



REPORT OF THE 2013 RESOLUTION 4-06A TASK FORCE

Executive Summary



July 9, 2015

The report which follows is in response to Resolution 4-06A of the 2013 Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). It attempts to address the convention’s mandate “to resolve questions about the service of licensed lay deacons” in LCMS congregations.

A basic, Lutheran theological foundation underlies the work of the 2013 Resolution 4-06A Task Force. The Triune God has revealed His salvation in the Son, who justifies all who believe in Him. Faith comes by the Spirit as the Gospel of Christ is heard (Rom 10:17). Such proclamation comes by the command of our Lord Jesus, His empowering Spirit, and the gift of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers” (Eph 4:11). Those who believe are Christ’s church, His disciples, flock, and priestly people (cp. 1 Cor 1:2; Acts 6:1-7; John 10:16; 1 Pet 2:4-9).

Thus, Lutherans confess both the priesthood of believers, sharing Christ’s love in word and deed in their daily lives, and also Christ’s gift of preachers (“the office of preaching,” AC V). By the office, the Gospel is heard and the sacraments are administered in the church. We confess that the church is the assembly of all who believe in Christ, existing where the Gospel is purely preached and the Gospel’s sacraments are administered rightly (AC VII, VIII). The Gospel Word of life and salvation is spoken both by Christ’s royal priests and His Gospel preachers. The priesthood of believers and the office of the ministry are complementary and should not be set in opposition, either by hyper-clericalism or by anti-clericalism.

Every Christian can and should share the Gospel in daily life. God also directs the church to set aside men for the office of the ministry to preach, teach, provide for confession and absolution, administer the sacraments, provide Christ’s care for God’s people, and lead His people in His mission (see e.g., Acts 8:4-25; 11:19-26; 14:23; and Eph 4:11). Moreover, the office of preaching is not self-chosen. Rather, those who are to serve pastorally are to be “faithful” both in life and doctrine, that is, they are “above reproach” and “able to teach” (1 Cor 4:1-2; 1 Tim 3:2-3; 2 Tim 2:1-2, 24-26). They serve because they are properly prepared, examined for fitness, called by a congregation, and ordained by the wider church. Men are put under orders to be Christ’s servants and to speak and act “in the stead and place of Christ” (Ap VII and VIII, 28). This threefold perspective—examination, congregational call, ordination—underlies AC XIV declaration that no one should publicly preach or teach unless rightly called.

For over twenty-five years there has been controversy within the LCMS over the matter of laymen who are serving LCMS congregations in a pastoral capacity. The rationale for such activity has been need: congregations served are typically either unable to find or to support a pastor for financial, geographical, or demographic reasons. The laymen who serve them do so out of a desire to serve where needed the most, often for no remuneration, and normally under the supervision of an ordained pastor.

Yet, although none should deny these challenges, these men serve LCMS congregations, but do so without having been examined either by faculty or colloquy, without a synodically recognized call, and without the wider church’s affirmation of their ministry via ordination. Thus, the practice has been divisive, with theological objections raised, primarily, on the basis of AC XIV.

There are genuine practical pastoral needs and there are genuine theological concerns regarding the office of the ministry that must be addressed. Just as significant is the reality that this unresolved controversy has led to division, ill-will, rancor, polarization, and stereotypes. One side accuses the other of a refusal to support mission while,

in turn, the corollary charge is a refusal to take theology seriously. The result is distraction from the calling of the church to proclaim the pure Gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19).

After visitations to districts, discussions with lay deacons and supervising pastors, consultation with the Council of Presidents, and input from theologians, the Task Force is hereby reporting to the Synod as mandated by 2013 Res. 4-06A. Briefly, we propose that:

1. Lay deacons who are regularly serving pastorally—as the *de facto* pastors of LCMS congregations—should be examined by a special LCMS colloquy process, receive further theological preparation where necessary, and be approved for ordination. Their roster status would be that of a Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP). (See Recommendation 1.)
2. The ongoing reality of geographic, financial, and demographic challenges that make it difficult to fill the calling needs of LCMS congregations and missions should be addressed by means of SMP and various other non-residential pastoral training programs in which future pastors are identified locally and then prepared for service. Need-based financial assistance for preparation will be available through the Pastoral Education Department of the LCMS. (See Recommendations 2 and 3.)
3. Districts should not neglect to explore other means of addressing the challenges to provide the ministry of Word and Sacrament for its congregations and missions. Such means include multi-point parishes, technological aids, and greater use of inactive pastors. (See Recommendations 4, 5, and 6.)
4. The role of the royal priesthood of baptized believers is *not* demeaned, but enhanced by a right understanding and practice of the Office of Public Ministry, for as believers share the Gospel in their daily lives and vocations, they are and always have been the primary arm of Christian outreach to an unbelieving world. This evangelistic or witnessing role should be emphasized and enhanced, not diminished. (See Recommendations 7 and 8.)

May the Holy Spirit guide the discussion and consideration of this report, in the name of Christ Jesus, to the glory of the Father.