

INTRODUCTION



**WE PREACH**  
**CHRIST CRUCIFIED**

1 Cor. 1:18-25

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the prayer for our time together I can't help but remember St. Paul's wonderful words to the Ephesians:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:16–23).

I hope to have the opportunity to visit with you soon! If I can't make it, I'll be sending First Vice-President Rev. Peter Lange in my stead. Your regional vice-president will also participate.

We began these intentional visitations a decade ago as an opportunity to meet you in person, speak with you and encourage you. We also want to see what's going on in your district and hear of your joys and challenges.

We are mutually bound to the inerrant Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. The Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod expect me to exercise oversight in doctrine and practice of all district presidents and districts. I also need to be held accountable by you, to hear your concerns and to find ways for the national office to be most helpful to you in your primary mission of sharing Christ with those in need of His wonderful free forgiveness.

I think we've done some 70 district visits. What I enjoy most about them is the face-to-face communication. I love to hear about your particular situations and all the blessings of Christ given to us in these "gray and latter days." We've got challenges aplenty to be sure. But things are humming. Our national work is growing. We'll particularly want to speak with you about church planting and the great demographic work we've done in identifying church-planting opportunities in your district. Our international work and reputation are strong, and they are getting stronger. We are supporting and conducting seminary education around the globe, producing pastors and planting churches.

As you browse through this brief report, you'll see some highlights. (We've shortened this report greatly. A more extensive document is available at [lcms.org/about/leadership/president/district-visitiation](https://www.lcms.org/about/leadership/president/district-visitiation).) Not many realize the extent of outreach and mercy this church body accomplishes in the clear name of Jesus Christ.

We're in very solid financial shape — in fact, never better. And you'll be amazed at the work being done on your behalf, even as you serve in so many ways as Synod where you are.

I'll leave you with just one thought. Our Book of Concord contains 400 references to "conscience." At the time of the Reformation, Christians were suffering uncertainty because works righteousness clouded all aspects of church life and worship. Christians were terrified, troubled and hurting, not knowing for sure that "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Today the greatest challenge to all mankind is the bad conscience, burdened by sin, burdened by the rejection of natural law and the Ten Commandments, burdened by the confusion of sexuality and many other problems. Friends, we have what this world needs: Jesus. And where Jesus is known and believed, there is the forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience.

God bless you all.  
See you soon!

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
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President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

# Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony (1528)

by Martin Luther

## Preface

**B**oth the Old and the New Testaments give sufficient evidence of what a divinely wholesome thing it would be if pastors and Christian congregations might be visited by understanding and competent persons. For we read in Acts 9[:32] that St. Peter travelled about in the land of the Jews. And in Acts 15[:2] we are told that St. Paul together with Barnabas revisited all those places where they had preached. All his epistles reveal his concern for all the congregations and pastors. He writes letters, he sends his disciples, he goes himself. So the apostles, according to Acts 8[:14], when they heard how the Word had been received in Samaria, sent Peter and John there. Also we read in the Old Testament how Samuel travelled around, now to Ramah [1 Sam. 7:17], now to Nob [1 Sam. 21:1], now to Gilgal [1 Sam. 10:8; 11:14; 13:8; 15:12] and other places, not out of delight for taking a walk but out of love and a sense of duty in his ministry and because of the want and need of the people. Elijah [1 Kings 17–21] and Elisha [2 Kings 2–13] did the same, as we read in the books of Kings. More than any, Christ has done this kind of work on behalf of all, and on this account possessed no place on earth where he could lay his head or which he could call his own. This began even while he was in the womb, for he went with his mother over the hills to visit St. John [Luke 1:39].

Formerly, in the days of the ancient Fathers, the holy bishops diligently followed these examples and even yet much of this is found in the papal laws. For it was in this kind of activity that the bishops and archbishops had their origin—each one was obligated to a greater or lesser extent to visit and examine. For, actually, bishop means supervisor or visitor, and archbishop a supervisor or visitor of bishops, to see to it that each parish pastor visits and watches over and supervises his people in regard to teaching and life. And the archbishop was to visit, watch over, and supervise the bishops as to their teaching. But in time this office became such a show of secular pomp when the bishops made themselves princes and lords, that the duty of supervision was turned over to a provost or vicar or dean. Then the provosts and deans and

chapter heads became servile courtiers and left supervision to deputies who with their notices of summons plagued the people with their extortions and visited no one.

Finally, when things reached their lowest, the deputies themselves remained at home in a warm house and sent perchance some rascal or ne'er-do-well who wandered around the countryside and in towns, and what he heard from mean mouths or gossip among men and women in the taverns he reported to his superior who then exercised his fleecing office, scraping and skinning innocent people of their goods and leaving murder and misery where there had been honor and good name. The holy synods were forgotten. In brief this is what befell so worthy an office and nothing remained of it except the burdening and banning of people because of money, debts, and temporal goods and the making of a divine order out of the bellowing of antiphons and versicles in churches. No attention is paid to how one teaches, believes, loves, how one lives a Christian life, how to care for the poor, how one comforts the weak, or punishes the unruly, and whatever else belongs to such an office. They are altogether officious and gluttonous fellows who destroy what belongs to the people and do worse than nothing for them. This office has fared like all holy and ancient Christian doctrine and order—it has become the farce and contempt of the devil and Antichrist with awful and terrible destruction of souls.

Who can describe how useful and necessary this office is in the Christian church? One can sense it in the abuses which have come through a period of deterioration and perversion. But no doctrine or vocation has remained sound or pure. On the contrary, a host of frightful sects and mobs, like the chapters and monasteries, have cropped up, whereby the Christian church has been altogether suppressed, faith has died out, love turned into wrangling and war, the gospel put in the shadow, and purely human inventions, teachings, and dreams have ruled in place of the gospel. Surely the devil enjoyed success when he tore down this office and brought it under his own power, setting up instead these spiritual scarecrows

and monk calves, so that no one resisted him. Even when the office is rightly and diligently administered it takes a lot of effort to exercise it properly, as Paul complained to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, and Galatians, for the apostles themselves had their hands full to keep things in order. What good purpose then can these lazy, sluggish bullies accomplish?

Now that the gospel through the unspeakable grace and mercy of God has again come to us or in fact has appeared for the first time, and we have come to see how grievously the Christian church has been confused, scattered, and torn, we would like to have seen the true episcopal office and practice of visitation re-established because of the pressing need. However, since none of us felt a call or definite command to do this, and St. Peter has not countenanced the creation of anything in the church unless we have the conviction that it is willed of God, no one has dared to undertake it. Preferring to follow what is certain and to be guided by love's office (which is a common obligation of Christians), we have respectfully appealed to the illustrious and noble prince and lord, John, Duke of Saxony, First Marshall and Elector of the Roman Empire, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen, our most gracious lord and prince, constituted of God as our certain temporal sovereign, that out of Christian love (since he is not obligated to do so as a temporal sovereign) and by God's will for the benefit of the gospel and the welfare of the wretched Christians in his territory, His Electoral grace might call and ordain to this office several competent persons. To this His Electoral grace through the goodness of God has graciously consented, and he has commissioned and commanded for this purpose these four persons, namely, the gracious and honorable Herr Hans of Planitz, Knight, etc., the worthy and learned Jerome Schurff, Doctor of Laws,<sup>4</sup> etc., the honorable and constant Asmus of Haubitz, etc., and the worthy Philip Melancthon, Master,<sup>6</sup> etc. May God grant that it may be and become a happy example which all other German princes may fruitfully imitate, and which Christ on the last day will richly reward. Amen.

But the devil through his poisonous, worthless gossips can leave no godly work unstained and uncaricatured. Already he has used our enemies to criticize and condemn us so that some boast that we have regretted our teaching and are retreating and recanting. (Would to God that their boast were true, and that our recanting were accepted by them! Surely they would more approach us than we them and would have to confirm our teaching and recant their stand.) Therefore I have been led to publish everything which

the visitors have prepared and shown to our gracious lord after I have carefully reviewed it in collected form, making it known in published form, so that everyone may see that we are not trying to cover up or hide anything, but would gladly and sincerely seek light and permit it. While we cannot issue any strict commands as if we were publishing a new form of papal decrees, but are rather giving an account or report which may serve as a witness and confession of our faith, we yet hope that all devout and peaceable pastors who find their sincere joy in the gospel and delight to be of one mind with us will act as St. Paul teaches in Phil. 2[:2], and will heed our prince and gracious lord. We hope they will not ungratefully and proudly despise our love and good intention, but will willingly, without any compulsion, subject themselves in a spirit of love to such visitation and with us peacefully accept these visitors until God the Holy Spirit brings to pass something that is better, through them or through us.

If some obstinately want to set themselves against us and without good reason demand something else, as there always are undisciplined heads who out of utter perversity are able to do nothing in common or in agreement, but are different and self-centered in heart and life, we must separate these from ourselves as chaff on the threshing floor and refuse to accommodate ourselves to them. In this matter, too, we shall not neglect to solicit the help and counsel of our gracious lord. While His Electoral grace is not obligated to teach and to rule in spiritual affairs, he is obligated as temporal sovereign to so order things that strife, rioting, and rebellion do not arise among his subjects; even as the Emperor Constantine summoned the bishops to Nicaea since he did not want to tolerate the dissension which Arius had stirred up among the Christians in the empire, and constrained them to preserve unity in teaching and faith. May God, the Father of all mercy, grant us through Jesus Christ, his dear Son, the spirit of unity and the power to do his will. Even though the finest spirit of unity prevails among us we still have our hands full to do good and to be established by the power of God. What would happen if there were to be disunity and disagreement among us? The devil has become neither pious nor devout this year, nor will he ever be so. So let us be on guard and anxious to keep (as Paul teaches) the spiritual unity in the bond of love and of peace [Eph. 4:3]. Amen.

From: Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 40:269–273.

# Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

## Article III Objectives

The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall—

1. Conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy;
2. Strengthen congregations and their members in giving bold witness by word and deed to the love and work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and extend that Gospel witness into all the world;
3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
4. Provide opportunities through which its members may express their Christian concern, love, and compassion in meeting human needs;
5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;
6. Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith;
7. Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith;
8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;
9. Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights;
10. Aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death.





# SEVEN MISSION PRIORITIES

1

**PLANT,**  
sustain, and revitalize  
Lutheran churches



2

**SUPPORT**  
and expand  
theological education



3

**PERFORM**  
human care in close  
proximity to Word and  
Sacrament ministries



4

**COLLABORATE**  
with the Synod's members  
and partners to enhance  
mission effectiveness



5

**PROMOTE**  
and nurture the spiritual,  
emotional, and physical  
well-being of pastors and  
professional church workers



6

**ENHANCE**  
early childhood, elementary  
and secondary education,  
and youth ministry



7

**STRENGTHEN**  
and support the Lutheran  
family in living out  
God's design



**Making  
Disciples  
for Life** 



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