	2	0	Great Plains
Kansas	26-Mar	0	0	5	0	13	23	10	11	62	3	5	Central
Michigan	27-Mar	2	0	8	0	33	0	0	4	47	2	2	Great Lakes
Mid-South	16-Apr	0	0	10	3	6	9	2	2	32	1	9	Central
Minnesota North	12-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Great Plains
Minnesota South	23-Apr	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	3	2	Great Plains
Missouri	12-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	3	Central
Montana	12-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Great Plains
Nebraska	12-Mar	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	6	1	0	Great Plains
New England	18-Mar	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	E-SE
New Jersey	14-Mar	0	0	1	0	0	1	4	0	6	0	1	E-SE
North Dakota	13-Mar	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	Great Plains
North Wisconsin	15-Apr	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	2	Great Lakes
Northern Illinois	14-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	Great Lakes
Northwest	17-Mar	0	0	19	0	52	1	1	0	73	4	25	W-SW
Ohio	21-Apr	0	0	2	1	4	0	0	0	7	1	2	E-SE
Oklahoma	16-Apr	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	Central
Pacific Southwest	12-Mar	8	0	12	1	0	0	10	56	87	10	10	W-SW
Rocky Mountain	16-Apr	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3	0	1	W-SW
SELC	13-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	SELC
South Dakota	12-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Great Plains
South Wisconsin	15-Apr	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	Great Lakes
Southeastern	24-Apr	4	4	3	3	3	3	0	0	20	0	3	E-SE
Southern	17-Apr	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	6	4	6	E-SE
Southern Illinois	14-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Central
Texas	10-Apr	12	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	18	6	12	W-SW
Wyoming	12-Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Great Plains
Totals for LLD activities		37	18	83	11	129	53	31	163	525	67	115	

Notes:

- Missouri District--LLDs serve not only as supervised P/T providers of W/S ministry, but also as P/T providers of other diaconal tasks. The survey does not distinguish between those who serve in such ways, which may therefore have produced some double counting, although that is uncertain.
- Nebraska District--One case under "Supervised reg non W/S" is not a licensed deacon.
- South Wisconsin District--One of the deacons serves a deaf ministry.

Notes re Appendix A:

1. The preceding chart shows the results of a March 2014 survey of District Licensed Lay Deacons conducted by the Task Force. The survey was designed to mirror previous surveys, particularly a 2009 survey but also one in 2012. It was sent to district presidents who responded either directly or through a staff member by the date indicated in the second column.
2. The survey's goal of mirroring previous surveys is evident in the third to tenth columns, which exactly mirrored those surveys by categorizing the sort of work conducted by LLDs in terms of "autonomous" or "supervised," "regular" or "part-time" (P/T), and "Word and Sacrament" (W/S) or "Word" (W) only or neither Word nor Sacrament (non W/S). So,
 - a. The third column ("Autonomous Regular W/S") describes LLDs who regularly serve, with minimal supervision (autonomous) and provide *both* preaching and the administration of the sacraments (W/S).
 - b. The fourth column ("Autonomous Regular W") describes LLDs who *regularly* serve, with minimal supervision (autonomous), but provide *only* preaching (W) and not the administration of the sacraments.
 - c. The fifth column ("Supervised Regular W/S") describes LLDs who *regularly* serve, under supervision, and provide *both* preaching and the administration of the sacraments (W/S).
 - d. The sixth column ("Supervised Regular W") describes LLDs who *regularly* serve, under supervision, but provide *only* preaching and not the administration of the sacraments.
 - e. The seventh column ("Supervised P/T W/S") describes LLDs who *occasionally* serve (P/T), under supervision, and, when they do, provide *both* preaching and the administration of the sacraments.
 - f. The eighth column ("Supervised P/T W") describes LLDs who *occasionally* serve (P/T), under supervision, but, when they do, provide *only* preaching and not the administration of the sacraments.
 - g. The ninth column ("Supervised reg. non W/S") describes LLDs who *regularly* (reg.) serve, under supervision, but neither preach nor administer the sacraments—thus, while they are categorized by the District as a Licensed Lay Deacon, they are not, in fact, serving as a *licensed* preacher or in sacramental administration.
 - h. The tenth column ("Supervised P/T non W/S") describes LLDs who *occasionally* (P/T) serve, under supervision, but neither preach nor administer the sacraments—thus, while they too are categorized by the District as a Licensed Lay Deacon, they are not, in fact, serving as a *licensed* preacher or in sacramental administration.
3. A follow-up survey of district presidents in May 2014 asked two additional questions.
 - a. The first question asked how many of the congregations or ministries served by a LLD were cross-cultural in their main focus or purpose (headed "X-cult" for cross-cultural).
 - b. The second question asked the district president's opinion on how many congregations currently served by a LLD would be unable to survive without the services of the LLD. The results of this question are indicated in the thirteenth column (headed "Surv." for Survival).

Appendix B

Proposed track for current LLDs toward ordained and rostered status via SMP colloquy process (see "Elements of the Colloquy Proposal" for specific details):

1. LLD candidates for SMP colloquy shall meet two initial criteria:
 - (1) having served in preaching or preaching and sacramental administration for two or more Sundays each month over the past two years or more and
 - (2) being 55 years of age or older.
2. LLD candidates for SMP colloquy shall complete the application for colloquy process.

3. LLD candidates for SMP colloquy shall complete the course on the Lutheran approach to Scripture and doctrine that will be offered regionally.⁸⁶
4. The expanded Colloquy Committee shall schedule interviews within the region for eligible candidates.
5. The Colloquy Committee shall make a determination regarding each individual LLD applicant either to
 - (1) approve immediately;
 - (2) approve immediately with mandatory mentor-study requirements to follow;
 - (3) postpone approval pending completion of coursework or mentor-study;
 - (4) require additional study followed by reconsideration of the candidate; or
 - (5) decline to approve.
6. If the candidate, assisted by his congregation and district, is unable to afford the full cost for the seminary faculties' course on the Lutheran approach to Scripture and doctrine or for ongoing expenses for mentor-study and potential coursework, he has the option to apply to the LCMS Pastoral Education Department seeking a grant to cover up to 50% of the costs (additional aid would be at the discretion of the Pastoral Education Department). (Adequate funds exist to meet this commitment from the Synod. The current level of financial support for existing LLD training can be transferred to assist in colloquy-related expenses as needed.)

Toward the future—supplying pastors in the face of geographic, financial, and demographic challenges:

1. As congregations recognize that they are unlikely at present or the not-too-distant future to be able to fill their pastoral needs with a full-time pastor (as determined by the congregation itself or by their district), they are encouraged to seek the counsel of the district regarding possible approaches to provide pastoral care.
2. The first recourse should be prayerfully to explore time-honored means of filling the need such as multi-point arrangements or other part-time or dual-career forms of service by currently rostered pastors.
3. Another course of action may be to identify from their midst a man (or men) of “good repute” who is (are) “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” and ask him (or them) to give prayerful consideration to gain the necessary training to serve pastorally (perhaps through residential seminary training, or via SMP or a program such as EIIT). (Such identification would mirror the current approach toward LLD training and may include initial course work on a local level to meet requirements for admission to seminary programs.)
4. Where funding obstacles exist for those who wish to enter SMP or another non-residential track of pastoral education, the candidate has the option to apply to the LCMS Pastoral Education Department seeking a grant based on individual need after seeking support from congregation and district.

⁸⁶ Depending on the needs of candidates, as determined by the colloquy interview process, a fuller program of ongoing distance education courses may be designed by the seminaries for LLD candidates. Assistance for the costs for such a study would also be available as needed.