



Office of the President
The Reverend Doctor Matthew C. Harrison
President of the Synod

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Dear Friends in Christ,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Too often in the church, we have been plagued by apparent but false dichotomies. Instead of sitting upright in the saddle on the horse, we wobble from side to side and then fall off on one side or the other like a drunken rider, as Luther said. Jesus is God and man, yet in the ancient church some denied His humanity while others denied His divinity. Are we to be preachers of the Law or preachers of the Gospel? Law with no Gospel can be preached by an Imam. Preaching the Gospel with no Law hits the hearer like water off a duck's back. Shall I practice closed Communion or be zealous for mission? Shall I be intentional at outreach, "to seek and save the lost," as Jesus put it, or emphasize the doctrine of eternal election? All false dichotomies. And all unbiblical.

Perhaps no teaching of the Bible has been so abused this way as the doctrine of the royal priesthood. One temptation is to decry this teaching as a threat to the Office of the Ministry. Another is to lose the balance and hold that the Bible's teaching on the Office of the Ministry as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions somehow diminishes the royal priesthood. Both approaches are unbiblical.

The CTCR document *The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission* is in response to LCMS convention resolutions from 2007 and 2016 requesting solid teaching on the topic for guidance to the church. As the Introduction to the document states:

The 2007 Convention directed us "to prepare a comprehensive study document which clearly presents the biblical teaching of the royal priesthood and Luther's teaching on vocation." The resolution then added that we were to carry out this study "in the light of the mission challenges of today."¹

The attached document stays firmly in the "middle of the saddle." The Introduction concludes:

Our Synod has emphatically articulated the proper understanding of the Office of Public Ministry and nothing that we say herein should be assumed to be in opposition to that doctrine. The royal priesthood and the Office of Public Ministry are not in conflict with one another.²

I urge you all to study this document. Take it up in your Bible classes (A Bible study and discussion guide for this document is also being prepared by the CTCR and will be available soon!). Read through it with your elders or deacons. We are all spiritual priests by virtue of our Baptism. And that means we offer

¹ See Res. 1-03, "To Prepare New Study and Increase Emphasis on Priesthood of All Believers," *2007 Proceedings*, 111.

² The LCMS has addressed the matter of the Office of Public Ministry on numerous occasions, most notably by adopting Walther's theses on *Church and Ministry [Office]* (in 1851 and again in 2001). For an English translation of Walther's theses, see *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). See also several CTCR reports pertaining to the ministry: *The Ministry in Its Relation to the Christian Church* (1973); *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature* (1981); and *Theology and Practice of the Divine Call* (2003).



spiritual sacrifices in response to what Christ has given us. We pray. We “teach each other divine things” (as Luther put it). We share the Gospel in the contexts and vocations of life in which God has placed us. We serve our neighbor in works of mercy and love.

This CTCR document points the church in the right direction. We highly regard, recognize and extol the rights and privileges of the priesthood. At the same time, we treasure the office of pastor, which has its unique biblical responsibilities. Together, we share Christ with those who need Him.

I’m very proud of the wonderful work of our CTCR. We have witnessed a plethora of faithful documents in recent years. CTCR Chairman Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast and staff members the Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer and the Rev. Larry Vogel are all a joy to work with. The commission members are remarkable. Thanks be to God!

Sub cruce,

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