

# Walther on Mercy

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*Selections on the Pastoral Office, the Congregation  
and the Church's Corporate Diakonic Life*  
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By C. F. W. Walther



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*The Pastor's Responsibility to Care for the Physical  
Needs of Members of his Congregation*  
Translated by Matthew C. Harrison

*Concerning the Exercise of the Duty of a Congregation  
to Care for Its Members Also in Earthly Needs*  
Translated by John Theodore Mueller



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“Concerning the Exercise of the Duty of Congregation to Care for Its Members  
Also in Earthly Need” is chapter three, part four from *The Form of a  
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## PREFACE

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*“It is always a sign of a deep spiritual sickness  
when a church forgets its fathers.”<sup>1</sup>*

C. F. W. Walther is the greatest Lutheran theologian/churchman in the history of American Lutheranism. That is an audacious statement, to be sure, but through Walther’s dogged faithfulness to the scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the writings of Martin Luther, there was produced a church body which in its public confession has remained faithful to the Formula of Concord to the present day, even when most others have long since surrendered Lutheran doctrine and clarity. Let’s have done with Walther bashing, also on the doctrine of Church and Ministry. Nothing would be so salutary to the church life of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as all of us donning sackcloth and ashes, and re-reading “Law and Gospel”, “Church and Ministry” and “The Proper Form of a Christian Congregation” and then resolving to live our synodical life accordingly.

You have before you two significant selections from Walther. The first is a new translation from Walther’s *Pastorale (Pastoral Theology)*. Previous publications of this section were abridgements. We present the full text in humble translation. The second is from Walther’s *Proper Form of a Christian Congregation*. Both selections offer Walther’s crystal clear teaching that the church has a corporate, diakonic life. Moreover, according to Walther, one of the official duties of the office of the ministry is “concern for the physical well-being, particularly the needs of the poor, the sick, widows, orphans, the infirm, the destitute, the aged.”

To be sure, Walther writes in a time well before the rise of the modern welfare state. His accusation that relying upon the state

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann Sasse, “Fathers of the Church” in *The Lonely Way*, CPH 2002, p. 223.

for any care of Christians is a shame for a congregation, certainly is more than tempered in our post-modern era of astronomical medical/insurance costs. Nevertheless, Walther's constant and fundamental point, that the church has a biblical mandate to care for the needy (including non-Lutheran neighbors suffering disaster), rings as true today as ever. And this begs for a complexity and level of planning and structure well beyond the common "food pantry." I wonder if in part the missional doldrums of the LCMS are due to a loss of congregational diakonia as envisioned by Walther. For such corporate diakonic life is the natural and requisite reflection of the fellowship of faith and confession created by the Lord and his Gospel gifts. And such fellowships of faith and love are missiologically powerful (**Acts 6**).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Adolf Harnack's *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, New York: Putnam and Sons, 1908, vol. 1. The section "The Gospel of Love" contains some 50 pages of original sources on the early church's diakonic life. Neither we, nor Walther could commend Harnack's historical interpretations in toto, particularly his diminution of churchly offices and institutions, much less his "history of dogma" of the Gospel. But the simply recounting of the documentation portrays the church at its missiologically best as a church which is corporately and intentionally diakonic.

**THE PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE  
FOR THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF MEMBERS  
OF HIS CONGREGATION<sup>1</sup>**

**A**lthough a preacher above all has concern for the spiritual needs of the members of his congregation, concern for the physical well-being, particularly the needs of the poor, the sick, widows, orphans, the infirm, the destitute, the aged, etc., are within the scope of the duties of his office. **GAL. 2:9-10; ACTS 6:1FF., 11:30, 12:25, 24:17; ROM. 12:8,13; JAMES 1:27; I TIM. 5:10; I THESS. 4:11-12.**

**NOTE 1**

Here in this country this is a very important point. Like a horrible cancer, the secret societies are devouring the body of the church. Thousands upon thousands are joining these organizations initially only so that they are assured of some help at a time of need, illness or other necessity. But the result is that they are finally completely estranged from the church and they conclude that their secret society is a better bearer of the true religion than the church, because it is an active religion. The basic reason for this is unbelief — lack of Christian knowledge and a more discerning knowledge. But at the same time a chief cause is that the Christian congregations do not do what they are obliged to do, in the minds of those who are their members, who find themselves in physical need. People recognize that even if they are members of a Christian congregation, they are still left in need, sickness and other necessity. Thus, unawakened as they may be, they decide to join a society

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<sup>1</sup> This document is a translation of section 35 of C. F. W. Walther's *Pastorale, or Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie*, 5th edition (St. Louis: CPH, 1906). Abridgements have been published in English, but not the full text as here presented.

which provides them the prospects of some assistance in time of physical need. This brings unspeakable dishonor upon the church and the Word of God.

The apostle wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica, “Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (1 THESS. 4:11-12). Thus the word of God desires that Christians shall act in such a way that they do not face situations in which they must seek the generosity of “those who are outside.” Hedinger remarks on the words, “That you be dependent upon no one”: “[Neither be dependent upon] the people themselves, or their possessions and assistance. Paul desires that they should work for themselves in blessing so that they need not look to the godless for a handout. That would be to their disgrace, an offence to their faith, and a misleading of their souls through the interaction.” But it is clear, if Christians want to work and eat of their own bread, but are not able, and it is necessary for them to rely upon the kindness of unbelievers, then they don’t bear the guilt for giving offense to the world, or the dishonor which thereby comes to the Gospel.

The zeal of congregations against the secret societies is completely pharisaic if it is not tied with sufficient concern for their poor and suffering. A Christian congregation can not simply claim that there are state funds for the poor and homes for them, which they also support. No Christian congregation should allow their poor to be cared for in this way. The state should much more see that it need not forcibly impose taxes for the poor in order to maintain poor Christians, but only for those who have been forsaken by all the world. Christian congregations should view it as a disgrace to see their poor cared for by the secular state. In the so-called state churches, in which a confusion of the church and the state existed, it was a different matter. There the state

institutions for the poor were essentially those of the church. Here, where church and state are strictly separated, the church should not allow its sole care for its poor to be taken away. If God already called upon the church of the old covenant that: “There will be no poor among you” (DEUT. 15:4), how much more does this apply to the church of the New Testament! If it dishonors God, if Christians among Christians have to go about as beggars because they are not provided with the necessities of life, so that Christ in them must go begging, what an insult must it be to the name Christian, if Christians close their hearts to their brothers, and they are forced to go begging from the loveless world!

Seidel writes:

*That the care for the poor from the first times of the church was entrusted to the preaching office, and that the same office had the administration and oversight of the poor houses and hospitals, there is absolutely no doubt, when we consider that in the Justinian Code invariably the “poor” and “homes for the poor” are dealt with under the title, “Regarding the Bishops and Clerics.” At the time of the Reformation it was thus the case, as is right, that care for the poor was among the episcopal rights of the territorial lord, and by these lords it was handed over to the spiritual jurisdictions. But these jurisdictions created the order that the preacher and the government authorities of every place gathered money for the poor and other benevolent institutions, through certain elders (Vorsteher) designated for that task. It was to be administered in such a form that the matters of the poor were never to be mixed with the common matters of state. And the supervision of all Pia Corpora were retained by the superintendents and the consistories. (Pastoral Theology I, 11; para. 1, p. 197 f.)*

Luther writes further, regarding the history of the establishment of a particular office of almoner (*Almosenpfleger-Amts*) in the apostolic congregations at Jerusalem (**ACTS 6:1 FF.**): “In this history you see first of all how a Christian community (*Gemeine*) should be formed. There you see a proper picture of a spiritual government (*Regiment*), which the apostles here exercise. They look after the souls, and go about preaching and praying. They also bring it about that the body is cared for, and set up certain men who dole out the goods, as you have heard. Thus the Christian government (*Regiment*) is concerned both with body and soul, that no one has any need, and all are richly fed and well cared for in both body and soul” (*Church Postil XI*, 2754 ff.).

#### NOTE 2

That the concern for the poor belongs to the particular official responsibilities of the preacher is clear especially from **GAL. 2:9-1** and **ACTS 6:1 FF.** As often, therefore, as our old theologians enumerate the official functions of a preacher, they also bring forth care for the poor among those functions. Thus, for instance, Johann Gerhard: “There are in general seven duties or tasks of the minister of the Church, to which the rest can be easily reckoned: 1. the proclamation of the word of God; 2. the administration of the sacraments; 3. the intercession for the flock entrusted to them; 4. an honorable life; 5. the administration of church discipline; 6. the maintenance of church rites; 7. the care for the poor and the visitation of the sick” (*Loc. Th. De Minister. Ecclesiasti*. Para 265). On this remarkable passage of **GAL. 2:9-10** Luther remarks: “If a faithful shepherd or one who cares for souls is concerned above all with the preaching of the Gospel to his little flock, then he should be concerned with nothing else so much as that the poor also may be nourished and preserved. For it never fails that where a church or community of God is, there must certainly also be poor people, who are commonly only the real disciples or followers of the Gospel, as Christ himself testifies in **MATT. 11:5**. For the

poor will have the Gospel preached to them; and **I COR. 1:27-28**: ‘What is foolishness before the world’ etc. For evil people and the devil persecute the church and the community of God and make many poor people, who are afterwards so destitute that no one will care for them or give them a thing” (VIII, 1762).

Hartmann writes:

*As in a flock, the sheep suffering need require greater and more ample help from their shepherd (EZEK. 34:4); thus in the parishes, suffering persons who are impoverished, particularly if they are ill, widows, orphans and those destitute of all help and oppressed by others, expect with full right the particular aid and care of their pastors. For although Christian love demands this duty also from others, still the pastor is more responsible than all others to express fatherly care for the suffering persons. He may not object that it suffices that they receive assistance from the administrators of the poor chest. He must pay heed to the soul and conscience of the poor so that they not fall away from the Gospel, withdraw to another place, or envy those who are wealthier, on account of lack of the necessities to sustain life. Therefore the pastor must, according to the example of St. Paul, also frequently urge the congregation to collect funds for the poor, GAL. 2:10. And as Paul directs the Corinthians to the example of the Galatians, so the custom of the one congregation kindles the other, since by nature we are not inclined to do something which is not done elsewhere. Here the zeal of love of many others destroys sluggishness ... Above all the pastor must diligently investigate which among those of his flock are suffering, and who deserve to be mercifully cared for ... To this end the pastor must have an up to date list of the poor, kept by himself and the*

*officers [of the church], noting if someone has fallen ill or otherwise been impoverished by increase in the cost of those things necessary for life, or through other unfortunate circumstances, in order to assist these people from the congregation's poor chest and out of their own means. Then he shall see to it that the officers divide the proceeds, given as free gifts, from which the poor are cared for. They are collected on Sunday in the divine service, on festival days, or at funerals. The carefully gathered and collected alms are divided with such wisdom and fidelity that they, so much as possible, leave no one in need, nor here do anything from party love or hate, or also from selfishness (if perchance the poor have served the pastor in some way). Therefore the pastor must in times of famine, or when out of other causes more difficult times transpire, admonish his flock, in these times, to likewise think of the poor and vigorously care for them. And therewith the pastor must guard his attachment and preferences over against all, and he must, with reciprocal consensus and council of the presbyterium, exercise this part of his office, and at the proper time provide an account of what has been done. When the pastor and the almoner, while completely convinced of their own honorable administration, are unjustly [accused] by many poor, to whom one can never give enough, or also by any other people are wrongly defamed, they must pay no attention, nor in their zeal of office cede anything. Rather much more think, as it is stated in the saying, "He who builds by a road has many masters." (Pastoral. Ev. III, 54 p. 1023 ff.)*

### NOTE 3

The preacher should see to it in his congregation, especially if it is a large congregation, that the concerns of the poor be ordered and that there be established, for the proper administration of the same, definite almoners according to the example of the congregation at Jerusalem, Acts 6:1ff, and that they are supplied with appropriate instructions. Luther wrote in the text already cited, “This is a right fine picture and example, and would indeed be good to begin if there were people to do it, that a city such that this one be divided into four or five sections, and each section be given a preacher and some deacons who would take care of each section with preaching and the distribution of goods, visit the sick people, and see to it that no one suffer need. But we don’t have the people to do it; therefore I trust it won’t happen until our Lord God makes Christians” (XI, 2755). Regarding the churchly offices alongside the office of the Word we shall later have express opportunity to treat them.

### NOTE 4

Regarding the persons who are to be assisted and supported by the congregation, and regarding the character of the support, we share the following witnesses. Already in the year 1520 Luther wrote in “Regarding the Improvement of the Christian Estate”:

*21. One of the greatest necessities is the abolition of all begging throughout Christendom. Nobody ought to go begging among Christians. It would even be a very simple matter to make a law to the effect that every city should look after its own poor, if only we had the courage and the intention to do so. No beggar from outside should be allowed into the city whether he might call himself pilgrim or mendicant monk. Every city should support its own poor, [In our circumstances in the free church, for “every city” we would say “each and every*

congregation.” Walther] and if it was too small, the people in the surrounding villages should also be urged to contribute, since in any case they have to feed so many vagabonds and evil rogues who call themselves mendicants. In this way, too, it could be known who was really poor, and who was not.

*There would have to be an overseer or warden who knows all the poor, and informs the city council or the clergy what they needed, or some other better arrangement might be made.*

*To be sure, some think that if these proposals were adopted the poor would not be so well provided for, that fewer great stone houses and monasteries would be built, and fewer so well furnished. I can well believe all this. But none of it is necessary. He who has chosen poverty ought not to be rich. If he wants to be rich, let him put his hand to the plow and seek his fortune from the land. It is enough if the poor are decently cared for so that they do not die of hunger or cold. It is not fitting that one man should live in idleness on another’s labor, or be rich and live comfortably at the cost of another’s hardship, as it is according to the present perverted custom. St. Paul says, “Whoever will not work shall not eat” [II THESS. 3:10]. God has not decreed that any man shall live off another man’s property, save only the clergy who preach and have a parish to care for, and these should, as St. Paul says in I CORINTHIANS 9[:14], on account of their spiritual labor. And also as Christ says to the apostles, “Every laborer is worthy of his wage” [LUKE 10:7]. (X,367f)<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Luther, M. *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44: *The Christian in Society I*, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, H. T. Lehmann, eds., Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966, pp. 189–191.

Furthermore, Porta writes:

*If it is asked to whom or which people one should especially give aid, you have plenty of doctrine and instruction in Holy Scripture. For in Deuteronomy chapter 15 it says, 'If thy brother is in any need in any of the cities of your land, which the Lord thy God will give to you.' Here it shall be well noted that God, the Lord, said through Moses, 'When there is a poor person in your city and in your land, so shall you open your hand and give him what he needs.' Therefore the church also sings, 'Open up thy gentle hand to the poor in the land.' For thereby he specifically commends to us the poor who are among us, such as the ill, the feeble, or those who cannot earn enough to feed themselves because of their age; or when paupers and impoverished tradesmen and workers are present, who have not caused their circumstances because of drunkenness, voraciousness, gambling or mischievousness, or perhaps have fallen into harm or been victim of an accident, especially through misfortune, even if they at the same time work, but cannot advance and therefore have to suffer need. Likewise, poor widows, orphans, poor but diligent students, who have a good testimony from their preceptor — one should give to these first of all. (Pastorale Lutheri. Cramer p. 1082f.).*

Indeed, each individual Christian should demonstrate his kind readiness toward everyone, also toward the stranger (including those of a different belief); but first of all he should do this, that he thereby do good “especially to those of the household of the faith.” Second, it is to be considered that the poor chest of the congregation is established not so much for the assistance of the poor in general, as it is for the poor of the congregation. Therefore out of the same, only these are to be assisted. [According to Deyling there appeared in 1715 a princely/electoral mandate which, at the

threat of a 10 Thaler penalty, forbade preachers from providing testimony and letters of recommendation for itinerant beggars (*Institut. Prud. Pastoral.* p. 714).] In any case it is incorrect and a very cheap kind of mercy to a man who seeks assistance, without evaluation of hasty claims of conversion.

Regarding the distinction to be made between the worthy and the unworthy recipient of alms, Hartmann treats it (pp. 1062-34) in a thorough and express manner, and writes, “Where there is a distinction among the poor, particularly among those who are begging, wisdom is absolutely necessary so that one not strengthen the unworthy in their wickedness. However, because we cannot know a person’s heart, one has to be careful not to treat a person as unworthy who is in fact worthy of assistance. Therefore it is better to give to the unworthy than to deny help to someone who is actually worthy. Even if a person is not worthy, he may still be needy.”

#### NOTE 5

Regarding the sick, it is the preacher’s duty to see to it that these people, if they are poor, are not only provided with the necessary means to sustain them, but that to them are provided also the necessary medical treatment, care, assistance and nursing. In certain circumstances also he will procure, for those who don’t have the means, particular people for assistance, nursing, care during the night, etc. In the apostolic times there appeared to be established in many larger congregations a particular office for the care of the sick. Regarding the words, “He who shows mercy, let him do so with cheerfulness,” Calov writes, “Here the text is speaking about the office which has to do with the ill and those in need. Those who show mercy are those who are entrusted with the care for the sick, the weak, and the afflicted. In general, this now could be understood as those who demonstrate this mercy privately. But as those who are designated and bound to such work through an office, thus the text here is concerned properly

with such churchly offices for which also pious widows were used, **I TIM. 5:9; ACTS 6:1.**” (*Bibl. Illust.* Ad l.c.) Where there is not an office for care for the needy, there it is required of every Christian member of the congregation, by virtue of his membership, in cases which arise, to take over the functions of this office or to see to it that these functions are taken over by someone in his place.

## THE FORM OF A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION<sup>3</sup>

### CHAPTER III

#### PART FOUR

*Concerning the Exercise of the Duty of a Congregation to Care for Its Members Also in Earthly Needs*

– 33 –

In the first place, the congregation should do everything in its power to see to it that its pastor has food, clothing, and a home for himself and his family. (This should include a room where he may be undisturbed in conference with those entrusted to his care.) (**MATT. 10:9, 10:** Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.”) Moreover, that the pastor has sufficient means to exercise hospitality (**1 TIM. 3:2:** “An overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach”; cf. **TITUS 1:8**); that the pastor may live solely of the Gospel (**1 COR. 9:14:** “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel”); finally, that he may give attendance to reading, practice fellowship, and need not entangle himself with the affairs of this life [Luther, “of support”] (**1 TIM. 4: 13:** “Devote

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<sup>3</sup> From C. F. W. Walther, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, translated by John Theodore Mueller, St. Louis: Concordia, 1963, pp. 142-152.

yourself to the public reading of Scripture”; 2 TIM. 2:3, 4: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits”; ECCLES. 38:25, 26: “How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough and that glorieth in the goad, and driveth oxen and is occupied in their labors, and whose talk is of bullocks? He giveth his mind to make furrows and is diligent to give the kine fodder.”) In its scope this applies also to the teachers of the children (*Einfaeltigen*).

**Note.** Concerning this matter Sebastian Schwan has collected an anthology of testimonies from the writings of Luther and Runge, in which we read, among other things: “It is not good to speak, preach, or write much about this subject. But what are we to do about it? Should we be altogether silent about the doctrine of the support and salary of ministers and let it lie buried? That would mean that we despise the truth and the office of the ministry, especially since this doctrine has to do with the Third Commandment. Also, if the ministry and office of pastors did not receive financial support, many would be deterred from it, and from this the church of God would suffer great harm. But if we speak of this and say something in church and school about the support of ministers, then we get the good-for-nothing crowd excited and meet with many godless people who hate, envy, and attack the pastor because of this very thing; they would rather rob and steal with Heliodorus, Julian, and Phocas than dedicate anything to the glory of God with Constantine, who founded many religious establishments . . . But both the Old Testament and the New Testament bear witness that it is the will of God the Lord that His servants who conduct divine worship be honorably and well provided for. In the Old Testament the priests were well supported and richly provided for. In the New Testament this is repeated; for the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself tells us (MATT. 10:10): ‘The workman is worthy of his meat.’

“Concerning these words Martin Luther writes: ‘Here we must note that to the ministers of the Word food and clothing are due because of the divine command. Today those sin grievously who indeed pretend to be Christians, but give the ministers of the church nothing; indeed, who steal and take from them what has been donated by others to be given to them, as our peasants, noblemen, citizens, and others are doing. These rascals will have to give an account to Him who says here that the laborer is worthy of his hire, for they take away from him his hire of which he is worthy and which he has earned.’ Again, bear in mind also that our Lord Christ demands that the ministers of the Word are to receive not only food and drink but also money and pay so that they may procure for themselves other necessities; for they, too, must have clothing and whatever else they need. In the epistles of St. Paul this matter is often repeated and inculcated, [namely] that they [the Christians] are to treat well, adequately pay and support, and richly provide for those who labor in the divine Word. Though many whom I will not name ... do not regard it as labor what faithful ministers do by studying, praying, writing, preaching, visiting the sick, accompanying those imprisoned, which often forces them to give up their life or at times to be in extreme peril of death. This matter is emphasized so strongly in the writings of St. Paul and repeated so persistently that Dr. Martin Luther himself at first was surprised why it was that he [the apostle] was so serious in urging this matter.

“For so he comments on the passage of St. Paul, **GAL. 6:6 FF.:** ‘I recall the time when I was very much surprised that St. Paul commanded Christian congregations so earnestly to support their teachers and ministers. For I noticed that in the papacy everybody contributed richly and gave with both hands to erect churches and monasteries, as also that the priests were cared for extremely well with interest and income. From this it followed that the wealth and possessions of the bishops and priests increased

and multiplied so greatly that they occupied almost the whole of Christendom so far as the best cities and lands were concerned. So I thought that it was hardly necessary for St. Paul to issue any commands concerning this matter, since the priests were given more than enough of all things and were, so to speak, deluged with gifts. On the contrary, I thought that it would have been more necessary to keep the people from this excessive giving than further to urge them to contribute. For I saw that with their overmuch giving they accomplished nothing more than that they gradually made the priests more avaricious. But since I now see why formerly the priests were rewarded so abundantly while now the poor pastors and ministers have hardly enough bread to satisfy their hunger, I no longer wonder. Formerly when nothing was preached but error and falsehood, the devotion of the people was so great and their giving so excessive that St. Peter's patrimony, that is, his inheritance (he himself says in **ACTS 3:6**: 'Silver and gold have I none' — how then did he [the pope] get it?) and the treasures of the church were so increased that the pope became the emperor and the cardinals and bishops the kings and rulers of the world. But after the light of the holy Gospel has again risen at this time, the faithful and devout ministers are about as rich as Christ and His disciples were.'

“These and other things Luther writes, and he finally concludes with the earnest words: ‘It is impossible that true Christians can permit their pastors to be in need and suffer want. But when they not only allow this but also laugh about it, rejoice when they fare badly, and fail to give them what is coming to them, or when they give by coercion and do it grudgingly and with the gift wish them every kind of evil, it is certain that they are worse than the heathen and Turks.’ Hence this New Testament passage concerning the support of Christian teachers and ministers is fundamental (**GAL. 6:6,7**): ‘Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God

is not mocked.' Here we must also consider **1 TIM. 5:17, 18** and **1 COR. 9: 14**. This exhaustive and earnest instruction of St. Paul is directed against the foolishness and avarice of those who want to withhold what they owe to Christian ministers. We may also note how powerfully St. Paul defends his instruction concerning the proper support of Christian pastors and ministers (including the schoolmasters), and [how] he proves it from the command and institution of God in the Old and the New Testament, from the natural law, and from the reason and judgment of every right-minded person, which we call sound reason; and [how] he finally confirms it from [the principle of] universal justice, all of which serves to demonstrate how very necessary and just it is that the Christian church and congregation should well support its ministers of the Word.

“However, what and how much should be given to the servants of the church, its teachers and ministers, for their support, cannot be legally prescribed and determined except by the principle of justice and love. It is reasonable to give to the ministers of Christ as much as is right, necessary, fair, and in accord with Christian love and justice. For as there is a difference of gifts, calling or state, and labor, as God the Lord Himself has distinguished the persons of the ministers according to a certain measure and order, so it is not unfair that a certain order should be fixed and a proper distinction be made with regard to their pay, salary, and support. But the law of love prescribes that everyone should be given as much as he needs for his own adequate support and that of his dependents, especially of his household. This should be done in order that such a servant of Christ may not become impatient and negligent in his calling, office, and work on account of want and poverty in his household, or on account of starvation, or because he can hardly clothe, support, and rear his children; or in order that in his distress he may not seek and obtain his support by other means or be forced to entangle himself in secular work,

business, and the like. And since there are different opportunities at different times and places, and the problem of food and support for a family becomes more complex from day to day, it is only fair that the pious elders of the churches should keep this in mind and be directed by these matters to determine and grant the support of Christian teachers and ministers according to such circumstances.” (Dedekennus, *Thesaurus*. II, 827-830)

Concerning the teachers in [Christian] schools Porta writes in his *Pastorale Lutheri*: “It is necessary, where the government fails in this, to support schoolmasters and schoolteachers from the common treasury in an adequate way. For schools are the beautiful, precious streams of the holy city of God, as the sacred [psalmist] David calls them (Ps. 46:4), and from them the whole welfare of government must flow and proceed. Where the schools must be staffed with inexperienced and untrained persons because of inadequate pay and support, and these often come and go, the children are neglected, and from this results such harm that it can never be repaired with money or good. Therefore it is only fair that we should spend more on the schools than, alas, we [actually] do, to our great havoc and harm. Besides the schools for boys, Christian congregations should also have lady teachers for girls, who are also to be supported from the common treasury, especially for the sake of children of poor parents who are unable to pay tuition” (pp. 1119 f.).

What is meant by food and clothing Luther explains in his *Admonition to Pastors to Preach Against Usury*. He writes: “‘Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content’ (1 TIM. 6: 8). That is addressed to all Christians, both rich and poor. And the reason is stated in v. 7: ‘For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.’ A prince has for his [own] person food and clothing, and more than that he cannot use for himself; the rest he must leave behind [when he dies], like any citizen, peasant, and beggar ... His house, castle, land, cloth-

ing, and what else there may be, is his clothing. His meat, drink, wine, and beer are his food. For food here does not mean horse fodder, nor is clothing a pigsty or sack, but everyone's necessity, according to his station, including all goods." (X, 1055; SL X, 884 f.)

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The congregation shall also provide food, clothing, habitation, and all other necessities for the poor, widows, orphans, aged, and invalids, which these themselves cannot procure and [for which] they have no relatives who first of all owe them these things. (2 **THESS.** 3:11, 12: "For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living." 1 **TIM.** 5:16: "If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows." Cf. 1 **JOHN** 3:17; **MATT.** 25:35,36,40,42,43,45; **JAMES** 1:27.) The congregation shall also care for those who suffer distress through special calamities like fire, famine, scarcity, robbery, and so forth. (2 **COR.** 8:13,14: "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness." **ROM.** 12:15: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." 1 **COR.** 12:26: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.") [This should be done] in order that no brother or sister may be tempted, to the disgrace of the Gospel, to seek the help of those who are without or even to join secret societies which advertise mutual assistance. (1 **THESS.** 4:11,12: "and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.") For this purpose the congregation shall appoint special almoners. (**ACTS** 6:1-7)

**Note 1.** Compare the testimonies of Luther under paragraph 8. Luther writes in his monograph *Concerning the Improvement of the Christian State*, 1520: “It is perhaps one of the most pressing needs that all begging for alms should be abolished in all Christendom, for among Christians no one ought to go begging. Nor would it be difficult to establish a law about this matter if only we had the courage and earnest intention to do so; for every town could take care of its own poor and refuse to admit any strange beggars, no matter what they would call themselves, hermits of the woods or mendicant friars. Every town could support its own poor, and if it should be too small, it could ask the neighboring villages and the [country] folk to contribute. As it is, they must support many tramps and vagabonds who appear as beggars. Then people could know who is truly poor and who is not. But there must be a manager or administrator who would know all the poor and what they need and tell this to the council or the pastor, or in what other way this matter might be adjusted . . . I agree very strongly with what some say, [namely] that in this way the poor would not be provided for so well and that not such large stone houses and monasteries would be built and richly endowed. Nor is that necessary. He who pretends to be poor should not be rich. But if he wants to be rich, let him put his hand to the plow and let him dig it out of the ground himself.

“It is sufficient that the poor be provided for adequately so that they need not die of hunger or freeze to death. It is not right that one should be idle at the expense of another’s labor, or that one should be rich and fare well while the other lives in poverty, as it now happens in our perverse world. For St. Paul says, **2 THESS. 3:10**: ‘If any would not work, neither should he eat.’ God has appointed no one to live from the possessions of others except only the preaching and ruling ministers because of their spiritual work (as St. Paul says, **1 COR. 9:14**). Just so Christ says, **LUKE 10:7**: ‘The laborer is worthy of his hire.’” (X, 367 f.; SL X, 326 f.)

Also Porta writes in his “Instruction for Ministers”: “If the question is put to whom or to what people you should chiefly give, you will find enough information and instruction in Holy Scripture. We read in **DEUT. 15:7**: ‘If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land, which the Lord, thy God, giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart,’ and so forth. Here we may note that God the Lord tells Moses that if anyone is poor in your town or your land, you should open your hand and give to him. Therefore also the church sings, ‘Open your helping hand to the poor in your land,’ and so on. For by these words He wishes to commend to our care especially the poor among us, the sick and invalid, or those who because of their advanced age or feebleness cannot earn their bread, or who are without a home. For instance, unsuccessful craftsmen or laborers who have not maliciously wasted their goods by drunkenness, gluttony, gambling, or in any other evil way; or such as suffered injury and harm through some particular calamity, so that they cannot succeed even though they work, and therefore suffer want. The same is true of poor widows, orphans, and indigent but diligent students who come with a good report from their teachers. All these should be given support.” (*Pastorale Lutheri* [ed. Cramer], pp. 1082 f.)

Later Porta writes: “To these belong also those who for a long time have served faithfully in the holy ministry and who now, because of old age and infirmity, can no longer minister. These we are in duty bound to support, as God the Lord Himself commanded that after the age of fifty years the Levites were to be free from service and should no longer serve, but minister with their brethren (that is, as tried and experienced persons they should serve them with good counsel) in the tabernacle of the congregation, but should not do service (**NUM. 8:24-26**). If, then, in the Old Testament the aged Levites were relieved from their service, but kept with the others and supported, why should not we Christians show the same kindness to the aged emeriti, our

pastors and ministers, who deserve this well? It certainly would be great and atrocious ingratitude to disown them in their old age and let them starve like old horses or dogs, as this happens now and then with great offense” (Ibid., p. 1119).

With regard to the survivors of a minister the Church Order of Lower Saxony declares: “It is therefore Christian, proper, and just that after the death of poor pastors their indigent, mourning, and pitiable widows with their forsaken, greatly distressed, and fatherless children should have roof and shelter. Surely God’s unceasing punishments would not fail to follow if in this matter Christian provision were not made. Therefore, moved by gracious and fatherly will and love, which we owe to God, His holy Word, the sacraments, the ministry, and the pastors and their survivors, we command and order that every town and parish in the whole princely dominion should build, at a suitable place, with plenty yard and garden space, a home in which such a poor, distressed surviving widow of a minister may be domiciled free of charge during her whole widowhood with her forsaken children, and also that she should enjoy the common protection, pasture, fodder, and necessary fuel which the others have. Such homes, besides the other buildings of the church, should be carefully kept in good condition, in towns and villages alike, by the church officials and church members.

“In addition there should also be supplied to such greatly distressed, pitiable widows, besides homes, some of the fair annual rentals of the pastor’s fields and meadows, or of the land of the church or of the chapel, so that they may all the better provide their household with bread. Nor is the pastor [in charge] to deny them any of this, especially since his own widow and orphaned children are also to receive and enjoy such support. But as long as there are no [pastors’] widows, the officials of the church shall lease the home and devote the income to the improvement of the church and other [parish] buildings. But should there be two

widows, the younger shall meanwhile stay at other people's homes, but without charge to her, and after the death of the older move into the home for widows. Furthermore, such widows, after the death of their husbands, shall receive and enjoy without curtailment for a whole year during their mourning the parsonage and the whole year's salary, while the neighboring ministers, during this period of grace, administer the office and supply the place of the departed" (Dedekennus, *Thesaurus*. II, 833 f.).

**Note 2.** A testimony from earlier times against joining secret societies by our church members is found in the order of the consistory of Hanover addressed to the superintendents in 1745. We read, among other things: "We herewith give you to understand that a certain minister in these lands has dared to join the so-called Freemasons.

It does not become a minister to do anything, even though it were an adiaphoron, which causes offense or becomes a stumbling block to the congregation entrusted to him or also to others. Therefore, because of Holy Scripture and his conscience, he is in duty bound to omit such things. Much less does he have the right to join a society whose laws and statutes he does not know and understand beforehand, obligating himself by an oath or otherwise binding his conscience. It may be pretended that such a society has for its foremost objective a *vinculum caritatis* (a bond of love), but Christians in Holy Scripture have so strong a *vinculum caritatis* that they need no other. Hence the action of this minister is not only seriously rebuked, but he is also commanded to separate himself from this society and to renounce its customary ceremonies" (*Acta hist.-eccles.*, IX, 404 f.).

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A congregation shall see to it that its members in their sickness are not without the necessary help, daily and nightly nursing, and comfort. (MATT. 25:36: "I was sick and you visited me." Cf. v.43. 1 TIM. 5:10: "If she ... has care for the afflicted.")

**Note.** The duty of nursing the sick Porta places especially upon those who are supported by the congregation. He writes: “If a male or female citizen in town desires to take care of a sick brother or sister (in a charitable institution), whether during an epidemic or at another time, this should not be denied to anyone who is able to do so. But if anyone refuses to do it, he should be reproved with due earnestness by the elders” (*Pastorale Lutheri*, p. 1128).

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A congregation shall see to it that every member, even the poorest, be given a decent, honorable, and Christian burial. (MATT. 14:12: “And his [John’s] disciples came and took the body and buried it.” ACTS 8:2: “Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.” JER. 22:18, 19: “Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, ‘Ah, my brother!’ or ‘Ah, sister!’ They shall not lament for him, saying, ‘Ah, lord!’ or ‘Ah, his majesty!’ With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried, dragged and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem.” TOBIT 1:18: “And if the king Sennacherib had slain any ... I [Tobit] buried them.”)

**Note.** Ludwig Hartmann writes about this: “Also the poor are to be given a [Christian] burial, for it is shameful to bury the departed poor without the sacred ceremonies.

Therefore those shall be buried without charge who have not left sufficient [funds] so that they can be buried at their own expense. Many indeed are offended when they see that the poor are buried without song and prayer” (*Pastorale evang.*, p. 1334).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

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1. In Walther's day, people joined secret societies, such as the Masons, in order to establish relationships they could count on in time of need. (p. 1) Where do people turn for help today, if they don't come to the church?
2. People often feel ashamed when they fall on hard times. Walther instead places shame on the church if it does not care for its members or neighbors in need. (p. 2) Why the different view? Is it shameful to fall into need?
3. Why is it important for pastors and deacons to know who is experiencing hard times and genuinely in need? (p. 5ff)
4. Reflect on the last paragraph of note 4, and the closing sentence, "Even if a person is not worthy, he may still be needy." (p. 10) What point does this make about mercy and generosity?
5. After urging congregations to properly support their pastors, why does Walther quote 1 Tim. 6:8? (p. 16) Similarly, after urging care for the poor, why does he quote 2 Thess. 3:10? (p. 18)
6. Why did Walther suggest a home for the pastor's widow? (p. 20f)
7. Why should the church care about a decent burial for even its poorest member? (p. 22) What witness does this give?

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