

Lutheran Church of Australia  
**THE PASTORAL MINISTRY**

The faculty of Luther Seminary has prepared this paper in response to a request from the Commission on Theology and Interchurch Relations of the LCA. It is part of the ongoing discussion on the question whether women may be ordained to the public ministry. In particular, this paper seeks to establish a consensus on:

- what we mean by ministry as a public office,
- whether our teaching on the public office contradicts the call to service,
- what we mean by pastoral authority,
- how we relate church, ministry and means of grace under Christ as head of the church, and
- how the public office is related to the general priesthood of all believers but distinct from it.

**A. THE PUBLIC MINISTRY AS OFFICE**

The question addressed in this section is whether there is a tension between 'ministry' and 'office'. In other words, are service and authority contradictory or mutually exclusive concepts? The points that follow develop the argument that ministry includes service and authoritative office.

1. Words used for 'ministry' in the Greek NT (*diakonia*, *leitourgia* and cognates) could, in secular use, denote service in either a private or public capacity. Both senses occur in the NT and where we have the recognised acts of service in a public capacity we can speak of office. Thus the KJV correctly uses the word 'office' in Romans 11:13, 12:4, 1 Timothy 3:1 and Hebrews 7:5 for duties involving public service in some form. Context determines where 'ministry' in the NT means voluntary service in a private capacity or the public exercise of duties for the good of many. The Latin word *officium* also has connotations of service for others, including voluntary acts of kindness. Whereas *beneficium* denotes a service to which the recipients have no claim, *officium* suggests service to which people have a claim. The extent to which authorisation, responsibility and recognition are involved depends on the nature of the office. Obviously, all three are important in the performance of public religious ceremonies.
2. Where forms of service or ministry are authorised, whether by the Lord or by the church, they are offices. In such offices authority and service belong together. Christ authorises his disciples to conduct their ministry under his supreme authority (Matt 28:18-20). The exercise of authority under Christ is thus a feature of the apostolic office (2 Cor 10:8) and of the office of overseeing elder (*episkopos*; Titus 2:15). In stressing that he is servant of Christ and an apostle called by the will of God (2 Cor 4:1; Rom 1:1, 1 Cor 1:1), Paul is claiming authority for his ministry.
3. Authority is important for the office bearer, but also for the recipient of ministry. Only true servants of Christ can be 'your servants' (2 Cor 4:1,5). Christ's servants are to be overseers of the flock placed in their charge (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:20), but those who dominate others and lord it over them do not serve Christ nor do they 'rule well' (2 Cor 1:24; 1 Peter 5:3; 1 Tim 5:17). Authority is not vested in self but in the Lord, and only those under his authority can exercise authority. Congregational members and pastors can be certain Christ is at work in the ministry of word and sacrament performed by a rightly ordained person.
4. Responsibility is thus a key element of any office, also of ministry in the NT. The exercise of office involves the responsible performance of prescribed functions in the service of others. All authorised service is communal; it makes sense only in community. The same holds true in the church as in any organisation. The fact that an 'office' can mean a place or a secular function, or that the sacred office can be abused and neglected, is no reason to avoid using the term when speaking of the public ministry.
5. The Australian Anglican-Lutheran dialogue has provided a good working definition of the 'office' of ministry:  
Office implies the authoritative exercise of prescribed functions by a designated person who holds a position of permanent leadership within a community. When we speak of the office of the public

ministry we are talking about the authorised performance of certain duties by a leader or leaders within the community of the faithful.

6. The office and the office-bearer need to be distinguished but not separated. Exercise of the office requires that a person be appointed to the office in a public way that clearly authorises, grants responsibility and gives public recognition. Such a public rite also clearly limits the exercise of authority with respect to the areas of responsibility, and the manner and duration of service.

## **B. THE AUTHORITY OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE**

This section outlines the legitimate authority of the pastoral office and how that authority is used in service.

7. Ministry founders where one of the two key elements is missing: humble service or responsible exercise of authority. Authoritarianism goes beyond the limits of pastoral responsibility and therefore denies the mind and spirit of Christ. Service by itself is not yet authorised public ministry. Pastors need to know that their ministry rests on Christ's authority; congregations need to be assured that their pastors exercise an authentic ministry. At the same time, the pastoral office is to be exercised in a Christ-like, self sacrificial way. The power of Christ is manifested in weakness, suffering and bearing the cross, but is obscured by the politics of power.
8. The word of God which establishes the office gives it its authority (Matt 28:18-20; John 20:21-23). The office exists by the command of Christ, who authorises, establishes and empowers it.
9. Christ is at work in the pastoral office. In the church he exercises the keys by administering the word and sacraments through pastors. When pastors speak the word, administer the sacraments and pronounce absolution, it is Christ himself who is present and at work (*in persona Christi*; 1 Cor 5:3,4, 2 Cor 2:10,17, 12:19). Luther, echoing the ancient ecumenical writings, said that the pastor was God's hands and God's mouth, or alternatively Christ's hands and Christ's mouth (LW. 22,505,506). It is really the triune God himself who baptises, speaks through the words of the sermon, absolves the penitent, and administers the holy sacrament. The pastor is the necessary instrument through whom Jesus Christ, the true worship leader, publicly proclaims the gospel and enacts the sacraments in the church.
10. Christ places people into the pastoral office through the church. Since the pastoral office is a gift of the risen Lord to the whole church, the whole church through its leaders recognises, equips, approves and ordains those who are fit to hold the pastoral office. The church, the body of Christ, calls some from within the body to preach and administer the sacraments publicly among the people. In this regard the pastor functions on behalf of the whole church.
11. The triune God bestows the pastoral office and its authority through the word of God, prayer, and the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination (cf AC 14; SA 10.3).
12. The authority of the pastoral office is evangelical. It is the authority to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, to baptise, and to preside at the Holy Eucharist, to admit and exclude from the Lord's table, and to formulate and judge doctrine (cf AC 28.5,21).
13. The authority of the pastoral office entails oversight and responsibility for the pure teaching of the word and the correct administration of the sacraments among the people of God. This oversight and responsibility extends beyond preaching, teaching and worship to pastoral care, catechesis and evangelism. This focuses the work of the pastoral office but also defines the limits of the office and, by implication, the limits of its authority.
14. Since pastors are teachers of the word, the pastorate has a corporate teaching authority in the church. Though Lutheran pastors are ordained into the ministry of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, they exercise ministry in the evangelical Lutheran church and under the authority and oversight of their presidents.

15. In addition to exercising ministry under the *episkope* of presidents, pastors also heed carefully the biblical and confessional insights and pastoral counsel of colleague pastors and the laity. And all – presidents, pastors and people – are accountable before God.
16. While pastors are to be appropriately gifted, the authority of the pastoral office does not depend on the giftedness of the person, but on the word and call of God. God gives the Holy Spirit and his gifts to those who are ordained. At ordination the president therefore lays his hands on the candidate and asks God 'to pour out your Holy Spirit on N and fill him with the gifts of grace for his ministry to your people' (*Church Rites* 141; cf 2 Tim 1:6,7).

### **C. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL FOCUS OF THE CHURCH, THE PASTORAL OFFICE AND THE MEANS OF GRACE**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is at the core of the church's life. It is central to the work of the pastoral office. It is at the heart of the means of grace. However, it is not always clear that this is so, or in what way church, pastoral office and means of grace are inter-related. The focus of this section is to describe how the person and work of Christ is central in the church, the pastoral office and the means of grace.

17. The church is the assembly of saints created by the triune God through the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments (AC VII). The Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith (SC II, 6).
18. There is an inseparable connection between the church as the body of Christ and the gift of the body of Christ in the sacrament. The church is the body of Christ and at the same time receives the body of Christ in the sacrament so that it can continue to be built up as the body of Christ in and for the world (1 Cor 10:17).
19. As the body of Christ the church is inseparable from Christ its head. We cannot speak of the church apart from Christ, and we cannot speak of Christ apart from the church. Christ speaks through his church and is present in his church. However, the two are not identical. The church as the bride of Christ is called to be faithful to the bridegroom. Christ disciplines the church he loves, just as he also stands over against it in judgment and grace (Rev 1-3).
20. The triune God alone is the source of salvation which he gives through the means of grace. God does this work of salvation through Christ. The church bears witness to salvation, and it mediates salvation through the gospel and the sacraments. The church gives birth to every Christian through the word (LC III,42). Without the church there is no gospel or forgiveness. Therefore, Cyprian can say that outside the church there is no salvation (LC III,56).
21. Apart from the word and the sacraments we cannot be sure that God is there for us in grace and mercy. Although God is free to work how he pleases, he has bound us to the means of grace. Luther says very forthrightly that God gives his Spirit and grace only through the external spoken word (SA III/8/3–13). Although God can be resisted when he acts through the means of the grace, he will always be true to his promises. Wherever the gospel of Christ is proclaimed God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel (AC V, 2,3; Rom 10:17; cf Isa 55:11).
22. In worship, word and sacraments are inseparably connected. The word is prior in the sense that the word institutes and sanctifies preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The word points to and interprets the sacraments just as the sacraments point to and interpret the word. Gospel and sacraments are so closely bound together that the loss of the sacraments entails the loss of the gospel. While it is possible to be a Christian without the sacraments, the church may not and cannot persist without the sacraments.
23. Christ entrusted to the church the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–20). This is enacted publicly by the public ministry of the church. It is a ministry of word and sacraments. Christ commissioned his apostles to preach and baptise (Matt 28:19,20), to absolve the penitent (John 20:21–3) and to celebrate the eucharist (Matt 26:26–8; 1 Cor 11:23–5). This mandate is carried out by the ordained

ministry (Luke 10:16). Pastors, like the apostles, are responsible to the Lord of the church as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries (1 Cor 4:1–4).

24. Christ's mission to gather people into his Father's kingdom continues through the church in the power of the Spirit, whom Christ promised to send from the Father (John 14–16). Christ continues his mission in two principal ways: 1) through the public ministry of the means of grace by the pastors of the church; and 2) through the priestly vocation of the baptised, as they glorify the Father in worship and intercede for all in need, and as they serve the neighbour in love.

#### **D. THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD AND THE PASTORAL MINISTRY**

There has been some confusion about the relationship between the royal priesthood and the pastoral office. This has contributed to a tendency to dismiss one or the other or to elevate one or the other as more significant in God's mission. This section outlines the common goal of the royal priesthood and the ordained ministry, and also highlights how the task of the ordained ministry differs from the tasks of the priesthood.

25. All Christians belong to a spiritual priesthood which serves the world in word and deed on God's behalf and brings the world's needs to God in prayer. In this way all Christians are involved in God's work and God's mission (1 Peter 2:9). Through their ministry pastors are responsible for preparing the people of God for their priestly ministry in the church and in the world. All Christians exercise their priestly ministry, each according to their situation and calling (1 Peter 2:9-12; Eph.5:1-2; Col.3:1-4:6).
26. Pastors do not cease to belong to the royal priesthood when they are ordained. However, while pastors are also priests in the spiritual priesthood, the pastoral ministry is not identical with the spiritual priesthood of all believers (TA VI,4).
27. The spiritual functions of the apostolate are continued only in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments (TA VI, 6). According to the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, "the office of the ministry derives from the general call of the apostles" (Tr 10, German text). The reference is to John 20:22. The authority of both apostles and pastors depends on those foundational words of Christ. Like the apostles, pastors receive their ministry from the Lord and are leaders whom Christ has appointed to 'preside' and 'rule' in his church (Col.4:17; Heb 13:17; 1 Tim 5:17; FC SD,X,10). Pastors exercise oversight over God's flock, preach God's word, teach sound doctrine and shepherd God's flock (1 Peter 5:1; Acts 6:2,4; 1Tim 3:2; 5:17; Tit 1:9; FC SD, 10; Acts 20:28).
28. The teaching of the New Testament and the church about the priesthood of the saints presupposes familiarity with the role of the priests in the Old Testament. They were consecrated for service in the temple where they could approach God's holy presence. Led by the high priest, they mediated between God and his people in two ways. They stood in for the congregation before God as they atoned for the sins of the people with the blood of the sacrifices, interceded for them by burning incense in the Holy Place, and presented the various offerings on their behalf. They stood in for God with the congregation by announcing God's acceptance of his people, by proclaiming his gracious presence to them in the song of praise, and by blessing them in the Lord's name.
29. God the Father has appointed the exalted Lord Jesus as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 6:20; 7:24; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21). All those who are baptised are consecrated with the Holy Spirit to serve as priestly brothers and sisters together with him (1 Cor 6:11; cf. Eph 5:26; Heb 3:1). He shares his own holiness with them and makes them holy with his body and blood (Heb 2:11; 10:10,29; 13:12). They all alike have access to God the Father and his grace in the divine service (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12). They can approach the throne of grace through Jesus and together with him (Heb 4:16; 7:19; 10:1,22; 12:22).
30. Those who are called to serve as God's royal priesthood perform two priestly functions (1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6; 5:10). They represent others before God the Father by interceding for them. They also offer Spirit-produced sacrifices to him through Jesus Christ. They do this corporately in the divine service, and personally in their vocation and station. As those who stand in his light they proclaim the gracious presence and acts of the triune God to the world by their confession of faith and in their songs of

praise (1 Pet 2:9; cf. Heb 2:10-11; Rev 5:8-10). They offer themselves in love to others and perform good works for their benefit (Rom 12:1-21; Heb 13:16). They share what they have with the poor and needy (Heb 13:16). They bring God's blessings to those who, unlike them, do not yet have access by faith to God's gracious presence (1 Pet 3:8-12; cf. Rom 12:14). Like Christ their high priest, they therefore bridge heaven and earth.

31. Priests perform a second significant function. They represent others before God the Father by interceding for them. They offer Spirit-produced sacrifices to him through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:5). They offer themselves with their bodies and all their members to him (Rom 15:16; Rom 12:2; Rom 6:19). They offer "the fruit of their lips" as a sacrifice to him by confessing Jesus as their Lord, praising him for his great deeds, and interceding for the world (Heb 13:15; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:9; 8:3-4; cf. 1 Tim 2:1-6). They offer the works of their hands to him by giving offerings for the needy and the work of the church (Heb 13:16).
32. Christ exercises the keys publicly in the divine service and in congregational life through those who are ordained ministers of his word. This involves the preaching of law and gospel, absolving and retaining sin, baptising and withholding baptism, granting and withholding Christ's body and blood, judging right doctrine and condemning false doctrine, excluding people from the congregation and readmitting them into communicant fellowship in it (AC XXVIII, 5, 21). The members of the priesthood do not perform these tasks by themselves in the church without proper authorisation. A pastor performs these tasks by virtue of his call and ordination, but not in isolation from the church. Pastors do not stand over the church, or operate apart from the church, but are always part of the church (TA VI, 3,4).
33. The office of ministry may also be distinguished from the general priesthood in that it is exercised mainly in the church while the priesthood is exercised mainly in the world. Pastors are called to teach God's word and administer the sacraments publicly in "the assembly of the saints" (AC XIV). They do this primarily in the divine service and by extension in their daily ministry of pastoral care, catechesis and evangelism. As far as the public worship of the congregation is concerned they function as God's mouthpiece and hands in the sacramental aspects of the divine service where they offer and convey the gifts of God from God to the congregation. As far as the sacrificial aspects of the divine service are concerned pastors stand together with the congregation before God, even when they lead it in confession, prayer, praise, and offering.

## **Summary**

Obviously much more can be said about the pastoral ministry, however this paper is concerned about the proper foundation and exercise of the pastoral office. Pastors represent Christ and therefore they need to be called by him and work under his authority. This happens through the church. This is significant so that people can be certain that through the public ministry Christ is at work for their salvation. It also requires that pastors exercise their office in a Christ-like way by giving of themselves to him and serving God's people.

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