



# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

Leader's Guide

## Leader's Guides

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### What Constitutes Unity within the Church?

#### The Issues

In order to answer the broader question of what constitutes unity within the church, we need to be clear on our definitions and distinctions otherwise people will wander off into side issues and talk past one another. Note how on justification by faith alone Melancthon first defines “faith” (Apology IV:48-60) and then the word “alone” (IV:61-72). So without proper distinctions “nothing can be explained or understood in a discusson” (AC XXIV, 16). Traditionally, we have considered the church in terms of the invisible church (faith in the heart)-visible church (confession of the faith) or hidden church-revealed church (word and sacrament marks) distinctions. Similarly, we have spoken about the distinction between the unitas of the church (unity in faith) and the concordia of the church (unity in the faith). These distinctions continue to have value for us in addressing certain kinds of questions. But today, in light of the attention given to the human dimension of the church, it may be helpful to consider the church and its unity in two dimensions/relationships. The first is a vertical dimension that pertains to our relationship with God. The second pertains to our relationship with each other and our life within the world.

What constitutes unity in the Church depends on whether its unity is being considered in terms of its essence before God (*coram Deo*) or in terms of its expression within the world (*coram mundo*).

1. Before God there is only one unity, the hidden unity of faith in Christ. It is visible to God but “invisible” to us. This is the “holy communion of saints,” the *Una Sancta*.
2. Within the world (*coram mundo*) the unity of the church is lived out in a variety of ways as a community of people gathered by the Word (in oral and sacramental forms):
  - a. Unity in Confession
    - i. Preaching and teaching consistent with our confession of “the one true faith”
    - ii. Practices (infant baptism, close[d] communion, polities, ceremonies, membership in synods, etc.) consistent with our common confession.
  - b. Unity in Love
    - i. Pastor-Pastor: judgment calls about how best to confess the faith in particular situations.
    - ii. Pastor-People relationships: who’s the boss and calling the shots?
    - iii. People-People relationships: interpersonal conflicts.

Where does disunity exist within The LCMS today? Do we have doctrinal disunity? Does the diversity of adiaphora raise questions about unity in confession? Or is there a lack of

trust in the pastoral judgments made by fellow pastors? Or is there a general lack of love among members as a result of a growing intolerance within society?

## Scripture Search

1. Ephesians 4: 1-16.

Paul deals with several facets of the church's unity in these passages. First, Paul presupposes the unity of the church as a given *coram deo*. It is a unity given by the Spirit (vv3-6). The Spirit gives and maintains that unity in two ways. First, through the teaching and preaching of the Word. To that end, he has provided gifts (vv7-11) to teach the Word. It is this word that binds Christians together in the oneness of faith and in maturity in the knowledge of Christ so that they are not buffeted by the various winds of doctrine (vv13-14). Second, as Christians live with each other, they demonstrate love through tolerance, patience, humility (v. 2) and in Christian service (v. 12). This too contributes to the building of up of the body *coram mundo* (vv. 15-16).

2. 1 John 1:8-9; 2:18-25; 4:2-6.

John, otherwise known as the beloved apostle, is also the one who pulls no punches when it comes to the matter of a common confession of faith. Confession (*homologeō*) means to say the same thing. That is, one who says what God says (ditto, Amen) confesses. The antonym of confession is denial (*arneōmai*) or a mere "speaking." Thus there exists either confession of God's word or denial of His word. Note in 1 John 1:8-9. Who ever "says" he has no sin calls God a liar. They deny what God says about us. But whoever "confesses" their sin, that is, agrees with God's diagnosis, God is faithful and just to forgive them their sin. Thus in chapter two, John speaks about those who have gone out from us but were never really a part of us. Here he appears to be speaking of those who had a docetic or Gnostic understanding of Christ. They denied (did not confess) that Jesus was the Christ. And so when we arrive at chapter 4, John urges them to test the spirits. Note here how John gets more specific about the confession of Jesus. It is not simply affirming that Jesus is the Son of God. More specifically, those who confess that Jesus has come in the flesh are from God. Any other confession is the spirit of the antichrist. This confession becomes the basis for the love that John urges his hearers to show for one another. For in this confession we acknowledge that love of God demonstrated for us in the expiation of Christ (1 John 4:10). And so we show love for one another.

3. 1 Corinthians 8 & 13

Paul's entire first letter to the Corinthians deal with issues related to the unity of the church. But what are the types of issues that Paul addresses which are creating division within the church? Are they issues that pertain to the very nature of the church as a congregation of believers before God? Are they primarily theological issues that threaten the confessional unity of the church at Corinth? Or are they issues related to the various ways in which the Corinthians are living out their faith in the Gospel, issues, to be sure, with theological presuppositions (such as an over-realized eschatology).

Throughout the letter Paul deals with a variety of issues related to the Christian life. He addresses party factions (1:10-13), jealousy and quarreling (3:3-4), filing lawsuits against fellow Christians in pagan courts (6:1-6), sexual morality whereby

a part of the body of Christ unites itself to prostitutes (6:15-17), eating food offered to idols (8:4-6), and the matter of different gifts (chapters 12-14).

So what does Paul exhort? The issue is not how one becomes a member of the body of Christ (that's the Spirit's work). The issues revolve around how we live together in that body for the well-being of all the members of that body. Two examples will suffice.

First, on the matter of eating meat offered to idols, Paul provides the theological basis with his Christian interpretation of the Shema (8: 1-6; cf. Deuteronomy 6:4) by confessing that there is only one God. The basis for this affirmation? He is the Creator. Throughout the Bible (esp. Isaiah 40-46) the creation of all things defines who God is. Given that there is only one God and that idols have no real existence, Paul exhorts the strong to bear with the weak. Who are the strong Christians? Those who recognize the freedom that they have in the gospel with regard to certain practices. Who are the weak? Perhaps new members who are still struggling with how they should now conduct themselves as Christians, those who have not yet come to realize the implications of the freedom that we have in the Gospel.

Second, related to this, Paul exhorts love in 1 Cor 12:7-8; 12-15; and 13:4-7. In chapter 12 he stresses that the gifts are for the good of each member of the body. They don't contribute to our membership in the body and attachment to Christ (*coram deo*), but they do contribute to the well-being of the members (*coram mundo*). In chapter 13, note how love expresses itself in patience, forbearance, and living with the imperfections and weaknesses of each other.

### Our Confessions Speak

1. "The church is not only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons." — Apology VII, 5 (KW, p. 174). Cf. Apology VII, 5 (KW, p. 174); Apology VII, 10 (KW, p. 175); Apology VII, 34 (KW, p. 180).

In each of these instances, Melancthon seeks to distinguish the Lutheran definition of the church from that of Rome. To that end, he insists that strictly speaking, the church *coram deo* is an assembly of faith, sheep scattered throughout the world who share the same Christ. Having said that, he argues that the church can also be considered as an "association of external ties." In other words, it is also a group of people who are identified by their participation in Word and sacrament. In AC XIII he notes that things like baptism mark a person outwardly as a member of that community. But these external ties can also extend to human traditions and practices. His complaint with Rome is that they make the "association of external ties" the primary if not the exclusive definition of the church, even *coram deo*! In other words, it is important to distinguish between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the church. But in distinguishing them, we must also affirm them.

2. "Fundamental, enduring unity in the church requires above all else a clear and binding summary and form in which a general summary of teaching is drawn together from God's Word, to which the churches that hold the true Christian religion confess their adherence." "...it is necessary not only to present the pure, beneficial teaching correctly, but also to censure those who contradict it and teach other doctrines." (FC, SD, Rule & Norm, 1, 14; KW, p. 526, 529).

Two different approaches to unity characterized the Philippists and the Gnesio-Lutherans. The Philippists wanted a broad, general statement of faith that would enable different positions or interpretations of Scripture to coexist. The Gnesio-Lutherans believed that only a detailed and thorough discussion of the issues would produce a lasting concord. The approach here adopted by *The Formula* follows the Gnesio-Lutheran approach, the roots of which are found in Martin Chemnitz' memo to himself in 1561 known as the *Iudicium* (Judgments). See *Sources and Contexts* for the text. The Formula followed the Philippists in that while it rejected error and those who promote it, they did not name names.

3. "In this very assembly we have sufficiently shown that, for the sake of love, we are not reluctant to observe adiaphora with others, even if such things may prove to be somewhat burdensome. We judge that the greatest possible public concord which can be maintained without offending consciences ought to be preferred to all other interests." — Apology XV: 51-52..

**Article XV deals with church practices and traditions. Overall, Melanchthon has an open and shut case since his opponents insist that it is necessary to observe the church's regulations in order to become righteous before God (*coram deo*). In the process of dismissing this crass works righteousness, Melanchthon takes up the question, "if we don't need to observe various humanly established practices, traditions, and ceremonies, then what good are they"? Using categories borrowed from rhetoric, Melanchthon insists that we must consider the value of all things in terms of what purpose (*causa finalis*) they serve within the church *coram mundo*. In other words, do they serve good order? Do they contribute to the teaching and learning of the gospel? Do they help Christians live out their vocations within the world? (See XV: 38-44). These paragraphs (51-52) are Melanchthon's concluding words. They follow a brief warning that the whole matter of traditions is fraught with dangers on both sides of the issue. He contends that the Lutherans have demonstrated at Augsburg how they were quite willing to observe certain adiaphora with the opponents no matter how burdensome they might have been for public concord within the church takes priority over nearly all other interests.**

4. "In all families and communities harmony needs to be nurtured by mutual responsibilities, and it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless people overlook and forgive certain mistakes among themselves. In the same way, Paul urges that there be true love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear with (if need be) the crude behavior of the brothers [and sisters], and to overlook certain minor offenses, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and lest enmities, factions, and heresies arise from such schisms." — Apology IV: 232 (KW, p.155).

"For harmony will inevitably dissolve when bishops impose excessive burdens upon their people or have no regard for their weakness. Dissensions also arise when the people judge the conduct of their teachers too severely or scorn them on account of some lesser faults, going on to seek other kinds of doctrine and other teachers. On the contrary, perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear the weak, when people put the best construction on the faults of their teachers, and when the bishops make some allowances for the weakness of their people." — (Apology IV: 233-234 (KW, p.155-56).

**In each of these texts, Melanchthon takes up arguments of his opponents regarding the basis of justification. In particular, he provides an exegesis for 1 Corinthians 13; Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 4:8. In each case he contends that the**

**problem lies in the fact that his opponents confuse the vertical (passive) and horizontal (active) dimensions of righteousness. When Paul talks about love, according to Melancthon, he does not do so with regard to how it can serve as a basis for our righteousness and salvation with God. To the contrary, Paul's talk about love as a "bond of perfection" or that love "covers a multitude of sins" has reference to our life together as Christians. There are some very helpful thoughts here on pastoral theology and the relationship between pastors and people and even between pastors and pastors. In these sections Melancthon speaks about the necessity of not taking everything to the full extent of the law (or by-laws?), "putting up with" each other's various weaknesses and foibles, and putting the best construction on things. See especially IV: 232-235 and 242-243.**

### **Points to Ponder**

1. The church's unity before God is first and foremost a unity of faith created by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its forms. It is made known within the world of human beings primarily through the confession of the faith and secondarily through lives of love for one another. Confession and love are interrelated.
2. The church's unity of faith *coram deo* is expressed in a common confession of the faith. Confession is the only way by which we know whether or not we've heard the same Word of God and hold that Word in common. It is also the only means by which we know that Gospel we speak is in fact the Gospel of Scripture by which the Spirit gathers the church into one body in the spiritual unity of faith *coram deo*.
3. Brothers and sisters in a family did not choose each other for siblings. We find ourselves thrown together to bear each other's burdens and share each other's joys (whether or not we like each other). In a similar way, the Spirit gathered us into one body where we now find ourselves bound by mutual love and responsibility despite our differences. The lack of love brings the Gospel into disrepute and can produce schism and heresy.

**In order to negotiate the various ways in which the church lives out its confession of the Gospel together, the church lives by the law of love. In a post-modern world the emergent church has argued that it is most authenticity if key. For Lutherans, that means above all else living in line with our core value of forgiveness. Unity in the expression of love for one another and bearing with the foibles of each other.**

### **For Conversation**

1. Once upon a time, membership in a denomination identified a person's public confession and commitment (abide in it till death). Now one is more likely to hear, "Oh, I don't believe what my church believes. I simply attend that church because I like its programs." What does this say about the importance of a common confession of faith? Does it mean that people no longer think in terms of communities and instead see themselves as free agents in charge of their own faith and faith commitments? What does this mean for the unity of a congregation or denomination?
2. How has the American value of radical individual autonomy affected pastors and congregations with regard to the mutual responsibility and accountability that they have to the wider church (synod, Lutheranism, etc.)? Are there things that individual members can do with other Christians that pastors, as public representatives of the congregation,

cannot? Or are all members public representatives of the *corpus*? Are pastors and congregations increasingly adopting the attitude, “Just leave me alone”?

3. Does the synod (as a voluntary human institution/association of external ties) continue to play the same role or serve the same purpose for congregations today that it did in the early years of its existence? Or is the synod slowly becoming one para-church organization among others from which congregations purchase certain services and products? How might church unity look in a post-denominational world?
4. In a world in which more than 30,000 Christian denominations exist, how important is it for congregations to express their confessional unity with the “one holy Christian church” in time and space? What are the various ways by which a congregation/church can express its unity within the midst of these divisions?
5. What do you say when faithful Bible study participants bring up ideas from their neighborhood Bible study? After all, the leader of their Bible study has been studying the Bible for over thirty years. How do we equip people to engage in ecumenical conversation as they participate in interdenominational Bible studies?
6. Three kids from three different churches get killed in a car that could not quite beat the train across the crossing, or drown in a boating accident, and the two other pastors involved want a joint memorial service. A local LCMS pastor decides to participate in the memorial service. What factors would you take into account that would prompt you either to question the pastor’s commitment to our common confession or would prompt you to give him the benefit of the doubt? What are the boundaries for legitimate disagreement?

As a small group, offer a prayer of thanks for the unity in the one true faith that the Spirit has bestowed upon the church through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and pray that we might be instruments for expression and furtherance of that unity within the church throughout the world.

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## Leader's Guide

Church and Culture  
October, 2007

### The Issue

"Many of the most difficult issues before the church today—from in-house debates over worship styles and the best way for church to grow, to calls for Christian activism to combat social evils, such as abortion, poverty, the decline of the family, the immorality of the media, political corruption, and the like—are actually questions about how Christians should relate to their culture." [Veith, Gene, "Two Kingdoms under One King" in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, p. 129]

Continuing, Veith offers the following observations:

- Never have there been more professing Christians in America, and yet never has the impact of Christian been less... Christianity is culturally invisible... Is this because Christian are not applying their faith in their culture? Or has the culture totally swallowed up their faith? [Veith, *ibid*, p. 129]
- American Christians are uncritically embracing their culture at the very time the dominant culture has become aggressively hostile against any kind of religious faith. [Veith, *ibid*, p. 130]

Articles by LCMS member Veith regarding the relationship between Christianity and culture can be accessed at the following Web addresses:

<http://www.youthesource.com/Index.asp?PageID=7082&Function=View&ArticleID=1121>

<http://www.issuesetc.org/resource/archives/veith2.htm>

The first, but almost impossible, task is to agree on a definition of "culture". There are hundreds of competing formal descriptions offered by academicians. Martin Marty suggests the following informal definition for the purpose of engaging in a meaningful discussion: "Culture is the sum total of the processes and products by which humans do anything and everything to nature (divine creation)." [Marty, Martin, "Articles of War, Articles of Peace: Christianity and Culture" in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, p. 57]

From among the many definitions, these are helpful:

- "Culture is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations." [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]
- "Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation."
- "Culture, as a body of learned behaviors common to a given human society, acts rather like a template (i.e., it has predictable form and content), shaping behavior and consciousness within a human society from generation to generation." [http://www.wsu.edu/gened/learn-modules/top\_culture/culture-definition.html]

We belong to a dominant culture as well as to a myriad of sub-cultures in varying degrees. A sub-culture may be categorized by ethnicity, geography, religion, gender, age, profession, sport, hobby, fad, etc. Being a pastor in the LCMS places you into yet other levels of sub-cultures.

**Note the various sub-cultures to which you might belong related only to your profession: clergy, specialty, community involvement, circuit, district, denomination, congregation, staff, theological stance, and seminary. The list is endless just in this regard.**

The best way to understand “your culture” is to explore it. For a few minutes reflect on how growing up where and when you did affected your view of the world. Consider the differences between your generation and those of your grandparents, parents, and children.

**To probe deeper, raise and respond to questions such as these:**

- **To what extent does “your understanding of Christianity” determine “your culture”? And vice versa.**
- **Could you easily give up or change the ways in which you celebrate family events and holidays?**

Another way to discover “your culture” is to intentionally experience another for an extended period of time.

**If the culture differs greatly from your own, sooner or later you may experience some degree of culture shock—the greater the number of unshared sub-cultures, the greater the shock. To test your adaptability, consider these questions:**

- **How would you cope in a culture in which sin is simply a mistake? Where shame, not guilt, dominates?**
- **Could you survive in a culture where a person’s age trumps educational achievement?**
- **Would you be able to function in a society where time is not primarily viewed chronographically?**

Yet another way in which to perceive “your culture” is when people representing another culture—and it need not be a dominant but a sub-culture—encroach on your own.

**The first reaction is one of unease as you attempt to accommodate a new way of thinking and doing. However, if the encounter challenges your values and beliefs, you may react with defensiveness. To ascertain your tolerance levels, answer the following questions:**

- **How would you respond if a non-Christian immigrant family moved into the house next door to yours?**
- **What would you do if your teenager determined to adopt the latest trends in music and dress?**
- **What is your response to a person who says that all religions lead to the same goal?**

For many, speaking of Christ and culture brings to mind H. Richard Niebuhr’s book of the same title. Written in 1951 but still relevant, it assesses the ways in which various Christian traditions understand the relationship between the two. He suggests these five basic models:

1. Christ against culture (rejection): Christianity and culture in opposition  
**Proponent: Tertullian, Tolstoy**  
**Example: Monastic and sectarian groups (such as Mennonites), modern-day Fundamentalists**
2. Christ of culture (affirmation): Christianity and the purest expressions of culture in agreement  
**Proponent: Valentinus, Abelard, philosophers of Age of Enlightenment**  
**Example: mainline Protestantism, some Evangelicals (associate God and nation)**
3. Christ above culture (synthesis): both continuity and discontinuity between Christianity and culture  
**Proponent: Early apologists, Aquinas**  
**Example: Roman Catholic tradition**

4. Christ and culture in paradox (dualism): paradoxical tension between Christianity and culture  
**Proponent: Luther**  
**Example: Lutheran tradition (Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms)**
5. Christ the transformer of culture (conversion): culture reformed for Christian purposes  
**Proponent: Augustine, Calvin**  
**Example: Reformed tradition, Puritanism, “social gospel”**

An essay entitled “Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture Reexamined” by Angus J. L. Menuge in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* is a summary and critique of Niebuhr’s five models. This chapter can be accessed on the Web at this URL address:  
<http://www.mtio.com/articles/bissar26.htm>

To these Richard John Neuhaus adds another, namely,

6. Christ without culture: Christianity indifferent to culture and unconsciously adopting its patterns [Neuhaus, Richard, “The Public Square” in *First Things*, April 2007]

**Neuhaus introduces his model with in this way:**

**What then do I mean by suggesting this sixth type, Christ without culture? I mean that the Church—and here Church is broadly defined as the Christian movement through time—can at times adopt a way of being in the world that is deliberately indifferent to the culture of which it is part. In the “Christ without culture” model, that indifference results in the Church unconsciously adopting and thereby reinforcing, in the name of the gospel, patterns of culture that are incompatible with her gospel. [Neuhaus, Richard, “The Public Square” in *First Things*, April 2007]**

The entire article by Neuhaus can be accessed on the Web at the following URL address:  
[http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id\\_article=5460](http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=5460)

Focusing on the six types listed, as a whole group, take some time to address the following questions:

- In your opinion, which best conveys the most appropriate interaction between Christianity and culture?  
**Responses will vary.**
- Which most aptly describes what is actually happening in contemporary American society?  
**In general, Model Number #6 seems to be predominant; though, by definition, most people would be following it “unconsciously.” Depending on denomination and background, Christians who take seriously leading a God-pleasing life would be following one of the other models.**
- Which best portrays the classic Lutheran understanding of the church’s relationship to culture?  
**The general consensus is that Model #4 reflects the basic Lutheran stance toward culture. However, a closer evaluation reveals that it needs refinement if it is to be categorized as the “classic” Lutheran model.**

In his essay “Niebuhr’s ‘Christ and Culture in Paradox’ Revisited” in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, Robert Kolb, while approving of Niebuhr’s landmark study, challenges his analysis of the Lutheran approach. He writes:

**“His analysis of Luther’s ‘two realms’ understanding of the relationship of church and society is incomplete and burdened by two significant mischoices of vocabulary... His analysis is flawed by two unfortunate choices of expression which he used to describe this position: the words ‘paradox’ and ‘dualism.’” [Kolb, Robert, “Niebuhr’s ‘Christ and Culture in Paradox, Revisited’” in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* (Concordia Academic Press, 1999), pp. 104-105]**

## Scripture Speaks

The encounter—often clash—between the people of God and the culture(s) enveloping them is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. However, we will focus on three settings which offer insight into dealing with such confrontations.

1. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the Israelites encountered an agrarian way of life upon entry into the Promised Land. From their new “neighbors,” the Canaanites, they were compelled to learn how to build, farm, and trade. But adapting to a new culture without forsaking faithfulness to Yahweh proved to be impossible.
  - What did the covenant with Yahweh require of them? Ex 20:3; Dt 6:14-15, Lv 18:30; Lv 20:23
  - To what temptation did they succumb? What was the attraction? Judges 2:11; 10:6; 2 Kgs 17:15

**Worship of Baal was in essence participation in a fertility cult. The Israelites saw it as a way to acquire health and wealth. It was an ancient “prosperity” religion.**

  - How were the Israelites to treat their new “neighbors”? Ex. 23:9; Lv 19:34; Dt. 10:19; Nm 35:11-15. See also Is 56:6-7.
  - Referring to the six models listed under “The Issue,” which best portrays Israel’s relationship to culture?  
**First, substitute “people of God” for “church.” Since ancient Israel was essentially a theocracy, the pattern of engagement with other cultures resembled Model #1. However, there were glimpses of patterns characteristic of Models #3 and #4.**
2. During His ministry Jesus dealt with both the culture of Judaism and that of Roman occupation government. In both instances we see a clash between the Messianic Kingdom and an institution rooted in laws, traditions, and mores of human origin.
  - With respect to culture in general, what did Jesus actually teach? Jn 17:14-17; 15:18-19; Mt 6:24; 13:22; 16:26; Mk 12:30
  - How did Jesus deal with the political reality of His day? Jn 18:36-37; Mk 12:17
  - What was Jesus’ reaction to the religious situation He encountered? Mt 15:8-9; 5:43-44; Mk 2:27
  - Referring again to the six models, which best portrays Jesus’ teaching about relating to culture(s)?  
**The principles supporting Models #3 and #4 are obvious in Jesus’ teaching. What we learn from Scripture is that a follower of Jesus is to be “in the world” but not “of the world.” This creates a tension that is not resolved by outward rules and laws but by an inward regeneration of one’s sinful nature. To live out rather than to resolve the paradox is the challenge of the Christian.**
3. After Pentecost and the subsequent rapid spread of the Gospel message throughout the Roman Empire, the early Christian church faced numerous challenges related to cultural interaction on many levels. Of primary concern was the inclusion of Gentiles into a “church culture” comprised predominantly of Jewish believers. Others were adaptation to a Greco-Roman way of thinking and the relationships between male and female and between slave and free.
  - What was the stance of leaders in the early church toward the dominant culture? Rm 12:2; James 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15; 1 Cor 5:9-11; Col 2:8; Phil 3:20; Acts 5:29
  - What moved Peter to adjust his attitude toward the inclusion of Gentiles? Acts 11:4-11  
**Peter’s willingness to adopt a new paradigm has to do with revelation—God intervenes.**
  - How did the early church resolve the problem regarding the inclusion of Gentiles? Acts 15:1-33 (especially note James’ counsel in v. 19)  
**Note the appeal to Old Testament Scripture.**

- What was Paul’s approach to people of different cultures? Rm 1:14; 1 Cor 9:22; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; 1 Cor 1:23-25
- How did Paul personally deal with the Gentile issue? Gal 2:11-15
- Referring again to the six models, which best portrays the early church’s interaction with culture(s)?

**The approach reflects Model #4 with some elements of Model #3. In the early church we see the believers attempting to put Jesus’ paradoxical teaching into practice. Paul, particularly, grapples with cultural conflicts in his mission outreach to non-Jews and to citizens of the Roman Empire.**

## Our Confession

Though the Lutheran Confessions do not directly address the matter of cross-cultural conflict, it is important to note that they were written against the backdrop of the early Renaissance Period, a time of major cultural turmoil and change.

The following excerpt from Article XVI of the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” provides insight into the thinking of the reformers regarding the “Political Order”:

The writings of our theologians have profitably illumined this whole question of the distinction between Christ’s kingdom and a political kingdom. Christ’s kingdom is spiritual; it is the knowledge of God in the heart, the fear of God and faith; the beginning of eternal righteousness and eternal life. At the same time it lets us make outward use of the legitimate political ordinances of the nation in which we live, just as it lets us make use of medicine or architecture, food or drink or air. The Gospel does not introduce any new laws about the civil estates, but commands us to obey the existing laws, whether they were formulated by heathen or by others, and in this obedience to practice love. [Tappert, Theodore, editor, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), pp. 222-223]

The Constitution of the LCMS alludes to cultural influences in Article III.7. An objective of Synod is to “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.”

**It is interesting to note that this document was originally written in German in an English-speaking country.**

## For Reflection

**It should be noted that the following statements are not to be viewed as the final word on the matter but as opinions or observations meant for reflection and refinement.**

1. The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms affirms the differing cultures of which Christians are a part and offers a way to deal with the tension that arises when these cultures conflict.

**Regarding the Two Kingdoms Doctrine, Veith writes as follows:**

**My thesis is that Christianity must never be turned into simply a cultural religion. And yet, Christianity has cultural implications. All Christians have both a spiritual vocation and a cultural vocation, requiring them to be both separate from the world and yet actively engaged in the world. God is sovereign over the culture as well as the church, but he operates in different ways in each sphere. The church and the culture are not to be confused with each other; but God is King over them both. [Veith, Gene, “Two Kingdoms under One King” in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, (Concordia Academic Press, 1999), p. 130]**

2. True Christian unity is rooted not in a harmonization of all cultural expressions but only in the relationship we share through Baptismal grace. It is a unity for which we diligently strive here on earth but which we will only totally experience in heaven.

**A relevant Scriptural reference is Rev 7:9.**

3. In witnessing to those of other cultures and sub-cultures, distinguishing what is biblical truth from what is a culture-based mindset is difficult. Too often we tend to think that “my way” is God’s way.

**James’ advice at the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:19) is extremely significant and as relevant today as then.**

4. Some feel that the disagreement over the style of worship plaguing the present-day church is as much a conflict of cultures as it is a theological disagreement, while others hold that there is a theological standard for worship which transcends cultural preferences. There seems to be no way to break the stalemate.

**One additional point to ponder is an excerpt from a news release issued immediately after the 2007 LCMS National Convention in Houston. In it President Gerald Kieschnick listed the challenges facing the LCMS. One of them is related to the topic of this study. The excerpt is reproduced below:**

**Kieschnick also noted that another priority looms large as each day of his life passes: helping the LCMS articulate its confession in a culture increasingly influenced by non-Christian religious bodies. He wrote:**

**“We are 160 years old, and for most of those years we have defined ourselves as a confessional Lutheran church demonstrating that confessional spirit in a country, a culture, and a context that for most of our history has been largely Christian. Our focus has been on demonstrating our orthodoxy amidst heterodox Christian bodies.”**

**Now, near the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Kieschnick said, we are coming face-to-face with the reality that our challenge is not only to be an orthodox Christian church body in the midst of a collection of heterodox Christian bodies, “but to be an orthodox, confessional, and evangelical Christian church body in the midst of a culture and context that’s full of religious bodies, many of which are non-Christian, that are growing a whole lot faster than any Christian church—Mormons, Muslims, and atheists, to name a few.”**

**The playing field has changed, Kieschnick observed. He encouraged a strong confessional stance in the culture:**

**“Our challenge is not just how we refute the incorrect teaching of heterodox Christian churches, as important as that is. While we don’t want to stop doing that, our major priority is not sitting back and letting non-Christians have the microphone everywhere we go, but instead standing up as a confessional church body and faithfully and courageously articulating our confession. Our confession must be heard. It can’t be stuffed in our pocket.”**

**[July 31, 2007, LCMS News - No. 54]**

## **For Conversation**

After dividing into groups of 4-5, proceed to the following case studies:

**The leader may opt to open the small group discussion session by reading this communication from the wife of an LCMS pastor. It is reproduced below with permission from the writer—only the names have been concealed. It reveals the angst pastors (and wives) endure—even in their own families—in their attempts to minister in a culture hostile to the Gospel message.**

**I have long felt that the LCMS has not been able to articulate an apology for the Christian faith that addresses our pluralistic culture, issues related to science, and the how human sexuality is currently understood. Our children and grandchildren are living next door and going to school with Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. It is just not the “in thing” to believe that persons who adhere to these**

religions do not know the true God. [My husband] and I are persuaded that God's intent for human sexuality is that of a monogamous, heterosexual, procreative marriage. You know how that flies with today's young adults.

I suspect that [we] are not the only [ones] who have a child who is not worshipping anywhere. We are often at a loss to address questions and concerns raised by one or more of our children. [My husband] often tried to have a time at pastoral conferences where guys could openly talk about "witnessing" to our own children.

We are profoundly grateful for the openness of conversations with our children, but the conversations "ain't easy."

**Though Case Study #1 is fictional, it is based on a composite of two actual situations. Similar circumstances, however, are perhaps more common than many of us pastors would like to admit. It is also something that we are reticent to talk about, even (or maybe, especially) with other pastors.**

### Case Study #1

Pastor J's children attended Lutheran elementary and high schools. They are now adults. The elder son and his family, seeking a Christian community that "meets its spiritual needs," have recently begun to attend a large, non-denominational church. The daughter married a Lutheran of another synod and has joined her husband's church. The younger son, now in college, just announced that he has left the church and adopted "an alternative life style."

- In what way, do you suppose, has this situation changed Pastor J's understanding of and attitude toward the culture(s) of which he is part?
- How might this upheaval in his "family culture" cause him to alter the focus of his ministry in the congregation he serves?
- How might Pastor J minister and witness to his own children?
- Invite and encourage anyone in the group who is concerned about his own child(ren) to share and to receive counsel and support from his brother pastors. See Gal 6:2.

### Case Study #2

Trinity Lutheran Church, an old urban parish, is now in a community in transition. Once populated by ethnic Germans, the area has experienced an influx of immigrants from Africa and Latin America. In order to remain vital and relevant, the dwindling membership is faced with these choices: 1) Do nothing; 2) Sell and relocate elsewhere; 3) Make the congregation more appealing to "outsiders" by setting aside some traditions and practices; 4) Begin and sustain an ethnic ministry; 5) Offer space to another group for ethnic ministry.

- If you were pastor there, what would you advise? Why?

Time permitting, choose several of the questions and observations noted earlier for a more thorough discussion.

Close by praying for self, family, congregation, and all Christians seeking God's will in our ever-changing culture.

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# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### Confession and Witness

#### How Can We Maintain Our Confession and Also Be Strong in Witness?

##### 1. The Issues

We live in an age of choice, and we are constantly being asked to decide between alternatives. Republican or Democrat? PC or Mac? Coke or Pepsi? Paper or plastic? Again and again, forced choices are pressed upon us. The same insistent demand to choose, commit, and take up sides has found its way into the church. Some choices are necessary, even imperative: we cannot serve two masters, and faith in God excludes every rival allegiance.

But some alternatives are false alternatives, pitting competing goods against one another as if they were mutually exclusive opposites. One of the most unhelpful examples of forced choice between false alternatives is the tendency for us to polarize between our commitment to "confession" and our zeal for "witness." Some lay claim to the label "confessional" and give absolute priority to perfecting our doctrinal information. Others grow impatient with careful attention to doctrine because of the urgency of the evangelistic task.

A floor debate at the recent convention of the Synod centered around whether reaching the lost should be *the* priority or *a* priority (among other important tasks) for our life and work together. What do you think was at stake in that debate? [*Encourage participants to reflect honestly about the question of mission as "a/the" priority in the church.*]

Does a passionate dedication to pure doctrine—to the accurate confession of the Gospel—have to push evangelistic witness to the sidelines? Have you seen examples of this?

Is doctrinal orthodoxy an obstacle to bold missionary zeal? Has this happened among us?

***[These questions are meant to spark conversation, and in many settings will not be controversial among participants. But sometimes even brief discussion of these last questions can generate heated conversation, especially if participants disagree about specific examples. The leader needs to encourage open expressions of opinion and concern, without letting participants divide into two polarized camps!]***

##### 2. Scripture Search

Luke 24:44-49

**We are familiar with the so-called great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) which is often referred to as the primary mission text. But each of the four Gospels presents us with its own unique text in which the disciples of Jesus are launched into the world with the good news of Christ crucified and risen.**

This passage might be described as Luke's "Great Commission," and it helps us understand the witness of disciples (then and now) in several important ways. Christ reminds us of His own words ("These are my words that I spoke to you..."). He connects His words and His whole ministry to the rest of the Scriptures ("... everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets..." — the formal principle!), and the central message of the Scriptures is clearly centered on the death and resurrection of Christ (v. 46) for the forgiveness of sins (v. 47 — the material principle!). The message is for the whole world (v. 47), and the ones who will do the witnessing are Christ's disciples (v. 48). Finally, the witness and global proclamation is not dependent on human skill and ability, but is empowered by the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 49).

John 20:19-23

The risen Christ came to his disciples not only to comfort them but to commission and send them out. The Lord's sending of the disciples is the continuation and echo of the Father's sending of Jesus. This means their "mission" (and ours) has no validity or content at all apart from His mission as the crucified and risen Son of the Father. When Jesus speaks here of God the Father "sending" Him, He is sounding a note which is repeated often in John's Gospel. The leader might refer to John 4:34, where Jesus says that the father sent Him to accomplish his work, which includes talking to the Samaritan woman to bring her to faith. And in John 12:44 Jesus directly connects faith in Him with faith in the Father who sent Him. The connection between faith and mission is significant: We believe in God by believing in the Christ He sent, and we are sent only "as" (and because) the Father sent His Son.

This is a very important corrective for us when we start to imagine "mission" as primarily a human activity, first and foremost something we are doing (or are supposed to be doing). But our activity is never the place to start. The sin-forgiving work of the disciples is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who is breathed on the church by the One sent by the Father.

In this connection, respected missiologist David Bosch has pointed out that the way we use the term "mission" to describe the church's activity is actually rather recent. "I have used the word 'mission' as though it had always been the conventional designation for the activity of proclaiming and embodying the gospel among those who had not yet embraced it. My use of the term has been, however, anachronistic. The Latin word *missio* was an expression employed in the doctrine of the Trinity, to denote the sending of the Son by the Father, and of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son." (David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis: 1991, page 228) It is profoundly important to remember that "mission" is always first and foremost God's activity in Christ, into which we are drawn and for which we are empowered with the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

It is surely not possible for Lutherans, formed deeply through Paul's theology especially in Romans and Galatians (and recovered by Luther), to paint some kind of caricature of the Apostle Paul as a merely pragmatic mission strategist. Yet Paul's ministry and writings shape not only our deepest theological reflections but also our commitments to winsome witness among people of all sorts. In fact, those two dimensions (theology and witness) are not separate functions of the

church at all. It is precisely Paul's insight into the doctrine of Christ which moves him to "become all things to all people." His concern through all his preaching is not just that he present correct information, but that he actually bring about a change in heart, the conversion of his hearers, whoever they may be.

Paul does not say here what we can supply from other places: that it ultimately is not Paul who "wins" anybody, but the Spirit who is at work through the word of the gospel. Paul does not say that here, but focuses our attention on his adaptation to the condition of his hearers, as *if* everything depended on Paul's efforts to get the message into the minds and hearts of people of every culture and condition. For Paul what matters is not just a correct and accurate understanding of the gospel — can anyone doubt his passion about that? — but getting message heard by as many people as possible.

Colossians 4:2-6

This passage is an exhortation to missionary prayer. Paul calls on the Christians in Colosse to pray for him, and more specifically to pray that God would provide an opportunity for the gospel to be heard. Faced with such an opportunity, Paul wants "to declare the mystery of Christ" and to do so accurately (v. 4). In other words, preparation for witness involves not only study and clear understanding, but also watchful, thankful prayer for opportunities to speak the message.

It is then clear (v 5) that Paul also expects the Colossian believers not only to pray for him in his witness opportunities, but also to encounter and make use of such opportunities themselves. Paul leads them (and us) to understand that interaction and grace-filled conversations with those outside the church will be a normal and welcome part of the Christian's life. And those conversations always require some sanctified wisdom in order to know what to say and how to say it (v. 6).

Acts 18:24-28

The story of Apollos in Ephesus is a fascinating case study of missionary zeal and doctrinal inadequacy! His skills were impressive, his Biblical knowledge was thorough, and his dedication to deploying skills for the cause of preaching Christ could not be denied. As Luke describes him and his work in vv. 24 and 25, it is clear that we are to approve of him and his efforts. He is in many ways an exemplary missionary in the early church. So the mention of his defective doctrine of baptism comes as something of a shock! (Paul may have encountered some of Apollos' converts later in Ephesus, since they also seemed to only know of John's baptism, not baptism in the name of Jesus, Acts 19:1-5.) But Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and provide further "more accurate" instruction, and that apparently did the trick. He went on to further fruitful and effective Christ-glorifying ministry in Greece, and believers were encouraged and helped by his powerful preaching.

It is hazardous to attempt to draw doctrine (or even "principles"!) from a narrative such as this one (a chronic problem in the interpretation of the Book of Acts!). But it seems safe to offer one or two applications. First, Apollos was regarded as an important proclaimer of the gospel of Jesus even before his understanding of baptism was corrected. Second, Priscilla and Aquila did not simply overlook or "let slide" what they recognized as a serious gap or deficiency in his doctrine. Thorough, accurate command of Christian teaching, no less than practical eloquence and fervent zeal, belong to the mission task of "teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus" (v. 25). In brief, doctrine and witness are inseparable.

### 3. Our Confessions Speak

“To obtain such [saving, justifying] faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.” (Augsburg Confession, Article V. Kolb-Wengert, page 40)

**This familiar passage is most often cited as a definition of the Office of the Holy Ministry. What is not always recognized is the way in which it connects justifying, saving faith (see Article IV) with the hearing (not just the “speaking”) of the gospel. That is to say, the word of the gospel in all its forms (preached, written, sacramental) is precisely the means by which the Spirit works to produce and sustain that kind of true faith in people, but only “in those who hear the gospel.” The word does not work by magic, as if the authorized preacher wielded some kind of automatic power simply by mouthing correct vocabulary. The preacher’s task can be described as “proclamation,” but that designation can run the risk of ignoring the importance of presenting the message of Christ in a way that people can actually hear it. This is most obviously the case when we think of language: for most of us, it will be of no benefit to listen to even the finest sermon in Hungarian, since we simply cannot hear the gospel in that language even if the words are spoken clearly and within earshot. In such a case it wouldn’t matter at all that the preacher was thoroughly orthodox and faithfully accurate in his sermon. One might say that the gospel had been proclaimed, but it would not be fair to say that the gospel had been heard in such a situation. The bottom line is that the proclamation of the word, the witness of preaching, accommodates itself to the hearers in whatever ways are necessary to let them really hear the gospel.**

“This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it and also in order that it may find approval and gain followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. In this way many, led by the Holy Spirit, may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of redemption, so that we may all remain together eternally in this kingdom that has now begun.... All this is nothing more than to say” ‘Dear Father, we ask you first to give us your Word, so that the gospel may be properly preached throughout the world...’” (Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, Second Petition. Kolb-Wengert, page 447, emphasis added)

**In the Small Catechism, Luther’s explanation of the Second Petition speaks only of the kingdom coming to “us” (i.e., to the simple, ordinary Christians who are learning to speak their faith). The Large Catechism expands and amplifies that simple explanation in very helpful ways. Specifically, the passage quoted here helps us re-connect two functions (or ministries) which are very often distinguished or even pitted against each other.**

**When we pray that we who are already believers “may remain faithful and grow daily,” we have in view the regular pastoral care of the faithful which is sometimes cavalierly belittled as “maintenance ministry.” Any careless neglect of such ministry simply fails to understand that “maintaining” us in the faith require the daily miracle of God’s Holy Spirit at work through the gospel. This is not a small thing at all, because this is what it looks like when God brings his kingdom among us, and what we are taught to pray for. God’s kingdom coming among looks like that: when Christians remain faithful and grow in the word of Christ and the confession of his name.**

**At the same time, the very same prayer for God's kingdom to come among us embraces what we call "mission work," or the spread of the gospel message among those who do not yet believe, all over the world. So God's kingdom coming also looks like this: many people everywhere coming to faith in Christ through the powerful witness which advances victoriously against all the devil's influence and power.**

**Picture these three scenes: first, a pastor bringing Grandma Schmidt the Lord's Supper in the nursing home for the umpteenth time, providing her spiritual care and food through her final days on earth; second, an evangelist's bold and eloquent public witness to Christ in a predominantly Muslim village in India; and third, the theologians at the Council of Nicaea hammering out the precise wording of the creed to clarify the controversial question about the person of Christ. Now consider this: all three of those scenes are answers to the same prayer: "Thy kingdom come."**

#### **4. Points to Ponder**

Forcing a choice between "confession" (doctrine) and "witness" (mission) is a false, unbiblical alternative.

The church's mission grows out of Christ's own mission to save sinners, and always involves an accurate and growing knowledge of Christ, drawn from the Scriptures.

Pure doctrinal information without bold witness is unfaithful to Christ, and is not a true confession.

#### **5. For Conversation**

"Any theology-minus-mission is simply false theology, and any evangelism-minus-theology is no evangel at all." Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Is it possible to become too interested in theological study? Is it possible to be too focused on reaching the lost?

Is it reasonable when some worry that an emphasis on "missions" may compromise our confessional integrity? On the other hand, can preoccupation with doctrinal correctness handicap our gospel witness in the world? What can we do together to avoid these risks?

Pray together for God's kingdom to come, guided by Luther's comments in the Large Catechism quoted above. Pray together for your own faithful, daily growth. And pray that many others may hear the Word and be brought to saving faith in Christ.

*[The leader will want to ensure that adequate time is left for each discussion group to spend in prayer centered around the Second Petition. Participants should be encouraged to pray for each other individually in their ministries, and well as for our Synod and mission efforts locally and globally.]*

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# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### The Way We Worship What Scriptural values guide our worship?

#### The Issue

**Read aloud the little case study below. It is meant to introduce the topic and foster an initial large-group conversation.**

Pastor Jim arrived a year ago as the new pastor of Zion Lutheran Church. An experienced pastor with a heart for both liturgical worship and evangelism, Jim is being asked by Zion's leadership to begin what they call a "contemporary service." When Jim asks, "What does 'contemporary' mean?" the response is, "We'd like a more informal service with contemporary Christian music led by a praise band. You know, we want something close to Crossroads Church, the big non-denominational church in our neighborhood that's growing so fast." They add, "But we want it to be Lutheran, too."

When Jim asks, "Why do we need to change?" he gets all kinds of answers from "We want to appeal to the seeker" to "We need an alternative to our traditional worship." Jim struggles with what to do. He wonders if the alternative contemporary service his leaders want will compromise Zion's theological and liturgical integrity. He questions whether worship should be designed for seekers who are not yet Christian. Jim also struggles with the consequences for his ministry if he refuses to act.

**Ask each of the three questions below of the entire group. Allow time for a variety of responses. Pastor Jim could make mistakes on the side of an autocratic leadership style or on the side of "caving in" and moving ahead without adequate study and preparation. On the up side, Jim has an opportunity with his congregation to teach and clarify the values that underpin their worship practice – the focus of this Bible study.**

*What would you advise Jim to do as he responds to this request?*

*Where might Jim go wrong?*

*In what sense is this a real opportunity, a teachable moment?*

#### Scripture Search

**You may choose to read each Scripture text and deductively provide commentary regarding worship values. An inductive approach is to assign a text to teams of pastors, asking them to identify the worship values they see in that text. You could then put these values up on newsprint as they surface, offering your own commentary along the way, using the examples provided below.**

The texts below provide foundational values for decisions concerning our theology and practice of worship. What values for worship do you find in each of these texts?

**Examples are offered here of worship values drawn from each of the texts.**

- Psalm 98

**Because the LORD continues to do marvelous things, our worship is always new.**

**The LORD and His mighty acts on our behalf are the focus of our worship.**

**We approach God in worship with a sense of reverent awe and wonder.**

**In worship God's people testify to His presence and power in the world.**

**We worship with a variety of instruments.**

**The single most characteristic mood of our worship is jubilant joy.**

- Isaiah 29:13/Matthew 15:8-9

**God desires our worship to be genuine and from the heart.**

**Worship goes wrong when it becomes just a matter of keeping human traditions.**

- Luke 4:14-21

**As in synagogue worship, our worship treasures the public reading of the great texts of the Scriptures.**

**The Word in worship is given meaning and application for our lives.**

**Christ is taught and proclaimed in worship.**

- John 4:19-24

**Authentic worship turns not on place or tradition but on spirit and truth.**

**We are called not to worship our worship, but to worship the Father.**

- Acts 2:42-47

**Worship is at the center of our life together as Christians.**

**When we come together in public worship, we do the work of worship as one Body, with the operative pronouns in the plural.**

- Romans 12:1-2

**Our whole life, offered as a sacrifice to God, is worship.**

**Our worship sets us apart as different from the world.**

- Colossians 2:16-23

**Especially in worship, we must not be enslaved to human traditions, especially when they obscure the centrality of Christ.**

- Colossians 3:15-17

**The Word of God in all its richness is the substance and dynamic of our worship.**

**We use a variety of musical forms in worship, reflecting our heritage and our variety in background and gifts.**

**By the way we worship, in substance and in style, we teach and confess the faith.**

- Revelation 7:9-17

**Our worship is eschatological, giving us a foretaste of heaven's worship before the throne and the Lamb.**

**Now, as in heaven, we are moved to praise by the power and grace of God.**

### **Our Confessions Speak<sup>1</sup>**

**The quotations below present a healthy tension in the Confessions concerning the way we worship, our worship "traditions, rites, and ceremonies." In the current worship wars, we look for a confessional quote that will bolster our side of the debate, and there is enough in the Confessions to keep both sides well armed.**

**A closer look, though, reveals that the Lutheran Confessions hold a wise and cautious attitude toward variety in worship substance and styles. On the one hand, as the first quote indicates, it is not necessary for the true unity of the church that all Christians worship alike everywhere. What is necessary for our unity are the pure teaching of the gospel and the right administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.**

**On the other hand, as the second and third quotes show, the Confessions hold high "the useful and ancient ordinances" in worship which continue to teach God's truth to God's people. What's more, the Confessions cherish the peace and harmony that come with uniform practice, counseling an attitude of love that will sometimes bear with a "somewhat burdensome" worship practice for the sake of peace in the church.**

**The three quotes below seem to capture this tension between a healthy freedom in worship practice and a cautious love that promotes harmony through uniformity.**

**After your introduction of the three excerpts from the Confessions, give pastors an opportunity to offer their own responses to the quotes.**

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. (AC 7, 1-3).

But just as the different lengths of day and night do not undermine the unity of the church, so we maintain that different rites instituted by human beings do not undermine the true unity of the church, although it pleases us when universal rites are kept for the sake of tranquility. Thus, in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's Day, and other more important festival days. With a very grateful spirit, we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline by which it is profitable to educate and teach common folk and the ignorant. (AP 7, 33)

Nevertheless, we teach that liberty in these matters should be exercised moderately so that the inexperienced may not take offense and, on account of an abuse of liberty, become more hostile to the true teaching of the gospel. Nothing in the customary rites may be changed without good reason. Instead, in order to foster harmony, those ancient customs should be observed that can be observed without sin or without proving to be a great burden. In this very assembly we have sufficiently shown that, for the sake of love, we will reluctantly observe adiaphora with others, even if such things may prove to be somewhat burdensome. (AP 15, 51-52).

## 12 Points to Ponder

**These points are intended to be gleanings from our study so far. You might read through them all once and then ask if pastor have any comments on any one of the points. Additional notes are provided for a few of the points. Note No. 6 especially.**

1. Spiritual worship encompasses our entire lives of sacrifice.
2. Public or corporate worship is at the heart of Christian community.
3. In worship we kneel in awe before our great God who has done mighty things.
4. God acts in worship through His means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
5. The Word of God is both the substance of worship and its dynamic power.
6. The historic *ordo* of worship (Baptism, Confession and Absolution, Praise, Scripture Readings, Sermon, Creed, Prayers, Thanksgiving, Communion, and Blessing) provides dynamic movement and a meaningful sequence for worship.

**A serious concern of many in the church today is the loss of the *ordo* of the historic liturgy. This treasure with its movement, grace, and crucial juxtapositions (one act set against another) is threatened by the use of a non-denominational orders missing many of the historic elements or playing with their order. Be sure to give pastors an opportunity to talk about the endangered *ordo*. What's behind the move to a new and "non-liturgical" order of worship? How important is the *ordo* to us?**

**Along the way, you may wish to share the quote below from Gordon Lathrop on the significance of the *ordo*. You may want to put it up on newsprint or a slide.**

In Christian liturgy, it is the assembly itself, encountering Christ in word and sacrament, that becomes a hole in the fabric of things, through which life-giving power flows into the world. But this hole is in this world and for this world. Indeed, the structures of the world urgently need such a hole. Similarly, in the Christian liturgy, the unity of the assembly with Christ through word and sacrament, through the dialectic of the *ordo*, becomes the *communitas* that some anthropologists have noted as characteristic of ritually healthy cultures. Such cultures experience *communitas* in rituals that are marginal to the daily status-structures of society and yet utterly necessary for keeping those status-structures penultimate and malleable to change.<sup>2</sup>

7. Public worship spans heaven and earth and space and time, moving a village church to global, universal concerns and placing it in the company of saints and angels.

**This quote from Ron Feuerhahn makes the point well and is worth sharing with your group:**

In the divine liturgy the church finds itself at the threshold between earth and heaven (Ps 96:5-6). Here we encounter heaven on earth. The church sings her *Kyrie* to her Lord on the occasion of his weekly (at least) *parousia*, his coming to be with us. At the altar and font and in the pulpit, God is present with his gifts. These are the most visible locations of God's presence on earth. The liturgy says that the church is in the world, but that God is also here.<sup>3</sup>

**Ask how global or even cosmic our worship is these days. When do we go global in worship? When do we go cosmic? And why is this important?**

8. Integrity and authenticity are to characterize our worship.
9. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions allow for variety in worship practice and, at the same time, value the peace that comes from uniformity in practice.
10. Public worship may include a variety of musical genres and instruments.

**You may want to ask here if any current musical genres should be off limits in our churches. Also, "Is any one genre of music better than another for use in worship?"**

11. In worship we teach and confess what we believe.

Ask, "**What more can we do explicitly to make worship a teaching moment?**"

12. Caution needs to be given to the form, substance, and style of worship practice lest a church adopt a practice expressing false theology and values.

**Choices we make in hymnody and the language of home-grown confessions and creeds can carry false theology. Ask, "What more can we do to be sure that the**

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 212.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald R. Feuerhahn, "Speaking *For*, Not Just *To* the Church," *Liturgical Preaching: Contemporary Essays*, Paul J. Grime and Dean W. Nadasdy, eds. (St. Louis: CPH, 2001), 251.

**language of our worship honors our theology?” Certainly the genius of Lutheran worship has been its avid use of the Scriptures for its liturgical language.**

### **For Conversation**

**At least half of this Bible study should be set aside for small group conversation. In the interest of time, you may want to highlight three or four of the questions below for discussion.**

Spend time in groups of 3-5 conversing around any or all of the following:

1. Describe your congregation's worship practice and briefly explain why you worship the way you do.
2. Choose a statement from "12 Points to Ponder" above which you believe is most crucial right now in the on-going debate on the way we worship. Explain why you believe it is so important.
3. Now choose a statement from "12 Points to Ponder" with which you disagree in some sense. Share your point of contention.
4. What would a non-believer learn about your church from the way you worship?
5. In what specific ways are you sensitive to the visitor in worship?
6. Is there any genre of music that by nature should be disqualified from use in worship? Explain your response.
7. How important to you is uniformity in worship practice among churches in fellowship? Defend your response.
8. How do you think your people approach worship, more as individuals or as members of a body of believers?
9. Close with prayers, focusing on one another's needs and hopes for worship in each of our specific settings.

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# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### WELCOME TO THE TABLE

#### Who is worthy to commune at the Lord's Table?

#### The Issues

*Who is worthy to commune at the Lord's Table? The policy of close(d) communion does not deal solely with the personal worthiness of the individual. It has other dimensions as well.*

*In this study we will discuss:*

1. *What is the Lord's Supper?*
2. *What is meant by "worthy to receive"?*
3. *What is responsible pastoral care (Resolution 3-08, 1989 Convention resolution)?*
4. *What is meant by "confessing the same faith"?*

The assignment given is to prepare a study on "Who is Worthy to Commune at the Lord's Table?" This may be answered with one simple sentence from the Small Catechism of blessed Martin Luther. "...He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, **given and shed for you for the remission of sins**. But he who does not believe these words, or doubts is unworthy and unprepared" (SC VI).

However, in the past four decades the question of "close(d) Communion" has raised other issues. This does not deal solely with the personal worthiness of the individual, but has other dimensions as well.

Another issue which has been raised is the interpretation given to 1 Corinthians 11:29 "... he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the (Lord's) body." The word, "*body*," here is interpreted to mean the mystical body of Christ, that is, the church. Thus the refusal to commune persons of another denomination may be the sin of failing to discern that they are members of the mystical body of Christ, the church. This would make our policy of close(d) Communion unscriptural.

Yet another issue is the question of what is meant by "... the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care in extraordinary situations and circumstances." This is a reference to communing members of churches which are not in pulpit and altar fellowship with us (Resolution 3-08; 1989 Synodical Convention).

## Scripture Search

### 1. *What is the Lord's Supper?*

1 Corinthians 11:23-25  
Mark 14:22-25

Matthew 26:26-29  
Luke 22:14-20

"The Lutheran Reformers propose to base their Eucharistic doctrine on the four accounts of the words of institution. Even 1 Corinthians 10:16-21 is used merely to supplement the insights received from the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20) and 1 Cor 11:23-25."<sup>1</sup>

The words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 are introduced by a declaration that Paul had delivered to the Corinthians exactly what he had received from the Lord Himself. The words, "*receive*" and "*deliver*," are technical terms in rabbinic circles. The precise words, "*received*" and "*entrusted*," are not some general information, subject to change, or personal and subjective interpretation.

### 2. *What is meant by "worthy to receive"?*

1 Corinthians 11:27  
Galatians 5:19-21

1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:9, 10

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27). The original text indicates that the crime that has been committed is against the body and blood of the Lord. An unworthy eating and drinking of the bread and wine is not an insignificant activity.

Martin Chemnitz writes that the word used in the Greek text (*enochos*) is used in Deut 19:10 ("There shall not be in you one guilty of blood"). In the context this means that one incurs guilt that brings punishment or divine judgment. "Therefore when Paul says, 'He will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,' he is not describing the punishment itself...but the cause of the crime whence he incurs the punishment or judgment he describes."<sup>2</sup>

The old collect for communicants also prays, "...keep them from impenitence and unbelief that no one may partake of this sacrament to his damnation, take off from them the spotted garment of the flesh and of their own righteousness, and adorn them with the garment of righteousness purchased with Thy blood" (The Lutheran Liturgy). This is a reference to the priestly clothing which Aaron and his sons were to wear when they came into the presence of the Lord (Exodus 28:43). "They shall be upon Aaron and his sons ...when they come near the altar...that they do not incur iniquity and die."

"But now I have written to you not to keep company with **anyone named a brother**, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard or an extortioner -- **not even to eat with such a person**" (1 Cor 5:11). 1 Cor 6:9, 10 describes those who do not inherit the kingdom of God: "...fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners." Galatians 5:19-21 also speaks in a similar manner of those who practice activities by which they forfeit the inheritance of the Kingdom of God: "...adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries...those who continue to practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

3. *What is responsible pastoral care (Resolution 3-08, 1989 Convention resolution)?*

*Matthew 11:22*  
*1 Timothy 5:22*

*1 Corinthians 5:11-13*

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:22). This supper is for all those who are troubled because of their sins and seek to find rest for their souls. This especially includes the person who is troubled because they cannot be rid of the feelings of anger toward someone who has injured them. “I wish I could be rid of this anger, I know it is wrong.” Here is the Savior’s invitation:

“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person...Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor 5:11, 13). The letters of John in the New Testament address this also. “Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 Jn 2:22). Those who deny the incarnation of the Son of God also are antichrist (1 Jn 4:1-3).

1 Tim 5:22 warns against sharing in the sins of others. The word for “*share*” used here is the same word used in 1 Cor 10:21. “You cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons.” Admission to the Lord’s Table of those who openly continue to act and believe contrary to the doctrine of Christ makes us guilty of sharing in their sin.

4. *What is meant by “confessing the same faith”?*

*Jude 3*  
*1 Corinthians 15:2, 3*

*1 Corinthians 1:10*  
*Galatians 1:6*

A shared confession of “...to contend the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) is required by Holy Scripture. This appeal is clearly affirmed in St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). In Chapter 15 Paul uses a technical term about the gospel which he preached to the Corinthians: “... by which you are saved if you hold fast the exact word which I preached to you” (1 Cor 15:2). Once again, as in 11:22, he uses technical rabbinic terms, “I delivered to you...that which I also received...” (1 Cor 15:3).

On the basis of this shared external confession of the faith we determine whether the person shares with us the same biblical faith or doctrine. This includes the confession that in the Lord’s Supper the body and blood of Christ is given under the bread and wine to all who eat and drink. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (participation or sharing) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16)? The Lord’s Supper is Gospel. Therefore there must be agreement on this sacrament before there can be communion of eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper together.

## Our Confessions Speak

### 1. What is the Lord's Supper?

- *"It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and drink."* (SC, VI)<sup>3</sup>
- *"...in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly tendered with the things that are seen, bread and wine."* (Ap. X, 59)
- *"...are given and received not only by the godly but also by wicked Christians."* (SA, VI, 1)

The body referred to is the "body born of Mary." The Apology makes it clear that "... in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly tendered, with the things that are seen, bread and wine, **to those who receive the sacrament.**"<sup>4</sup>

The Smalcald Articles add the words, "... are given and received not only by the godly, but also by wicked Christians."<sup>5</sup>

In an effort to accommodate those who did not agree (e.g. Calvin), Melancthon produced the Variata of the Augsburg Confession. The 10th article of the Variata reads: "Concerning the supper of the Lord they (i.e. our churches) teach that the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, are **offered** to those who eat in the Lord's Supper." Calvin and others (the Sacramentarians) were willing to subscribe to the Variata.

The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) in the Communion liturgy does not invite us to some sort of ethereal heavenly vision of the Lamb, but to the Lamb of God who is present with his body and Blood for us to eat and drink. Martin Chemnitz writes, "The Nicene Canon, when it teaches us to raise our minds, says, that faith must recognize that **on the holy table has been placed the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.**"<sup>6</sup>

### 2. What is meant by "worthy to receive"?

- *"...we have ascribed to repentance (or conversion) these two parts, namely contrition and faith...contrition is the true terror of conscience..."* (Ap. XII (V))
- *"... despisers of the sacrament should be exhorted to repentance..."* (Ap. X XI 62)
- *The basis for such repentance are the Ten Commandments – "Here consider your station according to the ten commandments..."* (SC V 20)

The apostle is not speaking of the individual who may occasionally fall into these sins. He is speaking about persons who continue without contrition, that is, the fear of God's judgment, and are therefore without faith. The confessions define repentance as consisting of two parts, contrition, (i.e. the terror of conscience before God), and faith in Jesus as their Savior.<sup>7</sup>

The eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper is a "proclaiming of the death of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is the Gospel. It is not in some way added to the Gospel as an "ordinance" for the church to observe. Neither is it an act by which an inner fellowship or "communion" with one another is expressed. Such interpretations make law out of the Gospel. No one should be coerced or urged to receive the sacrament as a matter of obedience. Concerning this our confessions say, "Those who fail to commune – despisers of the sacrament should be exhorted to repentance. Christ (Paul) says in 1

Corinthians 11:29, that those who eat unworthily eat judgment to themselves. The pastors, accordingly, do not compel those who are not qualified to use the sacraments.”<sup>8</sup>

The apostle urges us to judge ourselves. “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor 11:31). This judging of self is described in blessed Martin Luther’s exhortation to confession in the Small Catechism (V. “*How the Unlearned Should Be Taught To Confess*”). The basis for this is the Ten Commandments. “Here consider your station according to the ten commandments...” Concerning this the Apology says, “To judge signifies sins. This condemnation truly occurs in contrition and a change of life. The entire repentance, contrition, faith, the good fruits, obtain the mitigation of public and private calamities.”<sup>9</sup>

3. *What is responsible pastoral care (Resolution 3-08, 1898 Convention resolution)?*

- *“Therefore the bishop (pastor) has the power of the order, i.e., the ministry of word and sacraments; he has also the power of jurisdiction, i.e., the authority to excommunicate those guilty of open crimes and again to absolve them when they are converted and seek absolution.” (Ap. XXVIII (XIV))*
- *“What Hearers Owe to Their Pastors:...Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account...” Hebrews 13:17 (SC (Appendix II))*

The Lutheran Confessions cannot envision a church (congregation) where the power of order and jurisdiction is not present in the person of the bishop (pastor).<sup>10</sup> The church consists of pastors and hearers (LC I), “... bishops, pastors, hearers” (SC, Table of Duties). “Tend the flock that is your charge...” (1 Pet 5:2) is the instruction given to elders (pastors). The Pastor is charged with caring for the sheep of his flock and will have to give an account on the Day of Judgment (Heb 13:17). Those persons who do not submit to the pastoral care and oversight are not members of the confessing community and are not to be admitted to the sacrament.

Not every Christian is to be admitted, even though they have not committed offenses for which they might be excluded from the communion of the church. Baptized children are members of the church, but until they have received instruction they are not communed. The Lutheran Confessions present a minimum requirement for their admission to the Lord’s Supper. They are to know from memory and understand the test of The Ten Commandments, the Baptismal Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the words of institution of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, without formal explanations.<sup>11</sup> The Apology also lists certain requirements for admission to the Lord’s Supper. Persons are admitted “... after having been first instructed and examined (whether they know and understand anything of the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments), and (have been) absolved.”<sup>12</sup>

4. *What is meant by “confessing the same faith”?*

- *“And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.” (AC VII 2)*

It has been suggested that the words, “Not discerning the (Lord’s) body” (1 Cor 11:29) means discerning the mystical body of Christ, the Church. An essay delivered in our Synod quoted the Anchor Bible’s Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. “The body of the Lord equals ourselves in this context, distinguished by common participation in eating His supper. Failure to discriminate His body is the same as failure to discriminate ourselves

and this means failure to recognize people together in the church constitute the very presence of Christ and are to be treated appropriately.” Thus we become guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ because we do not discern that all who belong to the mystical body of Christ are to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper.

This was the argument of the Sacramentarians at the time when the Formula of Concord was prepared. The argument of the Sacramentarians was: The bread is the body of Christ, that is, it is that by which we have fellowship with the body of Christ which is the church. To this the Formula responds, “...godless hypocrites, as Judas...who have no communion with Christ, and go to the table of the Lord...also receive **orally** in the Sacrament the true body and (true) blood of Christ, and by their unworthy drinking grievously sin against the body and blood of the Lord.”<sup>13</sup>

Agreement in the Gospel is essential for the true unity of the church. This is expressed in the doctrine or teaching of a church. Our eating and drinking together in the Lord’s Supper does not create unity. “And to the **true unity** of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.”<sup>14</sup>

The sainted Dr. Arthur Carl Piepkorn wrote concerning this, “...the Christian Eucharist is and under all circumstances must remain essentially private, the restricted meal of a fellowship of people who have been baptized into the same Christ and who recognize one another and are recognized by one another as confessors of the same faith and sharers of the same life.”<sup>15</sup> And again concerning close(d) Communion he wrote, “But I am suggesting it is wrong to admit individuals to the Holy Eucharist indiscriminately merely because they are physically present, with no effort to determine if they have been baptized, with no effort to determine their continuing status as members of the church, and with no assurance that they have the requisite dispositions of sorrow for their present wrong-doing and faith in the atoning work of our Lord that is made present again in this mystery.”<sup>16</sup>

## Points to Ponder

The following questions may be used in a large group discussion:

### 1. *What is the Lord’s Supper?*

*1 Corinthians 11:23-25*  
*Mark 14:22-25*

*Matthew 26:26-29*  
*Luke 22:14-20*

- *Are the words, “Christ is truly and really present,” an accurate statement in agreement with these Scriptures?*

### 2. *What is meant by “worthy to receive”?*

*1 Corinthians 11:27*  
*Galatians 5:19-21*

*1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:9, 10*

- *What does it mean to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord?*
- *Who is meant by the word “brother” in 1 Corinthians 5:11? Identify what these passages have to say about worthy/unworthy eating and drinking.*

3. *What is responsible pastoral care (Resolution 3-08, 1989 Convention resolution)?*

*Matthew 11:22  
1 Timothy 5:22*

*1 Corinthians 5:11-13*

- *Matthew 11:22 -- Discuss the application of this scripture in Pastoral care.*
- *1 Corinthians 5:11-13 -- Discuss these Scriptures and apply them to responsible pastoral care.*
- *1 Timothy 5:22 -- What does this say about indiscriminate admission to the Lord's Supper?*

4. *What is meant by "confessing the same faith"?*

*Jude 3  
1 Corinthians 15:2, 3*

*1 Corinthians 1:10  
Galatians 1:6*

- *What is a different gospel?*
- *Is the Lord's Supper Gospel?*
- *If there is no agreement on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, does this affect the unity of the church?*

## **For Conversation**

These questions, developed by the Editorial Team of *Faithful & Afire*, are designed for small group (3-4) conversations, allowing pastors to speak from their own perspectives and congregational settings.

1. *Describe your congregation's current policy and practice regarding admission to Holy Communion.*
2. *In a few sentences make your case for your policy and practice being in accord with the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and LCMS doctrine and practice. Whenever possible, refer to the material above.*
3. *Where do you see commonality regarding the Lord's Supper in the LCMS? Where do you see diversity?*
4. *What for you is the confessional aspect of participating in the Lord's Supper? In other words, on what must we agree to commune together?*
5. *What do you do in your church to teach the meaning and efficacy of the Lord's Supper?*
6. *Pray for one another, keeping in mind your responses to the above questions and one another's personal and pastoral needs.*

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *The Church, Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, ed. Michael Plekon and William S. Wiecher, (Delhi, NY: ALPB Books, 2000, 2006), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: CPH, 1979), 129.

<sup>3</sup> SC VI 1,2 *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis, CPH, 1921) 554-555.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Ap X, 57, 246-247.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, SA Part III VI, 1, 492-493.

<sup>6</sup> Chemnitz, *supra*, 164.

<sup>7</sup> *Triglotta*, *supra*, Ap XII(V) 29, 258-259.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Ap X XI, 62, 250-251.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Ap VI, 67, 302-303.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Ap XXVIII(XIV), 12, 13, 446-447 also SA 60, 62, 520-521.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, SC Preface, 6-10, 532-535.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Ap XV(VIII), 40, 324-325.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, FC SD VII, 59, 60, 992-993.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, AC VII, 2, 46-47.

<sup>15</sup> A. C. Piepkorn, *supra*, 182.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.



# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### WOMEN IN MINISTRY

What roles may women take in the life and ministry of the church?

**Note to Leaders:** Most of the commentary below (in bold print) is offered in the sections on “Scripture Search” and “Our Confessions Speak.” This commentary may also be useful in encouraging discussion of the “Points to Ponder” and the questions “For Conversation.” Leaders are also encouraged to familiarize themselves with the position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on specific questions relating to the service of women by reviewing the recommended resources listed at the end of this study guide. The CTCR’s 1985 report, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice*, was a primary resource for developing the “Points to Ponder” in this study and for the commentary in the “Scripture Search” section of the study.

### THE ISSUE

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-28). “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve...” (1 Tim. 2:12-13).

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. If anyone thinks he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:33-37).

Each of these passages was written by the same divinely-inspired author, the apostle Paul. If we believe—as we do—that Scripture does not contradict itself, how do we reconcile the contrasting messages conveyed in these passages? Still more challenging, how do we *apply* these truths to specific questions about the service of women in the church today?

### SCRIPTURE SEARCH

What principles emerge from the following sets of passages that apply to this issue?

**The passages below have been selected and grouped in a way that seeks to help participants identify and understand certain foundational Scriptural principles regarding the service of women in the church (see “Points to Ponder” below). Much more, of course, could be said about each of these far-reaching (and sometimes complex) passages, but leaders are encouraged to help participants to focus on the key points and principles that relate specifically to this study.**

1. Genesis 1:26-28; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 3:26-29

The passages listed above have this in common: they help us to see what *man and woman* have in common, according to God's inspired and inerrant Word. Genesis 1:27 makes it clear that God created *both* man and woman in his own image and likeness. There is no indication of any "ranking" or distinction in divine "image and likeness" in this text. Genesis 1:28 says that God blessed both man and woman, and gave both of them the authority and responsibility to "subdue [the earth] and have dominion over...every living thing that moves on the earth." This "co-regency" of man and woman over God's creation is pronounced "very good" by God in Genesis 1:31.

Not only do men and women have equal standing before God as Creator, but—according to passages like 1 Pet. 2:9-10 and Gal. 3:26-29—they also have equal standing before God as Redeemer through the justifying work of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of his Spirit. As those baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26), men and women are treasured (and fully equal) members of God's "chosen race" and "royal priesthood," the church. Both also share equally the great privilege and responsibility of proclaiming "the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

2. Matthew 19:4; Ephesians 5:21-33; Philippians 2:3-11

This set of passages highlights the truth that equality does not imply sameness. "From the beginning," Jesus says in Matt. 19:4, God "made them male and female." Our embodiment as male or female human beings—together with the unique blessings and distinctive realities associated with this embodiment—is rooted not in the fall, but in God's marvelous, miraculous and mysterious design for his human creatures. Sadly, what was intended by God as a blessing is often misunderstood and abused by sinful men and women. But the design itself is part of the created order which God himself declared "very good."

In Ephesians 5 the apostle urges all Christians to "walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (5:2). One of the ways we do this, says Paul, is by "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:21). In our various relationships with one another, each of us is to "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant..." (Phil. 2:5-7). Christ's submission to his Father in no way implies "inferiority" to the Father. On the contrary, because of this submission "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus"—the One who made Himself nothing!—every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:8-11).

Christians confess with the Scriptures and the ecumenical creeds that all three persons of the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are co-equal in substance, majesty and glory, and are equally worthy of our adoration and praise. To deny this is heresy—just as it is heresy to deny that there is no distinction between the persons of the Trinity. They are equal, but they are not identical. In God's wise and mysterious economy, each divine person of the Trinity, in full cooperation with the other persons, contributes uniquely to God's great and gracious works of creation, redemption and sanctification.

In Eph. 5:25-33 Paul explains how the relationship between men and women in marriage reflects—in a real yet mysterious way—Christ’s relationship with His bride, the church. The headship of the husband is rooted in and exemplified by the headship of Christ Himself: self-giving, self-sacrificing, exercising leadership and authority only and always for the sake of serving, saving, and sanctifying His beloved bride. Likewise, the submission of the wife is rooted in and exemplified by the church’s submission to Christ—a willing, joyful, grateful response to the Bridegroom’s underserved and inestimable love.

These passages make it clear that the oneness of male and female *in Christ* affirmed by Paul in Gal. 3: 26-29 does not nullify the distinction between them given by God *in creation*. Rather, this redemptive oneness sets both men and women free to relate to each other in accordance with God’s original will and design. When Paul insists that “there is neither male or female...in Christ Jesus,” he does not mean that faith in Christ obliterates any and all distinction between the sexes. Woman does not “become” man (or vice-versa) through faith in Christ, any more than Jew “becomes” Greek (or vice-versa). All of the redeemed are fully equal in Christ before our gracious God, but each retains his or her unique and God’s given identity and is called to respond to God’s grace in Christ in ways that, according to Scripture, are commensurate with that identity.

3. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 1 Corinthians 14:33-40; 1 Timothy 2:8-15

In 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2, Paul applies the principle of headship and subordination to questions about women “having authority,” “teaching,” and “speaking” in the church. These passages have been interpreted in a variety of ways, many of which call into question the authority, harmony and unity of the text of Scripture itself. Any interpretation that takes the Bible’s claims about its own authority seriously, however, must come to terms with the following truths.

First, Paul views the instructions given in these passages not as his own personal advice or opinion, but as “a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Outward customs like head coverings may change (1 Cor. 11:4-15), but the underlying principles regarding headship—“the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife [or woman] is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3)—do not change. Second, these passages also underscore the point that headship and subordination in no way imply superiority or inferiority. “The head of Christ is God:” this does not mean that Christ is “inferior” to God the Father. Similarly, says Paul, “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God” (1 Cor. 11:11-12). From God’s perspective, man and woman are not “in competition” for authority or influence. Each is dependent on the other, and each is called to serve the other—and God’s entire church—in accordance with God’s will and orderly design for His creation (see 1 Cor. 14:40).

These principles undergird Paul’s specific directives in these passages regarding women speaking, teaching, and having authority in the church. It should be noted, first of all, in each of these texts Paul is giving instruction to the Christian congregation gathered for public worship. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul uses the word for speaking (*laleo*) that is frequently used to refer to public preaching (cf. Mark 2:2), rather than the more general word for speaking (*lego*). In 1 Tim. 2:12 Paul uses the word *didaskein* (to teach) when he says that women should not teach men. This word is used throughout this apostolic letter to refer the formal, public proclamation of the Gospel.

Obviously, the apostle is not saying in these passages that women may not speak in church at all nor exercise any kind of authority or teaching in the church that is applicable to men. Otherwise Paul would be contradicting himself, since in 1 Corinthians 11 he provides counsel regarding edifying practices to follow when *women* pray and prophesy in public worship. Whatever such “prophesying” involved, it clearly involved some sort of speaking of God’s Word for the edification of God’s people—both men and women (see 1 Cor. 14:2-5; 29-33). The New Testament speaks elsewhere (see the next set of passages)—with no hint of disapproval—of women “prophetesses” and of women assisting in the Christian instruction of men.

Taking all of this evidence into consideration within its proper context, it seems clear that Paul is referring in these passages to a specific type of “speaking,” “teaching,” and “authority:” the authoritative speaking and teaching that belongs by God’s design and institution to the pastoral office. According to Paul, it is a violation of the relationship that God established between men and women at creation for a woman to carry out the distinctive functions which God—for the sake of order in the church—has assigned to the pastoral office.

4. Acts 21:7-9; Romans 16:1-6; Acts 18:24-26; Phil. 4:2-3

This set of passages illustrates the fact that women served in a variety of significant “offices” and positions in the New Testament church without in any way violating the Scriptural principles of headship and subordination. Unfortunately (from our perspective), we know little about offices such as “prophetess” or “deaconess” in the early church—how they were organized, how they functioned, what responsibilities they were given. The teaching of Apollos done by Priscilla together with her husband Aquila appears to be done in private, but given Apollos’s background—“he was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures...instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:24-25)—Priscilla herself must have been amply equipped and gifted for such teaching. In Romans 16, Paul thanks and commends “Prisca and Aquila,” together with many other men and women who evidently served in key leadership roles in the early church. While Paul teaches, therefore, that it was God’s will that women not serve as pastors, he does not apply the principle of headship and subordination to other forms of service and leadership by women in the church.

5. Luke 22:24-27; Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 3:12-17

In a fallen world, tragically, both headship and subordination—in marriage, in society, and in the church—can be (and often are) misunderstood and abused. It is crucial, therefore, that God’s baptized children “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3). As men and women serve in various ways and positions in the church, they need to remember that “grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:6). Pastors, too, need to bear in mind that Christ gave “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Only when “each part is working properly” does the *one* body of Christ “grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:16).

All of God's chosen ones, both men and women, are to "let the word of Christ dwell in [them] richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). "And whatever you do," says Paul, "in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). Finally—and most importantly—both men and women must be willing and ready to bear with one another and to forgive each other "if one has a complaint against another...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3:13). It is imperative that God's people learn to live and work together day by day in sincere repentance and forgiveness. The church as a whole must also strive to make clear that *biblical* headship and subordination are radically different from popular or contemporary secular interpretations of these concepts. All those—men and women, pastors and laypersons, full-time church workers and volunteers—who have been entrusted with any kind of authority in the church must assume the attitude that Jesus modeled and required: "Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves."

## OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

How do the following passages from the Lutheran Confessions speak to this issue?  
(Note: All citations are drawn from the Tappert edition [Public Domain] of *The Book of Concord*.)

**"Women in ministry" was not an issue under debate in the 16<sup>th</sup> century among Lutherans or between Lutherans and other churches. The following selections from the Confessions do highlight, however, specific doctrines or principles that are important to keep in mind when discussing this issue.**

Augsburg Confession VII, 1-4

1] Also they teach that *one holy Church* is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.  
2] And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and 3] the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. 4] As Paul says: *One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all*, etc. Eph. 4, 5. 6.

Smalcald Articles Part III [7], 1-3

1] The keys are an office and power given by Christ to the Church for binding and loosing sin, not only the gross and well-known sins, but also the subtle, hidden, which are known only to God, as it is written in Ps. 19, 13: *Who can understand his errors?* And in Rom. 7, 25 St. Paul himself complains *that with the flesh he serves the law of sin*. 2] For it is not in our power, but belongs to God alone, to judge which, how great, and how many the sins are, as it is written in Ps. 143, 2: *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified*. 3] And Paul says, 1 Cor. 4, 4: *For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified*.

**Lutherans believe, teach and confess that the church is "the assembly of *all* believers"—both male and female—"among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments administered according to the gospel" (AC VII, 1). The keys are an office and an authority given to the entire *church*, composed of both men and women (SA III [7], 1). In its discussion "Of the Church," the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (1932) builds on these scriptural and confessional truths by emphasizing key facts that apply to *all* members of the church, both men and women:**

**Since the Christians are the Church, it is self-evident that they alone originally possess the spiritual gifts and rights which Christ has gained for, and given to, His Church. Thus St. Paul reminds all believers: "All things**

are yours," 1 Cor. 3:21, 22, and Christ Himself commits to all believers the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:13- 19, 18:17-20, John 20:22, 23, and commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, Matt. 28:19, 20,; 1 Cor. 11:23-25...The officers of the Church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of delegated powers, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Col. 4:17. Naturally all Christians have also the right and the duty to judge and decide matters of doctrine, not according to their own notions, of course, but according to the Word of God, 1 John 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:11. (par. 30)

AC VII also points out that, according to Scripture, "it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere" (AC VII, 4). What is said here about humanly-instituted "ceremonies" also applies to humanly-instituted forms of congregational polity and humanly-instituted offices in the church. In areas where God's Word has not spoken or not spoken clearly (cf. *Brief Statement*, par. 40)—such as (e.g.) women voting or holding lay offices in the church—congregations may have differing practices without compromising or undermining doctrinal unity.

Augsburg Confession V, 1-4

1] That we may obtain this faith, *the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted*. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, 2] the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear 3] the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.

4] They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Lutherans also believe, teach, and confess that the office of the public ministry (the pastoral office) was instituted by God Himself in order to provide the church with a sure and orderly way of offering God's gifts of Word and sacrament to His people (AC V, 1-4; cf. AC XIV). Congregations are "required, by the divine order, to make provision that the Word of God be publicly preached in their midst, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work, whose qualifications and official functions are exactly defined in Scripture, Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:28; 2 Tim. 2:2" (*Brief Statement*, par. 31). One of these "qualifications," according to Scripture, is that pastors be men with certain gifts and aptitudes required for the proper performance of the functions of this office.

FC SD IV, 9-12

9] Therefore, of works that are truly good and well-pleasing to God, which God will reward in this world and in the world to come, faith must be the mother and source; and on this account they are called by St. Paul true *fruits of faith*, as also of *the Spirit*. 10] For, as Dr. Luther writes in the Preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: *Thus faith is a divine work in us, that changes us and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men in heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it [confers] the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing.* 11] *Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done; but before the question is asked, it has wrought them, and is always engaged in doing them. But he who does not do such works is void of faith, and gropes and looks about after faith and good works, and knows neither what faith nor what good works are, yet babbles and prates with many words concerning faith and good works.* 12] [Justifying] *faith is a living, bold [firm] trust in God's grace, so certain that a man would die a thousand times for it [rather than suffer this trust to be wrested from him]. And this trust and knowledge of divine grace renders joyful, fearless, and cheerful towards God and all creatures, which [joy and cheerfulness] the Holy Ghost works through faith; and on account of this, man becomes ready and cheerful, without coercion, to do good to every one, to serve every one,*

*and to suffer everything for love and praise to God, who has conferred this grace on him, so that it is impossible to separate works from faith, yea, just as impossible as it is for heat and light to be separated from fire.*

**Like Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 in the “Scripture Search” section above, Article IV of the Formula of Concord that true faith in Christ is “a living, busy, active, mighty thing,” which “does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them” (FC SD IV, 10-11). This “busy, active, mighty” faith, of course, resides in the hearts and is reflected in the lives of *all* of God’s faithful, both men and women. Although offices and vocations and gifts and opportunities may vary from person to person and congregation to congregation, a faith-filled man or woman of God “is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God, who has shown this grace” in Christ (FC SD IV, 12).**

## **POINTS TO PONDER**

1. Both man and woman were created in the image of God. They are equal in their relationship to God as Creator and in relationship to the rest of creation.
2. Both men and women are redeemed through the blood of Christ. Through faith in Christ, they have equal standing before God, their gracious Father. Baptized by one Spirit into the one body of Christ, men and women are fully equal members of the church, the priesthood of all believers.
3. Equality does not imply sameness. Distinctive identities for man and woman in their relationship to each other are a part of God’s “very good” design for his creation. These distinctive identities are not erased by Christ’s redemption, and should be reflected in the church.
4. Headship and subordination, when applied to the relationship of men and women in the church, do not imply superiority or inferiority. As in the relationship between the Father and the Son, these realities imply orderliness and unity.
5. According to the New Testament, the creational design of male headship requires that women not serve in the divinely-instituted office of the public ministry (the pastoral office).
6. The New Testament does not apply the principle of male headship to other (humanly-instituted) offices and positions in the church. In these areas, decisions about the service of women must be made on the basis of the functions of these offices and what best serves the unity and ministry of the church.
7. The Biblical principles of headship and subordination can easily be misunderstood and abused. It is crucial to bear in mind that both men and women, in their various vocations and positions in the church, are called to serve God and others in love for the sake of Christ’s mission.

## FOR CONVERSATION

1. Over twenty years ago *Time* magazine raised some eyebrows by naming as its 1975 “Man of the Year” twelve *women*. “Across the broad range of American life,” said the article, “from suburban tract homes to state legislatures, from church pulpits to army barracks, women’s lives are profoundly changing, and with them, the traditional relationship between the sexes” (*Time* [Jan. 5, 1976]: 8). What further changes—for better or for worse—have taken place in the last twenty years in “the traditional relationship between the sexes?” How have these changes affected the life of your congregation and your ministry as a pastor?
2. A parishioner says: “God’s Word does not change. How could the Synod change its position on issues like woman suffrage and women serving as congregational president without changing its attitude towards God’s Word?” Your response?
3. Discuss the following statement: *Placing unscriptural **restrictions** on the service of women in the church has the effect of **undermining** the Synod’s position that, according to Scripture, women may not serve as pastors.*
4. Among those whom Paul greets and thanks in Romans 16, how many are women? Name specific women in your congregation who play a key role in supporting and sustaining the mission and ministry in that place.
5. Discuss this scenario: Different congregations in your circuit have differing practices with regard to woman serving in various leadership roles in the congregation. Can there be true “unity” in this situation? Does unity in doctrine require uniformity in practice? Where there are tensions or disagreements in this regard (within or between congregations), how might they be addressed in ways that promote trust, harmony, and integrity?
6. Pray for one another’s life and ministry. Include a prayer for God’s power and blessing for all men and women who serve in the church.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES (available on the Synod’s web site at [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org))

- 1) *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (1932).
- 2) *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice* (CTCR, 1985).
- 3) *The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices with Guidelines for Congregations* (CTCR/President’s Task Force, 2005).
- 4) “Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices” in *CTCR Response to Expressions of Dissent (2004-2006)* (CTCR, 2006).

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# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### PASTORAL FORMATION How does God make a pastor?

#### 1. The Issues

*“Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio Faciunt Theologum”*—“Prayer, meditation, and temptation make a theologian.” Luther’s phrase is familiar and makes sense to most of us. But is it exactly what we want when we’re talking about making a *pastor*? Do these categories fit when we consider the witness of the Scriptures on how God forms and shapes a pastor for service in the church and in the world? Consider the following statement and then respond to the questions which follow:

Luther proposed an evangelical pattern of spirituality as reception rather than self-promotion. This involved three things: prayer (*oratio*), meditation (*meditatio*), and temptation (*tentatio*).<sup>1</sup> All three revolved around ongoing, faithful attention to God’s word. The order of the list is significant, for unlike the traditional pattern of devotion, the study of theology begins and ends here on earth. These three terms describe the life of faith as a cycle that begins with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, concentrates on the reception of the Holy Spirit through meditation on God’s word, and results in spiritual attack. This in turn leads a person back to further prayer and intensified meditation. Luther, therefore, did not envisage the spiritual life in active terms as a process of self-development but in passive terms as a process of reception from the Triune God. In it self-sufficient individuals became beggars before God.<sup>1</sup>

**Ask the group the questions below. Allow sufficient time for a variety of responses. This will encourage participants to begin to think about and articulate their own understanding of how God’s makes a pastor.**

*How is one’s relationship with God foundational to any discussion of the making of a pastor?*

*How does this relate to one’s baptism? One’s vocation?*

*What are the ways that God goes about forming a pastor for service to church and world?*

*In what ways do Luther’s categories capture what life is like as one of God’s pastors generally? For you personally? What would you add to them?*

*Where do you turn for comfort in your ministry when *tentatio* seems to be the prevailing experience*

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<sup>1</sup> John Kleinig, *“Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?”* 66 (July 2002): 262. The article may be found in its entirety in electronic form at <http://www.ctsfw.edu/library/files/pb/896>

## 2. Scripture Search

There is a flow to the texts, moving from our status as God's children by virtue of our baptism into Christ to our God nurturing our faith through his Word and through means like family members, to the call into the ministry, to our service to church and world, to our relationship with our ministerial colleagues, and, finally, back to Christ who brings our service to completion. Have a participant read each passage aloud. As leader, you may offer some or all of the points under each passage, or you may choose to get at each passage's meaning inductively with the group. Encourage feedback as you guide the discussion.

- 1 John 3:1-3

- There is nothing in us that merits the love of God.
- God loves us because He is love.
- Judgment is not the proper work of God (*opus alienum*).
- Promise is the proper work of God (*opus proprium*).
- God pours out his love upon us through Word and sacraments.
- This unmerited love of God, given freely to us, leads us to share this good news with those with whom God brings us into contact.

- 1 Peter 2:9-10

- The Old Testament Levitical priesthood was fulfilled in Christ.
- In the New Testament, God establishes all the baptized as priests for service in church and world.
- God gives a vocation/calling to each person for the sake of proclaiming Christ in word and deed to his/her neighbor.
- For some, one element of their vocation will be pastoral service.

- 2 Timothy 1:5-7

- The Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith.
- For some this leads to a call into the public ministry.
- God's call comes mediately.
- The sense of God's calling often comes through relationships.

- Ephesians 4:9-16

- God Himself has established the pastoral office for the sake of serving the church as it fulfills Christ's mission in the world.
- Ministerial service has the aim of helping the saints grow in their faith and witness.
- God wants us to see the church as His gathered saints, each of whom is a necessary part of the body.
- When it is healthy, the body of Christ grows under God's blessing.

A temptation for some may be to focus on the "comma" question in vss. 11-12. Strive to keep the focus on vss. 14-16: growing up into Christ.

- 1 Timothy 3:1-7
  - God makes the requirements for the pastoral office very clear.
  - On our own, these would be impossible requirements. Redeemed in Christ, His characteristics become our characteristics.
  - Note the integration of prayer, mediation, and temptation in this text.
  
- Colossians 1:3-8
  - It is God who calls pastors to be faithful in their service of preaching and teaching the Word and administering the sacraments.
  - Faithful proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments bears fruit and leads to growth.
  - God calls us to recognize the faithful ministry of our colleagues.
  
- Acts 15:36-39
  - Conflict is an unfortunate, yet unavoidable, aspect of ministry.
  - Even among the most gifted of God’s servants, divisions can arise.
  - The issue is not whether there will be conflict, but how we deal with conflict.
  
- Psalm 133:1-3/ Ephesians 2:12-22
  - God desires His servants to work together in unity
  - Unity of the pastors is of great value in the sight of the Lord.
  - Just as unity in the church has its root in the common redemption won by Christ, so also does our pastoral collegiality.
  
- Hebrews 12:1-2
  - As our salvation has its beginning and end in Jesus Christ; in a like manner our work as pastors is totally centered in him.
  - Therefore, our ministry has its beginning and end in Christ and Christ alone.

### 3. Our Confessions Speak<sup>2</sup>

The confessional texts emphasize the divine foundation of the pastoral office, as well as the centrality of preaching that unchanging good news to a changing world. Here are some questions to consider:

- When Melancthon wrote the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, his primary concern was the mistaken understanding of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church on the indelible character of the ministerial office. How does Melancthon’s approach differ in the Confessions?
- What does he see as the primary character of the “priest” or pastor?
- How are today’s circumstances similar to those in 1531?

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations are from *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

- **What different kinds of issues do we face in terms of the understanding of pastor today?**
- **Finally, note the final sentence of the last reading, which stresses that if the pastors are in conflict, the church will be in conflict.**

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe (*Augsburg Confession*, Art. 5).

The opponents do not consider the priesthood as a ministry of the Word and of the sacraments administered to others. Instead, they consider it as a sacrificial office, as if there ought to be in the New Testament a priesthood similar to the Levitical priesthood, which offers sacrifices for the people and merits the forgiveness of sins for other people. We teach that the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross was sufficient for the sins of the entire world and that there is no need for additional sacrifices, as though Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient for our sins. Therefore, human beings are justified not on account of any other sacrifice except the one sacrifice of Christ when they believe that they have been redeemed by that sacrifice. Thus priests are not called to offer sacrifices for the people as in Old Testament law so that through them they might merit the forgiveness of sins for the people; instead they are called to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments to the people (*Apology*, Art. 13, 7-10).

Peter ... means that in human relations love is not obstinate, harsh, or intractable; instead, it overlooks certain mistakes of its friends and puts the best construction on even the more offensive conduct of others, just as the common proverb admonishes, "Know, but do not hate, the conduct of a friend." It is not without reason that the apostles speak so often about this responsibility of love, which the philosophers call "fairness." For this virtue is necessary for preserving public harmony, which cannot last long unless pastors and churches overlook and pardon many things among themselves (*Apology*, Art. 4, 240-243).

#### 4. Points to Ponder

**These points are offered for additional discussion in the large or smaller group:**

- God has called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified his whole Christian church on earth. He does this through all of his servants as they carry out their given vocations. He does this in a particular way through his pastors.
- Luther's principle of *simul justus et peccator* applies to pastors as much as it does to all people.
- All ministry, however great or small, has its beginning, continuation, and fulfillment in Christ. Every pastor, however great or small, has his beginning, continuation, and fulfillment in Christ.
- A church without a pastor and a pastor without a church is not God's desire.

## 5. For Conversation

**Spend time in groups of 3-5 conversing around any or all of the following:**

- Reflect on your own life as one of God's baptized children.
- Discuss with your brothers when and how you first felt God tugging you toward the ministry. In what ways are your experiences similar to your colleagues? In what ways are they unique? Do you still feel that tug?
- Which of the three—*oratio*, *meditatio*, *tentatio*—seems to have characterized your ministry? Where do you find yourself right now? Given your location, how might your experience help your fellow pastors in similar circumstances? How might your situation be helped by your colleagues?
- Discuss times of conflict with colleagues in the ministry? How did you handle things well? How did you handle things poorly? What lessons did you learn?
- The bottom line: What makes a good pastor?

**If there is time and desire, the leader may here choose to read the following paragraph from Friedrich Wyneken on the unity of the faith:**

“Therefore we hold fast to our confession, as to our very life's life. In each part of that confession we have acknowledged, perceived, and experienced, a bulwark which God has constructed on all sides to protect our troubled consciences from the attacks of the devil. We can give up nothing without the most terrible betrayal of ourselves, of the poor sinners of the world, and without injustice of the One who has purchased them and us with his blood. In daily repentance before the mirror of the divine holiness of his law, we peer ever more deeply into the abyss of the evil of our hearts. We burn with the need for certainty of salvation in the confession of Christ. We long to grasp him ever more firmly in true, living faith. And by his blood he purifies our hearts and we find rest for our souls. Our positions, our gifts, our understanding may be ever so diverse. Yet at the foot of our Lord Jesus Christ we will all with each other—as poor sinners—hold fast to the simple truth of the catechism. That truth is our only true consolation. It may be ever more richly unfolded and expanded for our understanding and conscience. But it finally always remains the same. By daily repentance the darkness and inclination to seek and set forth something new passes away. One has enough to do against the crafty and furious attacks of the devil in holding fast to the old, acknowledged, divine truth, full of consolation. There is plenty to do to understand more deeply, to mine more richly, to establish more solidly, and to advocate more thoroughly, the saving truth. Let us actually practice seriously that which we have learned and relearned from our Small Catechism on the meaning of Holy Baptism. Then not only our inner life will benefit, but the right unity will also be advanced among us.”<sup>3</sup>

**The leader will need to draw the discussion to a conclusion so that adequate time will remain for small group or corporate prayer. It might be helpful for prayers to reflect**

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<sup>3</sup> F. C. D. Wyneken, “Sermon for the Opening Session of the Western District of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri,” unpublished translation by Matthew C. Harrison.

**thankfulness to God for His mercy in calling and gathering His church, but especially for the many, diversely gifted servants of the Word, unique as each one is.**

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# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### What Kind of Leader?

What is the proper relationship between church and pastoral leader?

#### The Issue

The participants are given one scenario concerning the issues of the relationship between church and pastoral leader. It puts the concern in a real setting.

#### *A Scenario*

After returning home at nearly eleven p.m. from a Church Council meeting, Rev. John has this to say:

*"I've had it with Hank! He doesn't have a theological bone in his body. He has no vision whatsoever! His engineering background must keep him from even imagining a project for the church beyond the current one, and his influence is so strong that no one will speak up when he obstructs every last long range plan I suggest! Tonight he actually stated that he had talked to over 100 members and they said...but I believe he persuaded them...that they would withhold their contributions if the church council decided to move the organ console even one foot! And the idea is only to allow more space in the choir loft so that we can expand the choir! Do you know that not one person spoke up while he threatened to hold back money just to keep control!*

*"I'd just write this off as a bad night, but already I was told that he and others have started a phone campaign to get all like-minded members to come to the Voter's Meeting next Tuesday night to stack the deck. That's when we're supposed to vote on the three-year plan to expand our ministry. The leadership and I have been working on this for nine months. His ilk will manage to stop the whole congregation from moving ahead. I'm just sure of it."*

In Lutheran Churches pastors are called to serve as public servants in the midst of their congregations. But often there is a wide disparity between what the pastor believes he is to do and what the congregation wants him to do. What is the relationship between pastoral leaders and congregation to be like? Is the pastor above the congregation, and therefore the congregation is to do his bidding, not just in matters of faith and doctrine, but also in the organizational aspects of the church? Or are the members above the pastor, and therefore he is to take orders from them—serve them as they want him to serve them? Or are they co-equal? And if so, on what basis?

There are two sides to this issue; namely, the side of the congregation and the side of the pastor. It is not unusual for a pastor to hear members state, "You just preach and teach, Pastor, and we'll run the church." Is this the right relationship? Is the role of the pastor only spiritual? Is the role of the people only organizational?

Here are two more scenarios you may use if time allows:

### Scenario 2

*Sitting in the living room of a lively couple in their early eighties a visiting church leader was asked, "What are we to do? Our Reverend simply isn't leading our congregation! Every year we are getting smaller. We are located just two blocks from a college, too, but we aren't reaching any of the students. Our pastor doesn't even seem to be interested in the youth or, for that matter, in anyone who isn't a member of our church. Most of our friends, our fellow members, want to grow, but we can't do it without the Reverend. We are taking care of the place; it looks pretty good. But we would like to get someone else in who would really lead us. The District tells us, though, that we can't just get rid of our pastor – he has" a divine call," whatever that is! And he won't reach retirement age for five more years! I don't know if our church can survive that long. What should we do?"*

### Scenario 3

*"It makes me so mad!" exploded Tom to his friend and fellow church member. "Every Sunday it seems he's saying something about how we are to be concerned about those outside our membership and how our buildings are to be open to the community when he knows the kids who live around here will just tear things up! And who will pay for the repairs? Now he is even saying we are to be missionaries. How crazy is that! I'm no missionary! Never was and never will be! And what's this nonsense about our congregation becoming a mission outpost! Before he came, we ran the church our way. This was our church. My parents and yours built it. The pastor cared about us and didn't try to make us bring all those foreigners in. At council meetings he acts as if he were a CEO or something. I think he thinks it's "my way or the highway!" I'd like to get rid of him! Or else we should make him stick to preaching and teaching and let us run our church!"*

As the leader you might want to interject this additional issue that has surfaced in recent years:

Accusations have been made that clergy are becoming CEO's (Chief Executive Officers) rather than pastors. This seems especially to be the case in the larger congregations in our denomination where there is more administrative work, often falling on the shoulders of the senior pastor. Perhaps even the title of this study reveals yet another connotation, or at least a shift from past perceptions of the duties of a pastor – he is called a "pastoral leader." Only in the past ten years has there been a movement to teach pastors leadership skills. Yet most people in the pew believe their pastor is to lead the congregation in its mission.

Let's start by examining the Scriptures.

### Scripture Search

1. Any understanding of the relationship between pastoral leader and congregation must start by addressing ownership. Whose church is it anyway? Read Matthew 16:18. What does this statement imply for both pastor and congregational members?

The answer to this question seems so obvious. Of course it is Christ's church. Yet, historically, especially at the time of the Reformation, this was a big question.

The pope claimed it to be his church since he considered himself its lord over (the “Vicar of Christ.”). He also considered himself lord over secular governments. *The Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope* begins with these words: “The Roman bishop arrogates to himself the claim that he is by divine right above all bishops and pastors. Then he adds that by divine right he possesses both swords, that is, the authority to bestow and transfer kingdoms.”

In current parlance it is still an issue. How we speak of something usually reflects what we really feel about a matter. Often we hear church members say, “St. John’s is my church.” They might even accent “my.” Clergy often refer to a church as “Joe Smith’s church,” Joe Smith being the pastor. Or they say, “That’s Dr. James’ church.” What does this imply? Is it merely a slip of the tongue, or is it how we consider ownership in the church?

Here are additional passages for consideration if there is time:

- Ephesians 1:22” “And God placed all thing under His [Jesus] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”
  - Acts 20:28: “Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood.”
2. The ownership of the church is now clear; however, the next question is, “To whom has the ministry of the Gospel been given?” (Note: The Lutheran Confessions use the term “ministry of the Gospel” more often than “means of grace.”)?
- Look up John 20:22-23. To whom is Jesus speaking? Whom do they represent?
  - Also check out Matthew 18:18-20. What is the ecclesiastical truth in the words, “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them?”

The Lutheran Confessions tackle the question of who is given the authority of the keys in this passage. Is it Peter? Or is it the whole church? They use the hermeneutical principle of “Scripture interprets Scripture” by immediately referencing the passage from John 20 where Jesus addresses all the disciples after his resurrection. The same words are used but this time in stronger language in a statement conferring of power on them, namely, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins...”

Thus they declare that the bestowal of the ministry of the Gospel (usually defined as the proclamation of the Gospel and the administrations of the sacraments, but in Lutheran parlance also called “The Office of the Keys”) is not given just to Peter but to all the disciples and thus to all Christians wherever they gather in Christ’s name. The accent on “where two or three come together” is proof that the ministry of the Gospel has been given to the local congregation, not to some super church organization, like a synod or national church body.

You may want to say to the group: “If this power has been given to the congregation, that’s one thing. If it has been given to the clergy as an elite group within the church, that is another matter. If it is given to one person who is the head of the church, that is still another. What do you believe here, and what are the implications of what you believe?”

**Additional passages for consideration if there is time:**

- **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**
- **1 Peter 2:9**

**3. If the ministry of the Gospel is given to the church, then how does a pastor obtain the right to administer it as a public servant/leader?**

- First read 1 Corinthians 4:1. Note the word, “entrusted.” What does that mean?

**This passage does not say that the ministry of the Gospel is bestowed on the pastor, but it does show the pastor to be a servant of Christ, not first a servant to the congregation. It is about Paul’s defense of the ministry given to him and to Apollos, and for that matter, to all the apostles.**

**Lutheran theologians, Th. Engelder, W. Arndt, Th. Graebner and F. E. Mayer (*Popular Symbolics*, page 109), address whether or not pastors receive the ministry of the Gospel in their ordination. They use the words, “to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments.” Some may see this right to the ministry of the Gospel coming to pastors from the hierarchy of the church, directly from God in some way, or from the congregation. These theologians, however, are clear in saying, “Not ordination, but the call of the congregation makes the minister.”**

- Also Titus 1:7. Once again the word “entrusted” is used. Who entrusts whom?

**The significant point here is that the ministry has been entrusted to the pastor. That is, it is not a divine right bestowed upon him at ordination, but entrusted to him by the Lord through the congregation to which he has been called.**

**4. What MUST a pastor do by divine right (*jure divino*)?**

- Look up 1 Timothy 4:13. Three things are required. What are they?
- This is not a complete list. What needs to be added?

**Timothy is to read the Scriptures publicly, to preach, and to teach. This Timothy passage could be read as a personal admonition from Paul to his young protégé. The Lutheran Confessions, however, state that more is involved in the preaching of the Gospel. In *The Augsburg Confession* states, “Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments” (AC. XXVIII, 5). It is important to recognize that the power of the bishops is really the power of the church given at will to either pastors or bishops, with no distinction made, except in jurisdictional roles. Thus, the fact that pastors are given this power in behalf of the congregation makes their exercising of it a divine right (*jure divino*).**

**Note that the words, “to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments,” appear in the quote above but not in Paul’s**

**words to Timothy. These activities are understood to be included in “the ministry of the Gospel.”**

5. What MIGHT a pastor do by human right (*jure humano*)?

- 2 Timothy 4:5, “...The duties of your ministry” is rather nebulous. What might be included? From whom might a list of “duties” come?

**St. Paul does not specify here what he means by “duties of your ministry;” In his letters to both Timothy and Titus, though, he identifies certain duties. Here are some examples: the treatment of older men, the ministry to and with widows, the laying on of hands to be set people aside for special ministry, the appointment of elders, straightening out matters of the church, warning divisive people, etc.**

**The congregation can ask, even direct, their pastor to perform specific duties. Especially in larger congregations some are called to be administrative pastors, pastoral care pastors, youth pastors, or pastors of evangelism and outreach. Specific ministries or foci for ministry can be given. Oversight, like that of a bishop, can be given to pastors over certain aspects of ministry. A larger church can give duties such as district oversight, or national oversight in worship or adult education to selected pastors. These duties, however, are not by divine right (*jure divino*) but by human right (*jure humano*).**

6. What kind of pastor does it take to properly lead the church of God? Models from the New Testament are abundant, for example, the models of Paul or Barnabas, or those of Peter or John. Most often, however, pastors want to model their ministry after Jesus.

- One model is given in Matthew 20:25-27. From this passage we get the term “servant leader.” What characteristic(s) of a servant leader can be identified in these verses?

**Interestingly, the basic concept of leadership developed by Robert Greenleaf in his book, *Servant Leadership* (1977), was articulated by Jesus nearly 2000 years earlier.**

**You might have the group review also John 13:14-15: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” Is there another characteristic of a servant leader that you can pick up from this passage?**

**Richard Rardin in *The Servant’s Guide to Leadership* (Selah Publishing, 2001) lists these facets of servant leading:**

- Focused on the individual
- Empathetic
- Nurturing
- Stooping
- Submitting to the gifts of others
- Being full of Grace

- Another model is set forth in John 10:3-4, that of a shepherd leader. Jesus' use of this model is reminiscent of the shepherd kings of the Old Testament. Review carefully the characteristic(s) of a shepherd leader that can be identified in this passage.
- Also check out 1 Peter 5:2. What two terms are used for pastors here? What are the implications of each?

**In contrast to servant leadership, or maybe as another perspective on leadership, Rardin lists these facets of shepherd leadership:**

- **Focused on the group**
- **Decisive**
- **Challenging**
- **Standing**
- **Exercising authority**
- **Being full of truth**

**The point is that a pastor can, and maybe even must, lead as both a servant and a shepherd, each approach having its place and time in his ministry. Biblically speaking, a better term for leadership than simply “servant leadership” is “shepherd/servant leadership.”**

### **Relational Essentials:**

Before continuing, consider the truth that both the pastor and the congregation can correctly understand the theological and ecclesiastical aspects of this matter and yet have a contentious and even calamitous relationship with each other. Good relationships are seldom established by right understanding of theology or church governance (although without these a church can even cease to be a church!) but by godly disposition, attitudes, and behaviors toward one another. What disposition, attitudes, and behaviors of both congregation members and pastor build healthy relationships?

It starts with mutual respect, but check out the following three passages for additional insights:

- Philippians 1:7-8: How does Paul describe his feelings for this church?

**Paul's warm and endearing feelings for the church at Philippi are evident in his passion of these verses. He uses phrases such as “I have you in my heart,” and “I long for all of you with the affection of Christ.” Only a word like “love” can adequately describe Paul's disposition and attitude toward this congregation.**

- John 10:3-4: What word describes the feelings of the sheep toward the good shepherd?

**When Jesus gives us the picture of the Good Shepherd, he not only describes the role of the shepherd but also reveals the feeling of the sheep. He states that they follow Him because they know His voice. To “know” Him is to have an intimate relationship with Him.**

- Ephesians 4:32: Select three words that describe the proper relationship between congregation and pastor as well as pastor toward members?

**The three words, “kind,” “compassionate,” and “forgiving,” are all critical to the establishment and maintenance of good relationships, whether in a marriage or in a church. Note the words, “to one another.” The command works both ways — pastor to congregation and congregation to pastor.**

### **Our Confessions Speak**

The Reformers answered the question, “To whom belongs the church?” by declaring who had the power to ordain. If only the bishops could ordain, then the authority of the ministry of the Gospel resided in them and not in the church local, that is, with the baptized. *The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, 65-69, speaks directly to this:

But the distinction between bishop and pastor is not by divine right, it is manifest that ordination administered by a pastor in his own church is valid by divine right...For where the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists.

This right is a gift given exclusively to the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church. It is as Paul testifies to the Ephesians when he says, “When he ascended on high he gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4:8, 11-12). He enumerates pastor and teachers among the gifts belonging exclusively to the church, and he adds that they are given for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. Where the true church is, therefore, the right of electing and ordaining ministers must of necessity also be...

Finally, this is confirmed by the declaration of Peter, “You are a royal priesthood” (I Pet. 2:9). These words apply to the true church which, since it alone possesses the priesthood, certainly has the right of electing and ordaining ministers.”

**Additional quotes from the Lutheran Confessions and Lutheran theologians on this subject:**

**On who is really a priest F. Pieper quotes Luther as saying:**

**“In the New Testament the Holy Spirit scrupulously avoids giving the name *sacerdos*, priest, to any of the Apostles, or any other office, but restricts this name to the baptized or Christians as their birthright and hereditary name from Baptism; for none of us is born in Baptism an Apostle, preacher, teacher, pastor, but solely priests are all of us born; therefore we take some from among these born priests and call and elect them for these offices that they may perform the functions of such office in the name of all of us.” (*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pp. 456-457)**

**On the duties of a bishop or pastor,**

**“...bishops or pastors may make regulations so that everything in the churches is done in good order, but not as a means of obtaining God’s grace or claiming satisfaction for sin, nor in order to bind men’s consciences by considering these things necessary services of God...” (*AC XXVIII*, 53)**

**On relationship of church to ministers,**

**“In I Cor. 3:4-8 Paul places ministers on an equality [that is with bishops] and teaches that the church is above the ministers.” (*Treatise 4*. 11)**

## Points to Ponder

The only priests in the New Testament are the baptized people of God. The role of mediator as a special class of people between God and man is over. Yet men are to be set aside to lead congregations in the public sense—that is, officially such as a notary public has authority in behalf of a state. To quote Francis Pieper, “For this office is nothing more than a public service, which is delegated to one by the whole congregation, though all of them are priest together” (*Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, p. 442).

Ponder what it means that you as a pastor have been entrusted with a public authority not owned by you but belonging to the congregation you serve; yet the congregation, in turn, has been entrusted with it by God.

## For Conversation

St. Paul sees the metaphor of Christ and his church as declaring his relationship with his people. Lutheran theologian, Francis Pieper, states, “The Church and its ministers have the same relation to each other as employer and employee or owner and steward.”

- Discuss how you feel about this analogy.
- What other metaphors could be used to describe the relationship between a pastor and the church? Have fun discussing!
- Allow time to pray together.

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# FAITHFUL & AFIRE

Biblical Conversations Toward Greater Harmony  
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2007-2008

## Leader's Guide

### Boundaries

#### What boundaries shape and limit our practice of the ministry?

##### 1. The Issues

From his interaction with over 100 congregations, church consultant Howard Friend has identified six factors which impede a healthy relationship of trust between clergy and congregations. One factor involves the establishment of boundaries. Friend writes:

Whatever the psychological motivation, many older pastors have allowed themselves to be thoroughly accessible. Unable to say no to almost any demand, they stick their fingers in every pie and teeter on the constant edge of burnout. Often they and their families smolder with quiet resentment. But in a younger generation the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. One parishioner put it strongly: "Pastor has made clear the four or five things in his life that have priority importance, but I don't think the church made the list!"...Overstating these boundary concerns has, in some situations, implied that being a pastor is merely a job, a clock to punch...It is difficult to build a spirit of partnership with a pastor who seems to regard himself as a mere employee. (Howard E. Friend, "The Failure to Form Basic Partnership," *Congregations* [September/October 2002], pages 23-24.)

**[The above quote by Howard Friend may elicit a "battle of the generations" between older and younger pastors, which can lead to unhealthy polarization. If this happens, the leader will need to help the participants to avoid invalid generalizations and caricatures. He should also direct them to recognize that both extremes can be found in all generations and to discuss the errors without reference to the age of the one in error.]**

Establishing boundaries which appropriately regulate one's professional and personal responsibilities is challenging. In what areas of the practice of ministry does a pastor need to establish boundaries? Why do you think some pastors fail to establish appropriate boundaries in the exercise of their ministry? Why do other pastors err in the opposite extreme by setting up boundaries which are too rigid and contrary to a servant attitude? How does one establish a healthy balance?

Why are boundaries important for the pastor in the following areas: family life, work load, accountability, friendships, sexuality?

**[This question is intended to help the participants to take a broader view of the subject of boundaries and to recognize that the discipline of setting boundaries is necessary on a number of fronts.]**

## 2. Scripture Search

Proverbs 25:28

[The Bible does not use the term “boundary” in the technical manner that is being used in this study. Technically, that term arises from recent theory in the social sciences, such as in the study of psychology, personal dynamics, and organizational systems. But the Bible does speak to the same concept. Perhaps the term that the Bible uses which most closely aligns with the concept of personal boundaries is that of “self-control.” The person who establishes boundaries in the areas of time usage, activity management, relationships, accountability, etc., is one who regulates herself and thus exercises self-control.

The wisdom literature of the Bible frequently commends the virtue of self-control. This virtue is reflective of true wisdom. Conversely, the lack of self-control is characteristic of a fool. The wise person is one who is able to set boundaries on his temperament, tongue, and sexual urges so that they conform to the will of God and to God’s ordering of the world.

The use of the term “boundary” is a metaphorical one. The image is that of a fence or barrier which marks out forbidden territory and restrains one from error. So it is felicitous that this proverb uses similar metaphorical imagery. In the ancient world “a city whose walls are broken down” is vulnerable to destruction, if not already ruined. So also a person who does not establish personal boundaries that align with the will of God will inevitably suffer disastrous results.

It should be noted that just as wisdom is a gift of God (James 1:5), so also self-control is a fruit of God’s Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Accordingly, the Christian exercises proper boundaries in life through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.]

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

[The boundaries which a pastor sets for the practice of ministry are guided by three issues: his identity, his responsibility, and his accountability. This passage treats all three issues.

Verse one clarifies a pastor’s identity—he is a servant of Christ. The word translated “servant” is *huperétes*, which refers to an assistant who carries out the will of another. For example, in Greek literature Hermes is described as the *huperétes* of Zeus. Similarly, in Acts 13:5 John Mark is identified as the *huperétes* of Barnabas and Paul. Thus the pastor is, first and foremost, one who carries out the will of Christ. This identity defines who the pastor is and what he is to do. His functioning is to be determined by what Christ, his Master and Lord (vv. 4, 5), calls him to do. It is true that one serves Christ by serving others. Yet the pastor is first a servant of Christ and then a servant of others. If others expect him to do things—to serve them—in ways which are not consistent with the will of Christ, the pastor establishes a boundary and says no to their expectations.

Verse one also identifies the pastor’s responsibility—to exercise stewardship of the mysteries of God. The Lutheran Confessions identify the “mysteries of God” in this passage with the Gospel and sacraments (*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article 24 “The Mass.” Kolb-Wengert, 272.80). The pastor administers the means of grace, and he is responsible to be faithful to this stewardship (v. 2). Accordingly, the

pastor's primary responsibility is to carry out Word and sacrament ministry faithfully. He must set boundaries against those activities or demands which distract him from this primary responsibility.

Finally, verses three through five indicate to whom the pastor is accountable. The ultimate judge of his functioning is not the congregational members ("by you"), or the world with its standards of success ("by any human court"), or even the pastor himself ("I do not even judge myself"), but it is the Lord (v. 4). Accordingly, the pastor is self-differentiated so that his functioning is not primarily determined by the expectations and anxieties of congregational members or the standards of the world. Instead, his functioning as a minister of Christ is determined by God's call and commission, since he is ultimately responsible to God. As such, he will not even be "self-differentiated" in the sense that the self is master. Rather he will be divinely directed to follow the responsibilities which God assigns to him.]

1 Timothy 3:1-5 (cf. Titus 1:6)

[Here are set forth some of the qualifications for pastoral ministry. Note the areas in which personal and professional boundaries are essential: moral behavior ("above reproach"), marital fidelity ("husband of one wife"), temperament ("temperate," "not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome"), sobriety ("not given to drunkenness"), financial aspiration ("not a lover of money"). This passage makes clear the need for boundaries to be established on multiple fronts in the minister's life.

Of particular note is the area of focus in verses four and five—family life. The pastor is to manage his family well. The passage has specific concern about the pastor's management and care of his children (Titus 1:6 emphasizes that they believe). The vocations of husband and father are significant and impact greatly the pastor's qualification for the vocation of public ministry. He is not to focus so much on his pastoral duties that he neglects responsibility to his family. This is a critical area for boundaries to be set, and a difficult area in which to do so. The discussion on boundaries in family life may consume a significant amount of time by the participants, and perhaps necessarily so.]

2 Timothy 1:7

[The Apostle Paul writes these words of encouragement to his protégé Timothy, who is a pastor in Ephesus. Apparently Timothy was somewhat sensitive and prone to anxiety, which leads him to become timid and perhaps overly accommodating of the will of others (1 Tim. 4:1). The word translated "timidity" here is *deílfa*, which has the sense of fearfulness, anxiety, even cowardice. Perhaps Timothy is not setting necessary boundaries and is allowing the expectations and pressures of others to intimidate him.

Paul directs Timothy to what God expects of him as a pastor and what God empowers him to demonstrate. The first trait, the spirit of power (*dúnamis*), is a confidence in the power of the Gospel. It is the authority God bestows to the one who administers the Keys of God's Kingdom on behalf of God and of the congregation. One who displays this spirit of power is able to set boundaries so that his ministry is one of integrity to the Gospel. The second trait, the spirit of love (*agápe*), emphasizes that the power that a pastor exercises is not self-serving, but always for the benefit of others. Thus one does not set boundaries simply for selfish purposes or as an excuse for laziness or an un-serving attitude. The spirit of self-discipline

*(sophronismós)* highlights that the pastor is called to regulate his thoughts, words, and actions to conform to the image of Christ. This self-regulation means setting boundaries for one's time, activities, and fleshly desires.

Notice that these traits of power, love, and self-discipline are not what Timothy musters from his own strength. These characteristics are given by God. So also those today who are called to be ministers of God's Word can be confident that God bestows the same gifts to them, allowing them to minister with courage ("power"), servanthood ("love"), and self-regulation ("self-discipline").]

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

[Paul writes these words to all Christians, but they are especially apropos for called ministers of the Gospel. Sexual sin committed by the pastor can sabotage his ministry and disqualify him from the office. Paul here says that a Christian must set clear and firm boundaries in the area of sexual behavior ("...learn to control his own body," v. 4). He should avoid "immorality" (v. 3) and "passionate lust" (v. 5), and impurity (v. 7). These boundaries have already been clearly defined by God in his Word (most succinctly articulated in the Sixth Commandment), and so to reject them is to reject God's holy standard (v. 8). The pastor is to adorn the office of public ministry with holy living, and clear boundaries of sexual behavior are critical (this includes the avoidance of pornography). There are serious consequences for failing to live within such boundaries (v. 6). Blessedly, there is forgiveness for sinners who repent of sin (and all of us have sinned in the area of sexuality—see Matthew 5:27-28). Ultimately, it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can live sanctified lives (v. 8).]

### 3. Our Confessions Speak

"...Christ gave to his apostles only spiritual authority, that is, the command to preach the gospel, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, to administer the sacraments, and to excommunicate the ungodly without the use of physical force. He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession, or dispose of the kingdoms of the world." (*Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*. Kolb-Wengert, 334.31)

[This quote from Luther's treatise is useful to the discussion of boundaries in two ways: 1) it illustrates more generally the need to set clear boundaries in the practice of ministry, and 2) it identifies a specific and significant boundary to be maintained by the pastor.

Regarding the first use, Lutheran theology regularly makes clear distinctions, and these distinctions significantly impact Lutheran practice. The quote from Luther illustrates the distinction between the two kingdoms—the realm of the right hand ("only spiritual authority") and the realm of the left hand ("the use of physical force"). Other distinctions are also primal for the Lutheran, such as between the two natures of Christ, or between the two kinds of righteousness, or between law and Gospel. These distinctions actually serve as boundaries for the understanding and application of the Word of God. Thus pastors are called regularly to make careful distinctions and set appropriate boundaries as guided by God's Word.

In terms of the second use, the boundary between the two realms is an important one for the pastor to establish in his practice of ministry. The authority of a pastor is

**exercised only through the administration of the means of grace (Word and sacrament). Thus the pastor is not to use the influence of his office to promote a political agenda or a candidate for a governmental office. Moreover, he will seek to influence his congregational members in terms of decisions impacting the mission of the congregation on the basis of the Word of God rather than pure political machinations. The Brief Statement affirms this boundary: “Although the office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, 1 Pet. 4:11...Accordingly, we reject the false doctrine ascribing to the office of the ministry the right to demand obedience and submission in matters which Christ has not commanded.” (*Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, 14-15.32).]**

“Therefore I have always taught that we should not despise or disdain this walk of life [marriage and parenthood], as the blind world and our false clergy do, but view it in the light of God’s Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified. Because of this Word it is not a walk of life to be placed on the same level with all the others, but it is before and above them all, whether those of emperor, princes, bishops, or any other. Important as the spiritual and civil walks of life are, these must humble themselves and allow all people to enter marriage as a walk of life, as we shall hear.” (*The Large Catechism*, The Ten Commandments: Sixth Commandment. Kolb-Wengert, 414.209).

**[In addition to the call into the public ministry, the pastor has been assigned other vocations by God (such as being a citizen of a country). Those pastors who are married have been given another vocation as husband, and those who have children yet another vocation as parent. The quotation from the Large Catechism emphasizes the significance of these latter vocations (Luther has additional forceful comments on the responsibilities of parents in his exposition of the Fourth Commandment. See Kolb-Wengert, 410.167-178).**

**Pastors who are husbands and fathers are richly blessed by these vocations, but also held accountable by God for their spousal service to their wives and fatherly service to their children. Faithfulness to these callings requires time and attention to family. This in turn requires the pastor to manage his time and activity so that he can devote sufficient care to his spouse and offspring. Accordingly, the pastor will set boundaries on his time serving others in the exercise of his ministry in order also to serve family members. He will establish boundaries on his availability to parishioners so that time with family is not unduly intruded upon.]**

#### **4. Points to Ponder**

The pastor regulates his functioning so that it aligns with the priorities which God has assigned to him through the call into pastoral ministry.

**[An issue to be emphasized here is the need to prioritize. The pastor prioritizes his time and activities so that he is faithful to the call of God.]**

The pastor serves others, but that service does not mean reacting to all the expectations or demands of those being served and in fact involves some self-care.

**[Self-care does not equate with being selfish or self-serving. The pastor cares for himself in order better to care for others whom he is called to serve.]**

The pastor establishes boundaries in his public ministry so that he may also give due attention to other significant vocations, foremost of which are being husband and father.

***[The Lutheran doctrine of vocation provides a useful theological framework to help the pastor integrate and balance the various roles and responsibilities entrusted to him.]***

## 5. For Conversation

“The pastor is to organize his life according to the following priorities: first is God, second is church, third is family.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement, and why?

Reflecting on ministry, Henri Nouwen wrote: “My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly being interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work” (*Reaching Out*, Image [1986], page 52). How does a minister regulate himself so that he is appropriately accessible to his people but does not permit unlimited access to him?

“The office [of the public ministry] and its functions are called ‘public’ not because the functions are always discharged in public, but because they are performed on behalf of the church...Moreover, the word ‘public’ connotes accountability to those who have placed them into ‘public’ office.” (*The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, CTCR, 1981, page 13) What boundaries must be established so that the pastor is appropriately accountable to those who have placed him in the pastoral office--namely to God and to the congregation? Is the pastor accountable to individual members of the church, and, if so, what boundaries inform this accountability?

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3). Which boundaries prevent a minister from falling into sexual sin?

Pray together that God engenders in you self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23), so that you might lovingly serve His people with purity, integrity, calm, and courage.

**[Discussion of the above matters may lead some participants to experience significant guilt. Most frequently this may result from pastors reflecting upon their devotion of time and service to spouse and children. When there is guilt, the leader will make sure that the message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ is announced and applied to those who are repentant of their failure to maintain faithful and healthy boundaries. It may also be appropriate to offer opportunity for individual confession and absolution or to lead the gathering in the Order of Corporate Confession and Absolution (LSB, 290-291).]**

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