

June 6th, 2016

Eric,

Thank you for your fraternal response to my essay. I receive it with thankfulness. We live in a district where discussions occur in a spirit of dialogue and collegiality, a blessing to all of us! I hope that as you read below, you will notice my first concern for 21st Century practical needs and challenges within our congregations, where primary authority for Word and Sacrament rests.

In retrospect, it might have been helpful for me in *Category Error, Common Sense, and the Office of the Ministry in the LCMS* to more specifically show my own assumptions and background. Here is what I would have added: "My background of living in an LCMS missionary family for two decades in West Africa gives me reason, and a unique perspective, to question the LCMS application of Northern European cultural frameworks to ministry. This paper raises a question of cultural conditioning and suggests that the LCMS is perceiving its Lutheranism through a particular cultural lens that may at times be a hindrance to a confessional and biblical ethos for ministry." If we are not explicit about our assumptions, we will continue to live in them blindly.

I agree with you that the prophetic voice is a gift to the Church by Christ, so that His people may keep their eyes on Him rather than original sin, the world, and the devil. So also are the shepherding voice, the evangelist voice, the apostolic voice, and the teaching voice (Eph. 4). I consider *Category Error, Common Sense, etc.* a prophetic piece, raising important questions in order to build up the LCMS here in 2016.

I also agree with you that we need highly trained pastors, and more of them. I am concerned my perspective on this might have been lost within the other points of my essay. I'm not against a highly trained pastorate, or against a robust graduate residential seminary curricula. However, nowhere in the New Testament do I see all the functions of the Office centralized into a single position (other than Christ, himself). Christ sets the tone by sending his men in two's to proclaim the Good News, and seems to have no issue with them baptizing in his name. Even among his select group of disciples, in special situations, Jesus chooses three rather than one. Paul's letters to the early church almost always indicate a plurality of leaders, and Paul never separates a special leader apart in these communiques who, alone, preaches, communes, baptizes, and forgives publicly (even Paul's specific letters to Timothy mention the presence of "the elders who rule well," acknowledging that Timothy was no "lone ranger"-- 1 Tim. 5:17, 2 Tim 2:2). The evidence from the New Testament suggests just what I assert in my essay: that the local church, gathered around God's word and His gifts, has the authority to identify a plurality of leaders to get the job -- the work of the Office of the Public Ministry -- done.

Rather than continuing to use circular logic (i.e. only ordained M.Div. or SMP pastors can carry out word and sacrament ministry because we only train and ordain M.Div. or SMP pastors), we should ask our training systems and organization structures to expand their reach and incorporate training for a variety of functions that serve the Office under supervision. Instead of placing our training programs in some kind of equal footing with congregations, let's get the sequence right:

primary authority is in the congregation, secondary support is all the training and “walking together” to support the primary authority. This is how Lutheran missions expanded so rapidly and effectively across the world, especially in the mid to late 20th Century. Practically speaking, whatever we call these leaders, *we already have this* in existing LLD programs (with 10% of all these men voluntarily going on to residential seminary), and other localized and regional support systems. In other words, we already have a “farm system” in place.

My concern is that the “just ordain them” approach will have a limiting effect upon our training and certification systems, despite the language regarding “training evangelists” used by the task force. The goal, at this time in the history of the LCMS, with the challenges we are facing, should be to shoot for a much greater target (a target that includes the need for many more highly trained graduate-level theologian pastors). The NOW Board of Directors highlights this target well in the ends policy for the district: “...to responsibly provide word and sacrament ministry *in every corner* of the district (for our discussion, I also add, “the world”).” The only way to meet that goal is to have a highly trained graduate pastorate *and* a variety of functions extending the Office responsibly under supervision. To reach this goal, we will need to restructure our training systems, reconsider the cultural trappings of our theological frameworks – and, to be honest – some pastors who are used to functioning autonomously will need to grow into a team-oriented role (like Paul and Barnabus) as supervisors, equippers of the priesthood of believers, and mission-trainers. This role requires a highly trained graduate-level pastorate.

As I hope you notice at this point, the ultimate responsibility for Word and Sacrament ministry does not shift in any way from the called, ordained pastor. This, from my perspective, is another point of agreement for us. Rather, the responsibility is heightened as he equips and supervises other leaders to extend the Office at the discretion of the congregation and the needs it identifies.

I also agree with your assertion that “more ideas need to be generated.” However, as you will see below, I have concerns that the LCMS is being pressed beyond the point of no return in this discussion.

After reading your response, I noticed some differences in our perspectives. If I have mis-read anything, please correct my understanding.

1. There are serious concerns among Lutheran theologians regarding The Office of the Public Ministry as narrowly confined to a single person authorized to carry it out with an M.Div degree, or SMP training. Please see Von Behren’s essay, *Rehabilitating the Doctrine of the Call...* in the January Special Edition of LMM as a fine introduction (found at www.lsfm.global). It is not appropriate to suggest, as Synod leaders have done more than once, that we are even close to theological consensus on this topic. The sitting president of the LCMS in public statements claims there is one valid theological perspective, and it requires immediate action. In this, it seems, we have a key difference: While you agree with the report and its recommendations, I find the report and recommendations of his task force to be 1. theologically confusing and one-sided, and, 2. short-sighted regarding the practical needs in the field and those facing Synod as an organization.

2. Your response suggests that after the death of the apostles and eye witnesses, we needed highly trained men who could interpret the scriptures they left for us, hence the requirement for a graduate-level pastorate. This seems your main point, beyond responding to my essay: “Let us not tempt God. Let us fully train those who are to labor in the Holy Ministry.” While I have already noted my support for having more highly trained graduate level pastors, I must also point out that we have a difference here. At least, we have a difference if your understanding of “fully train” is the equivalent of a graduate-level degree. How much education should a leader who is proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments have? For example, ethnic pastors who are ordained through the EIIT program (and are leading growing congregations across the U.S.) receive a lower level of theological education than SMP training, yet we expect Anglo men to do something else. How do we reconcile these two approaches?

Since Christ had “the pick” of all the learned “graduate-level” men across Israel, it must be of some importance to our discussion that he chose mostly uneducated men from Galilee and those who were not part of “the religious establishment” to pass along his priceless words and redeeming activity. This is no small item in our discussion. He has strong words of condemnation often for biblical scholars of his day. If Christ, who is our cornerstone and foundation, chose a different kind of man than those who had the equivalent of graduate training in their day, then how can we not also consider men like this? Should we not more stridently require our training systems to select and then train men following Christ’s model (teaching/supervision/daily practice) rather than the worlds’ model? Again, please do not misunderstand my emphasis to be an exclusion of graduate-level pastors. After all, Christ also chose Saul (trained by the graduate-level Pharisees of his day) and turned him into Paul, and “us gentiles” wouldn’t be here without Paul. Yet, it is this same Paul who seems wholly bent, his entire missionary life, on not training anyone into graduate-level Pharisees, or graduate-level “Grace-pastors.”

As in my essay, I must again suggest calling LLD’s “pastors” is a titular solution to the issue rather than a systemic solution. I’m not against the LCMS carrying out an extensive conversation about ordination, and the possibility of extending it to new groups of leaders. However, in my opinion, the subject is of enough consequence that TF 4-0A should not be jumping the gun with a quick solution all the while claiming it has done more than its due diligence. To summarize my perspective: we need to re-think and re-build a robust selection process for our leaders (usually the congregation and local circuit knows best who has faithful character); we need a training process that is flexible, not financially onerous, and modelled after the training methods of Christ; and we need pastoral supervisor-trainers who can walk with these leaders as they practice proclamation within real faith communities. These are not static structures but ongoing processes. The SMP program is a helpful step in this direction, but remains 1. Too expensive, 2. Too centralized in the Midwest (when it could be pushed out regionally, which would also take care of lowering expenses), and 3. Too limiting upon completion. The EIIT program is also a helpful step in this direction.

Foundational to this discussion is the Lutheran notion that authority for Word and Sacrament ministry rests in the local congregation. Our synodical arrangements are, at minimum, one step removed from this at a secondary level and we should communicate this difference

regularly. If we do not, we begin to confuse primary authority with secondary organizational structure created to enact the authority. The growth of the church across the world and more specifically the LCMS through its partners in mission has always moved forward with multiple functions extending the Office responsibly under supervision. That is a fact. I have heard leaders in our church body denying that fact, but it is a fact. I was there in West Africa in the '70's, '80's, and '90's. Local congregations and "preaching stations" raised up leaders, most with little education, to preach and baptize and commune under supervision. I was present when the Word of the Lord spread (Acts 6:7) in West Africa. The challenges of *that* mission world have arrived *here* in our insular western world, pressing us to reconsider our assumptions about the Office. This discussion is proof of that.

3. We have a difference regarding the theological balance point between congregation and leader, i.e. the authority of the congregation for Word and Sacrament ministry and the called leader and his level of training. I do not think these exist like your "two truths," in dialectical tension. Rather, I suggest that it is Lutheran, especially LCMS, to lean on the side of the congregation first. There is a sequence of importance. If I have a hungry guest in my home, and we are without food, and there's no Subway nearby with sandwich experts, do I make him go lunch-less? If I care for my guest and his need to be fed regularly, I go and purchase the ingredients, and though I may not be as well-trained as the Subway sandwich expert, I make him a sandwich myself.

To argue that lack of good theological training means congregations should not have LLDs (or someone like them, whatever we call them in these challenging times) is like saying because I don't have a Subway nearby with sandwich experts my guest must go hungry. In this case, the extended quote of Walther's which you suggest is Walther's support for calling LLD's "pastors" is actually the opposite. The activity of good "pastoring" as need arises should not necessarily lead to us to create an official designation for these people as pastors. Just because someone does, indeed, fulfil the need for The Office (whether out of immediate necessity or more formally for an extended time under supervision) does not mean we must slap an ordination tag on him. I am hopeful that you, and others who hold to your perspective, can at least see there may be a different and also valid interpretation of Walther in this case. Again, I must point to Von Behren, who says it much better than I can.

If we want to provide for the needs of local congregations (those that are aging and those that are starting new, those in remote locations and those in challenging situations) then we bring on more leaders in a responsible way to carry out the task, and we figure out how to get them the training under supervision as we go. The role of the graduate-trained pastor becomes even more critical here, as supervisor, trainer, and the one ultimately responsible.

What matters most is the feeding, not having a sandwich artist available. In this case, I lean towards a flexible *and* responsible approach to provision, rather than a rigid one. I believe this is the dividing line in this discussion. To what extent are we willing to see faithful servants, identified by local congregations, extending The Office under supervision? One final note: it is the very act of flexible provision that most likely paves the way for Subway to open in my neighborhood. My sandwich-making is not a threat to Subway. If I continue to make sandwiches for myself and my guests and neighbors, there may come a time when

even the anti-sandwich people welcome Subway to the neighborhood. I recognize this analogy breaks down quickly, I know that sandwiches are not the Sacraments. Here's what I mean: if a Christian in a situation without an M.Div. or SMP pastor available sees his neighbor or neighbors in need of public forgiveness, asking for baptism, or hearing the Good News proclaimed, should he not act? These kinds of occurrences are not out of the norm, and are becoming more and more regular because of our secular context.

All this changes if I happen to believe the sandwich expert is given powers -- by some special rite -- to transform a simple sandwich into something more. If I believed this, then if my guest or neighbor needed a sandwich, I would wait for this sandwich expert. I don't believe this, I'm not Roman Catholic. The authority is the Word of God, not the person, and every believer is granted full authority in his or her baptism to proclaim the Good News publicly within this Kingdom of Priests, gathered together around His gifts.

4. Your response notes the important role of being able to question one another regarding our theology and practice, which I find essential (after all, this is what my essay did). However, in the case of LLD's we have moved far beyond this constructive activity into pre-emptive decisions, and my essay notes that we need more time for discussion. I did not hear this perspective from you, only agreement with the task force proposals. I am concerned that instead of discussing the issue as you and I are doing, we are moving into a time when decisions will be made under the guise of "we've settled this and there is only one way to see it," and enforcements will become the norm. I would not have said this at the time of writing my essay, but since then, the LCMS president used Synod funds, Synod workers, and Synod P.R. to create and publicize a video to that effect.
5. Your response does not provide any differentiation in the analogy between the rural folk of Luther's day whom he called "pigs and irrational beasts," and Lutherans today who use LLD's in both rural and urban settings. Shall we assume this same phrase used by Luther for those 15th century illiterate Lutherans is applied to our LLD congregations filled with brothers and sisters who hold graduate degrees, run 1000-acre ranch operations, serve on community boards, parent children in our demanding times, coach soccer teams, and lead executive groups in organizations? Shall we assume these brothers and sisters in congregations facing remarkable challenges today which choose to use LLDs are "pigs and irrational beasts" who don't know what they are doing? That is the suggestion provided by the analogy, which you did not qualify. At some point, analogies cease to hold water (like my sandwich one, I'm sure). I am concerned this analogy does not transfer to our time.
6. You suggest, "...I think we ought to recognize that the ramifications of the use of licensed lay deacons won't be seen until many years down the road. The conditions of the church at the time of the Reformation did not occur over night nor even after a mere thirty or forty-year period. It was gradual and unforeseen until the damage was already done." We have a difference here regarding 1. "damage," and, 2. The ramifications of LLD ministry. The existence of the LLD ministry, in part, pressed the LCMS into creating the SMP program which has allowed a more robust response to local needs. That's not damage. The "ramifications of the use of LLDs" are in evidence today, not 30 years from now: It is a fact that we have congregations in the NOW district that would not exist without the ministry of

LLDs. It is a fact that we have congregations that have called a full time pastor as a result of the service of LLDs. It is a fact that the seminaries have noted, over and over through the years, that entrants who were previously LLDs and *sensed the call of God to voluntarily go and* chose the M.Div. route are excellent pastoral candidates. It is a fact that we have been able to launch new congregations with the service of LLDs. The ramifications of the use of LLDs are clear, today: with careful supervision, God's people receive the word and sacraments regularly in every corner of the district. 30 years from now, if we still have LLDs, my guess is we'll also have excellent graduate-trained theologians supervising them responsibly.

7. Nowhere in my essay do I say the reformers were in category error. Your statements to that effect are a misrepresentation and over-extension of my point. My point is the local church is given the authority by Christ to apply The Office, under the Spirit's guidance, as it sees fit within each era. This authority is retained in our Synod structure in the form of article seven of the LCMS constitution. My closing note reminds the reader that The Office is broader and more flexible than we often give it credit.

A number of questions arose for me after reading your response.

1. One of your main points is the role of the clergy to identify and point out original sin because "original sin is at home everywhere." Is not this role for every member of the priesthood of believers? Furthermore, is not there a second truth to your second truth that "original grace is at home everywhere," in fact, *more* at home than any sin could be? You neither explore the priesthood of believers' role in your response, nor the role of original grace. A biblically-uneducated reader of your response might be led to assume the prophetic eye of the priest-pastor is the sole gift God has given the church to search out the logs in the eyes of others. In emphasizing this important role, you may have inadvertently underemphasized 1. The role of the priesthood of believers, 2. The role of original grace, 3. The command of Christ to deal with my own sin first before the sin of a brother.
2. You do not speak to the auxiliary offices or functions that we have in existence already such as DCE, DCO, commissioned teachers, deaconesses, and so forth. Do these, in your opinion, proclaim or extend the proclamation of the word of God under the office of the ministry? If we already have the theological framework in place for this understanding, why cannot we also include the service of LLDs without making men pastors who do not want to be ordained, M.Div. or SMP pastors (contrary to the stated belief in the Synod President's video, our data from the last 25 years shows that 90% of our LLDs do not sense the call from God to be a pastor, but rather, they see their function as a responsible service to the congregation while under supervision, and they prefer to serve for a time as need dictates)?
3. Is it better to have a highly trained and highly educated theological educator/pastor leading a congregation without any required supervision and/or accountable relationships, or have a less educated and less trained pastor or deacon who is supervised regularly and held accountable locally? The reason I bring up this question is that I've heard more than

once the argument that we need to turn deacons into pastors because of “abuses” or “deacons off the rails.” I find this logic suspect, considering that we have just as many, if not more, pastors who abuse the office or “go off the rails.” Why would we turn deacons-- functioning within accountable systems--into pastors when we don’t have reliable accountable systems in place for our pastors? Deacons can have a license removed at any time by a DP, or not renewed at annual licensure, while pastors, typically, must commit an egregious error for there to be action from a DP.

4. At present time, LLD’s serve and learn within and under a variety of helpful accountable structures: robust theological training by graduate-level instructors, a supervising pastor, an annually revised ministry description determined by congregation need, the district president’s interview and licensure and oversight, and an annual requirement for CE. M.Div. pastors do not have any of these accountable structures in place. Would you be in favor of placing M.Div pastors within these accountable structures if we do away with the LLD function?
5. As I have already indicated, I support extensive pastoral training culminating in a graduate degree. We are in ongoing need of more and more graduate-level pastors. The question is not about men being trained extensively but rather the need of our congregations to receive the word and the sacraments regularly, and for new and old faith communities to have flexible provision. It is a fair question to ask: at what point does a current congregation no longer receive the Word and Sacraments regularly because it cannot afford the type of leader Synod requires? A secondary question is this: by whose authority shall this congregation be told it cannot receive regular Word and Sacrament ministry?
6. Acts 13:1 notes there were both teachers and prophets in the local congregation at Antioch who, through fasting and prayer, identified Paul and Barnabas to send as missionaries. Since you identify prophets as not being a mediated local call, what was the role of those prophets in that congregation and how did they receive their call?

Finally, there are a number of questions I raise in my essay which I did not notice a response from you. I’m not requesting a response from you, either to my essay or any concepts written here. I note them below because I think the questions provide a pathway for considering the practical needs of our congregations:

1. Do we need more time for this conversation rather than a vote this summer?
2. To what extent is this conversation about The Office culturally tinged, and how might we carefully identify our cultural conditioning over and against what is clearly scriptural mandate?
3. In what ways could Lutheran theology interact with the current 21st Century era’s challenges and support a robust Lutheran practice of the Office (my own answers rest on congregation polity and article seven of the LCMS constitution)? Please set me straight

if I heard you incorrectly, but what I thought I heard from you in this regard was a single point: we need to make sure we don't give away high level graduate degree training.

4. How will we actively provide Word and Sacrament to unique and challenged communities that are not homogeneously Anglo Saxon Lutheran?
5. How will we actively provide Word and Sacrament to unique and challenged communities separated by great distances?
6. How will we actively provide Word and Sacrament to unique and challenged communities with small groups gathered for worship in antagonistic situations?
7. How will we actively provide Word and Sacrament to unique and challenged communities that cannot afford a full time pastor or an SMP pastor?

I appreciate your response to my essay and found it valuable "as iron sharpens iron" for my own thought process. You note that my argument is "thin" in spots, flat in others, and that I miss important truths. I must balance my desire to be at peace with you and other brothers with the mandate of my conscience to speak for those congregations and new starts in danger of being treated like 2nd class citizens in the LCMS.

Ultimately, at stake beyond the LLD conversation is a serious question about what kinds of Lutherans can be part of the LCMS, and how wide our practice can be to allow for cultural and contextual differences on our communities. I am an Anglo Lutheran who grew up in West Africa, with a cultural sensitivity to Germanic overtones in our speech and theology. An ongoing question for the LCMS to consider is whether there is still "space in the family" for people with my perspective.

The goal of my essay was not to reply to every detail of TF 4-06A's report but rather use it as a spring board to raise serious cultural questions, highlight assumptions undergirding our theological framework, and focus on practical needs in the field and how we are structured to meet them. If my essay, and this response, meet those three items for the reader, then I fulfilled my goal.

All the best in Jesus,
Dust Kunkel