

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 2

D. MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH

The ministry of the people of God and the public ministry

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1. INTRODUCTION

In order to avoid confusion, church leaders and members need to learn the fine art of drawing distinctions. This is particularly the case in regard to the ministry of the people of God (commonly called the priesthood of all believers), and the public ministry. The ministry of the people of God is a vocation or calling which belongs to every Christian; the public ministry is an office that has been established by Christ and given as a gift to his church.

2. THE MINISTRY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

2.1 The New Testament uses various images to describe the people of God, who are the body of Christ. Each image brings out a different facet or vista of the ministry of the people of God. The following are some examples:

The people of God are:

- a. a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:10; Rom 12:1). The emphasis is on a priestly community offering up prayers and intercessions, and serving those outside the community
- b. a holy nation (Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:9). This is seen as the fulfilment of the Old Testament hope expressed in Exodus 19:6 that Israel would bring spiritual blessings to all nations. The holiness of God's people is given through Christ
- c. a body (1 Cor 12:14–20; Rom 12:4–8; Eph 1:23; 4:15,16). All the members of the body work in harmony, under the headship of Christ

- d. a household (Matt 25:14-30; Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 4:10,11). The servants, as trusted members of the household, are concerned about doing the master's will and fulfilling their trust
 - e. a spiritual house, God's temple. Each member is a living stone, supported by each other and supporting each other (1 Pet 2:5; Eph 2:21-22)
 - f. branches on the true vine, producing much fruit (John 15:1-8)
 - g. a building -construction operation (1 Cor 3:10-15; Eph 2:20)
 - h. workers in the Lord's service (1 Cor 15:58; 16:1,2; 2 Cor 9:6-10; Eph 4:12)
 - i. purifying and light-giving agents in a world darkened by sin (Matt 5:13-16)
- 2.2 The Bible describes the ministry of God's people in corporate rather than individualistic terms. Individuals exercise their ministry as members of the group and in harmony with the group. God's people practise humble, loving and sacrificial service on behalf of Jesus Christ. Their ministry is a natural expression of the worship life of the community. The goal of their ministry is divine service, not personal gratification.
- 2.3 By virtue of their baptism and their faith in Jesus Christ, all Christians share in the ministry of God's people (Gal 3:26-29).
- As priests and kings (Rev 1:6; 1 Pet 2:9), freed from their sins, they bring to God the offering of their whole lives, their prayers, praises, intercessions, giving of thanks, and thank-offerings. These are acceptable sacrifices to their heavenly Father (Rom 12:1-8).
 - As those who benefit from a restored relationship with God, they bring to the enemies of God the message of reconciliation. They bring this message on God's behalf (2 Cor 5:19).
 - As members of the body of which Christ is the head, they work in harmony with the diverse members of the body, bearing each other's pain, and sharing in each other's joys and victories (1 Cor 12:25,26).
 - As branches joined to Christ the true vine, they receive from him their life, their strength, and their ability to bear fruit (John 15:1-8).
 - As God's builders, they build on the perfect foundation that has already been laid (1 Cor 3:11).
 - As disciples who bear the image of Christ, they bring purity and truth to an evil world (Matt 5:13-16).
- 2:4 God's people exercise their ministry in every area of daily life. No part is excluded.
- As parents, they bring up their children in the nurture of the Lord (Eph 6:4).
 - As citizens, they pray and work for the good of their country (Rom 13:1-4; 1 Tim 2:1).
 - As husbands or wives, they are faithful to each other, and love and serve each other (Eph 5:21-28).
 - As children, they honour their parents (Eph 6:1-3).

- As members of the congregation, they gladly hear and keep God's word (Luke 11:28), test doctrine (1 John 1:1–3), encourage one another in worship and prayer (Heb 10:25), and honour, support, and pray for their pastors (Gal 6:6; Heb 13:17).
- As neighbours, they show practical love to those in need (Rom 13:8–10). In all things they let the light of Christ shine through them (Matt 5:13–16).

3. THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

- 3.1 The ministry of the people of God, in which all Christians share, is one thing. The special office, which Christ has instituted, is another. This special office is the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments (Acts 6:4; 20:28; 2 Cor 5:18–20; Augsburg Confession 5).
- 3.2 The office of the public ministry does not arise out of the ministry of God's people, nor is it handed over from God's people to a chosen individual. It is the gift of Christ to the church. It is a special office created by Christ so that through the proclamation of the word and the use of the sacraments the Holy Spirit may work faith in the hearts of those who hear the word and receive the sacraments (Rom 10:15; 2 Cor 5:18; Matt 28:19,20; Acts 20:28; Matt 18:15–18; Eph 4:11; John 20:21–23; 1 Cor 12:28; Acts 20:17,28; Acts 13:2; 1 Pet 5:1,2,4; Acts 14:23; 1 Cor 4:1).
- 3.3 This office is public, foundational, and ecumenical, since it is by the public proclamation of the gospel and the public administration of the sacraments that the Holy Spirit creates, upholds, and extends the church throughout the world.
- 3.4 The church does not create the office of the public ministry, but it does call and ordain persons *into* that office. These persons are qualified by personal qualities, gifts and training. They accept the office as a divine calling (Acts 13:2–4; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Tim 3:1–7).
- 3.5 Particular qualities and gifts suitable for ministry do not in themselves give the individual the right to exercise the functions of the public ministry. 'No-one should publicly teach in the church or administer the sacraments unless regularly called' (Augsburg Confession 14). This presupposes examination by the church to determine that
- the individual is sound in doctrine;
 - has the qualities and aptitude for ministry; and
 - possesses a call from the church or from one or more of its congregations to exercise the functions of the public ministry.

By the rite of ordination the church confers the office of the public ministry upon the candidate for ordination.

Note: For a further elaboration on the public ministry see 'Theses on the Office of the Ministry' in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the LCA Volume I*, pages A15 – A17.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

- 4.1 There is a close relationship between the ministry of God's people and the public ministry. Each presupposes the other and supports the other. Both receive their charter and authority from Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church. The two ministries relate to each other through Christ.
- 4.2 Questions arise: does the public ministry antedate the congregation or vice versa? or is the public ministry superior to the congregation or vice versa? These questions are out of order. The one final authority in the church is Jesus Christ.

The church comes into being through the gospel and is sustained by the gospel. The ordained pastor, as the bearer of the divine office, is bound by the gospel, as is also the congregation. The pastor has no arbitrary powers over other Christians, nor is the pastor subject to arbitrary directions and commands of people in relation to his divine office. Therefore neither the congregation nor the person of the pastor is the final authority. The Lord in royal sovereignty governs both pastor and congregation through the gospel and the sacraments.

- 4.3 The responsibility for carrying out the public ministry lies with the pastor, as a direct outcome of the pastor's call. Whereas, however, the essence of the public ministry — the administration of the sacraments and the preaching of the gospel — will not change, the style of pastoral ministry may vary from time to time, from place to place, and from pastor to pastor.

For example, in some situations the pastor may call on people to assist him in aspects of his ministry; in other situations the congregation may elect representatives to help the pastor in his ministry.

In the practical application of these principles, both pastor and congregation will be sensitive to each other's needs, as together they carry out the ministry of God.