

Document prepared by the faculty of Seminario Concordia, Buenos Aires, Argentina

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina (IELA)

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We, the undersigned, responsible for the continuity of Seminario Concordia (Concordia Seminary) in Buenos Aires in our role as pastors and teachers of theology, aware of the different attitudes, fears and versions that exist in relation to the events in recent months in our Seminary and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina (IELA), we feel the need to give our opinion and position. We do realize that we are not the exclusive owners of the truth and this statement may not fully satisfy some of the concerns that circulate in our church:

1. Our interpretation of what happened in the Seminary:

As professors of theology (teachers of the church) in charge of the continuity of the Seminary, we share our opinion about the situation of controversy which has led to the resignation of two of our colleagues.

For some time, we have been part of a Faculty who lived within a setting with a crisis, which was becoming evident both inside and outside the institution. Whether in pastoral conferences, in the Assembly of the IELA (its Convention), in relation to fellow pastors or the manifestations of some students in their respective congregations, were perceived tensions and judgments about theology and practice that for decades was normal between pastors and congregations of our IELA. The main focus of controversy has been the doctrine of the sacred ministry, a subject that became a pivot, a kind of theological prism, perhaps over-emphasized, which was giving way to tensions in relation to other issues, such as the concept of mission, the number of sacraments, the concept of the church, understanding the priesthood of all believers, some adiaphorous issues, etc.

There is no doubt that during this time, our IELA has taken very important steps to affirm our confessional identity, providing principles and teachings that help us to stand firm against “in vogue” theologies and ecclesiastical fashions that seek to infiltrate congregations, members and pastors.

The incorporation of professors who just resigned, helped a lot to work positively in this direction. What was observed, however, according to the testimony of pastors and members of the IELA, and evident in writings of the same professors, our colleagues, was that they been experiencing a change in some of their positions, especially with regard to the pastoral ministry. You could perceive a strong emphasis on the office and person of the pastor, something which differed from the teaching and practice that the IELA noted in its congregations.

Their position, in and of itself, was not the cause of the crisis seen today in the Seminary and the IELA, but rather, how they stated their position as the only legitimate and correct posture to which they held, placing under suspicion and judgment all who were not in agreement with their position. A healthy tension or paradox is proper in confessional Lutheranism. But suddenly we were confronted by a very rigid stance, which they called “confessional” claiming it had complete legitimacy. When the conflict reached its highest tension, it became a question of persecution of the true doctrine by the lies and falsehood. We believe that the apparent reductionism was not all that was at stake. There was a paradigm shift and conflict. And as in any conflict, it could also be seen in this crisis, features that do not come from the best sources, but more like bitter roots, which do not edify the church.

Since it was necessary to address those differences, at the faculty we were committed to each other to state our positions on the issue of the pastoral office and other issues that relate to it. Each presented their positions, but we were unable to reach agreement on certain points. It was clear at that point, that we were working in some way with two different theological paradigms. Despite the differences, we faculty had a respectful dialogue as we addressed the issue.

During recent years the topic of “ministry” took an important dimension in the Seminary and as this topic was known by the student body, a good part of it, a strange theological language began to appear which was not common in the IELA. Within our institution, the issue divided the student body and outside the institution many began to fear about the profile of future pastors. One question that was raised was how students were being trained and how would they be able to serve congregations that sent and supported them to study at the Seminary. When they entered the Seminary their reference were local pastors and congregations; now their training was forming them in a different direction. Confessional zeal with which they were being formed was evident. But concerns arose about how these tensions would be worked out when they were called and ordained as pastors of our congregations. In some cases, the combative and confrontational character of seminarians raised questions and concerns, putting under scrutiny the entire process of their theological formation.

What was happening, perhaps can be best understood through a metaphor. The IELA, with its theology and practice, could be conceived as a train that from one day to another, was forced to switch rails. A new theological paradigm had replaced the previous one. The theology and practice once evident was now viewed with disdain and distrust. Suddenly an acute revisionism takes place. From this tension questions were generated such as: What kind of church were we up until now? Are the majority of our pastors mistaken and should we not repent and change our theology and practice? Were we ever a confessional church or we were not? What determines that confessionalism? Who has the right to be considered part of true confessionalism? Were our parents and grandparents deceived, those who worked long years from a theological perspective which was the “official position” of our mother church (the LCMS) in the past? If they had been so deceived, how should we act in the present?

We believe that if a new theological conception (perspective, paradigm) becomes the “line” of a school of theology, at least the leadership of the church, the body of pastors, must have had an opportunity to meet and make it their own. If that process does not happen, it is obvious that a conflict begins to incubate. From the very start, this process of appropriation did not happen

properly. If given, it should be a firm, patient and loving process. If that new prospect new - different- is not appropriate, it will be seen as strange, at odds with existing theology and practice. As a result, the graduates themselves will not recognize their own church; on the other hand, the congregations will not recognize the graduates as pastors who speak their faith language, which embodies their identity as Lutherans believers.

2. Our position on the issue in controversy:

Please see the three attached statements below, which expose broadly, what each of us presented to be analyzed by our IELA Dispute Committee, which also served as the basis of our own internal dialogue as faculty. As can be observed, the above basically agrees with Pieper and Mueller's positions, in addition to the thesis of C.F.W. Walther on ministry.

The reasons why we accept to work with Mueller's text are because they are a guide which we do not find in conflict with our Lutheran Confessions. While there are other literary sources that help to enrich and deepen the issues raised by Mueller and Confessions, we know that the IELA has not seriously challenged Mueller to be at odds with the Lutheran Confessions. In fact, Mueller has been used for years together with the Book of Concord in the formation of generations of pastors. Neither has there been any recent serious objections to Mueller within the faculty, to be used as a reference book in the area of Systematics.

3. Diagnosis of the church, strengths and weaknesses:

It has been noted in recent years, a vigorous interest of seminarians to incorporate in their speech, a combative stance in favor of being and looking more confessional. Although maybe not done intentionally, it is evident in many of them of their urgent need to sometimes cite the Confessions first and then the Bible. If the Confessions are the map to understand and correctly interpret the Scriptures, we might say that in certain cases "the map ends up replacing the territory." In an effort to be theologically right, instead of arguing with the Bible itself, citing the Confessions is used to support what is being said, as if there were no other way to state the teaching and preaching of Scripture and to correctly interpret the Bible. The most salient example, however, has been the extraordinary emphasis that has been placed in Article V of the Augsburg Confession, when the same Confession is centered on the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ, in Article IV.

We believe that because of this doctrine, Luther stood firm with extreme courage at Worms before the authorities of the Roman Empire.

The above, demonstrate attitudes that can be considered worthy of being conferred, of Confessional zeal, but you can also display a radical and unjust gaze at the church in which we were born and where we have been nurtured until today. In general, what we see in our church, the IELA, are strengths and samples of the grace of God that cheer and encourage us, and also weaknesses that are the subject of our utmost concern. Colleagues, in general, struggle with everyday challenges and seek to deepen their training to respond faithfully to the challenges of their ministries. There is often no time or opportunity to stop and do "high theology", but without it our pastoral task may be weak, superficial and easily contaminable with non-confessional currents.

At the congregational level, as is observable, the biggest challenge is presented in the large urban centers, with an aging membership and the difficulty of reaching with the gospel, the majority of secularized and urbanized Argentina. We are also concerned with our ministry with adolescents and young people, many of whom do not remain in the church after their confirmation. We see, however, that in some rural communities, the church grows and parishes because of that growth (not always because of internal growth) has required sub-dividing, increasing the possibility of better pastoral and missionary work. This growth occurs in the context of the common folk, reason enough for the pastor who serves them must do so with patience, love and contextualization.

With respect to pastors, we need to continue working seriously and regularly our Confessional identity, in order to find a common language in fundamental doctrines -our theological framework- which also serves to review our practices. Knowledge and use of the Book of Concord should be natural and ongoing, to retrain and affirm our work in ministry. If it were not for our Confessions, perhaps today we would be one more of the many churches that are without identity, a collective fashion in the Protestant world (evangelicalism), built upon the theology of glory. We believe that our pastoral continuing education program must follow in order to help active pastors to deepen their theology and refine their practices, trying to find answers to the new theological, ethical and pastoral challenges of our time. Whether inviting pastors or teachers of sister churches, via Luther Academy or by any other means, we need to offer our pastors training and new tools for ministry. There are cases where we see that some practices (liturgies, hymns, songbooks, etc.) need to be reviewed, given that they do not reflect our Lutheran theological framework.

Moreover, we note with great concern the need for good catechesis, to return to training using the classical texts, such as Luther's Small and Large Catechisms. We included in this catechesis process, a new generation of Bible studies by the pastors or leaders (well-formed deacons) for members to learn to read and understand the Scriptures and thus share it with others. Youth, women, men groups provide a good structure to delve into the Bible and study doctrine. Habits like family devotion time, the teaching task of the parent, are principles that must be redeemed as precious elements in the transmission and preservation of the faith.

4. Relationship of the IELA and the seminary with other churches and institutions:

The IELA, as explained at one time by Professor Rev. Érico Sexauer, is a church of confluences. The main base of its members came from Russia (with pietistic tendencies) and they received as ministers LCMS pastors, with a conservative profile ¹. For a church as this, perhaps the Confessional zeal within its membership was not as marked as perhaps intended or appeared to be. In the province of Entre Rios, cradle of the IELA, families often became involved proportionally in Reformed churches (Congregational and IERP [a Prussian Union church]) as well as the LCMS influenced, IELA. Overall there was a climate of tolerance and mutual acceptance, although the Missourians received the nickname of "closed, attached to obsolete forms". It was in these years that the differences between these churches became evident, more so with regard to our IELA, because IERP shifting toward the more liberal side, and the Congregational Church toward the Pentecostal and Anabaptist. In terms of identity, admittedly, being a Lutheran IELA needed to distinguish itself from Roman Catholicism. For this reason, some of the Catholic practices and habits were and are seen as something strange in our churches. It had happened in Russia and

continued in Argentina: with Roman Catholics we held an attitude of rejection. This explains, albeit in part, certain symbolic or liturgical elements of Catholicism are rejected in our context (even though they may have been “Lutheran” originally, such as the sign of the cross or confession private).

However, as a Lutheran church, we are also part of a wider influence since our roots come from elsewhere. For years our theological books were not written here among us. Our first pastors came from elsewhere. The IELA was a district LCMS until 1986. Our economic dependency was linked to our theological roots.

Keep in mind that our IELA and its school of theology has strong connections with other sister or daughter churches, with whom there has been good communication and a common theological language for years. We can cite, for instance, the exchange program with the school of theology in Brazil. We have not noticed that our students have experienced any kind of shock because of the theology of our Concordia Seminary. With the churches of Paraguay and Chile there has been a fluid exchange, and they are being served faithfully by colleagues trained in this Seminary. With the church and pastors of Bolivia there have been strong connections for many years, and they have seen in the IELA a serious church with ministers well formed with whom they wish to have closer ties.

This means that being in contact or in communion with Confessional Lutherans elsewhere it has been and remains a source of growth, exchange and mutual benefits. Pastors who did their post-graduate studies outside the country have contributed much to the affirmation of our Lutheran identity and theological reflection flourishing in our midst. We allow and encourage this contribution.

For these reasons, we believe that the exchange with sister churches within the International Lutheran Council (ILC) is a blessing, since it gives us a reference point and allows us to exercise together, with a well-defined contour in Christianity: Confessional Lutheranism. So we feel that to receive human, financial or academic resources from other churches, is in our best interests. But there is one aspect to consider: that economic dependence can be harmful, it will atrophy local potential and may condition the freedom for us to do our own work within the confines of our own identity. Is our church prepared to take note of this and provide the resources for a solid theological preparation?

So we also observe, with some concern, how some pendular swings within the LCMS, end up affecting our progress and self-determination as a church, and not always in positive terms. Between one decade and another, we are invited to move from one orientation to other. That on the one hand, possibly bare weaknesses in our identity, but on the other bare questions of how those who have the resources may interfere in smaller churches, sometimes ignoring and disrespecting the identity and history of the sister churches. The Ablaze program a few years ago, for example, is replaced by a perspective that is at odds with the past. Perhaps now we see that certain equations undress our insecurities and vulnerabilities. We might ask: Is it good that most of the budget for maintain our Seminary come from outside? Is it a good idea, in terms of identity, that most of our student body is from other countries? Perhaps these things end up generating a not-so-desired effect, although they may be supported by the best of intentions and strategies.

Furthermore, these strategies may not be typical of our agenda as IELA, but rather originated and imposed by other outside entities.

5. Graduate profile, desired outcomes:

Among many possibilities, we would highlight the following features of our graduates:

- That they assume an attitude of commitment and service because of and in Christ.
- That they have a thorough knowledge of Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions (as a faithful exposition of Scripture).
- That their life and ministry be a true reflection of what Scriptures say about the pastor (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).
- That they know the reality of the IELA and the great challenges of pastoral work today.
- That they experience passion for the lost, recognizing the missionary dimension of the pastoral office and the life of the whole church.
- That they have training with actual experiences in the area of mission and evangelism.
- That they do not ignore the “cloak”, the context where the Lord will have them work.
- That they Confessional zeal accrues no fanaticism, at the risk of ignoring, for example, that which Walther (Thesis XX) says about heterodox churches ².
- That the concept of the “kingdom of God” be ever present and that they contemplate the work of the Holy Spirit in all activities of the church (Bible school, men and women groups, youth, etc.) as well as the Word in the believers’ lives, in every time and place, in the midst of their vocations.
- That they know how to use the tools that auxiliary sciences can provide to the pastoral office (such as psychology, anthropology, philosophy, didactics, communication, etc.).
- That they know the society in which we live, understanding current religious of our day, Christian and non-Christian. This will allow them to speak a language that recipients can understand and is appropriate for their lives.
- That they are always ready to learn, grow and develop, taking advantage of the good experience of others, leaving the “comfort zone” when needed for better service to Christ and to the extension of his kingdom.

6. General conclusions:

We are aware and conscious that on the issue of the pastoral office there remain theological and practical questions that have not given satisfactory answers. In fact, we had a council meeting and an open ended second attempt which has not ended, because there are questions that still need to be answered³. Today some of these questions are still open and they need to be considered. Historically the churches have sought agreement (“concord”) on the basis of the study of Scriptures and the Confessions. We believe this must be the way us to achieve harmony regarding these issues in order for us to have a common language on such great theological and practical issues.

Meanwhile, we suggest to be prudent and careful not to hurt consciences or provoke scandals, especially regarding the consecration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper by the laity. About vicars and advanced students, we suggest not to innovate anything with regard to the historical practices within the IELA.

José Pfaffenzeller
Antonio Schimpf
Leandro Hübner

Notes

¹ The excellent article by Professor Érico Sexauer published in the book of the 90 years of the IELA, pages recommended: 128ss.

² ... It is not rightly divided the word of God when it is dependent upon the salvation of man from his church affiliation Orthodox visible, and when salvation is denied to anyone who errs in an article of faith (Walther, Law and Gospel, Thesis XX, p. 270).

³ The first council was held in 2002. A second council is then scheduled. See Theological Magazine No. 166, containing all the papers prepared for the 2009-2010 Council that could not be take place for reasons beyond our control. We believe it is a good material as a starting point to work some issues seeking to be answered.

Individual reactions of the three Seminary professors who wrote the initial declaration:

Annex 1: Position Paper - José Pfaffenzeller

Overall I think that the issue of the public ministry, vestments and practices has created an unnecessary discord which continues to cause much confusion and waste of time. Satan is very adept at distracting the church and entertaining her. Generally speaking, I think the pastors in IELA are loved and well respected as persons acting by a divine call to perform their tasks. It is true that in some cases, there is some confusion and sometimes it may sound like members can perform the tasks of public ministry. This for certain is not correct and about this, we can dialog and teach amicable and in a peaceful manner, these issues without exceeding the levels of authority and autonomy.

There has been an attempt to introduce changes, consciously or unconsciously, with regard to the exercise of the public functions of the pastoral ministry, pastoral vestments and other practices that clash with what has been normal in IELA. This brought exposure, conflict and unfair judgements from both side of the issue, causing pain and hurt. Any change (especially within the church) produces pain and reaction. For this reason, changes require patience and love. Those who are younger often are influenced by what is new and revolutionary, and they can easily fall into the mistake of hurting others without knowing so; pain that could be avoided when wisdom and humility are exercised.

I believe that the public ministry is not an invention of the church to relieve the work of the laity as they engage in their vocations, but rather a divine institution (Ephesians 4:11). It is not a mere transfer (*übertragung*) of the whole church's responsibilities toward a hired employee. The public ministry is essentially the task of a servant in Christ's name, who's responsibility is first to preach the Gospel publicly and privately, and administer the sacraments. In synthesis, this means to deliver the gifts of Christ, meaning that this person exercises this function doing so in the name and with the authority of Christ himself. He is a shepherd (pastor) under Christ (1 Peter 5:2-4 and Acts 20:28).

The means of grace are 'food' that Christ prepared for humanity. They need to be served to the world. For this reason, Christ initially formed his apostles and from them, calls persons from among the members of the church to serve as 'servants' to serve this 'food' in the public setting of the church and wants all church members to serve this in private settings, as well as in the midst of their daily vocations. To be a person with tasks serving in the public ministry certain qualities are required as described especially in 1 Timothy and Titus. And no one can exercise these public tasks in the church by personal choice, but rather by the call or being entrusted by God, through the church.

I see in Scripture that everywhere a congregation came into being, persons were constituted to perform the task of serving the means of grace. I also see the apostles, especially Paul, forming a team around themselves (i.e. Philippians 4:3; 2:25), where surely there were people who learned from him and were performing tasks of the public ministry (i.e. Timothy and Titus) [There is no indication that there was a 'click' from which these people were allowed to do this or that pastoral

task]. This is something like an ongoing, practical, intentional and spontaneous seminar (workshop). In my pastoral practice I followed this ministerial model. I have chosen people with abilities, instructed them, and then took them with me (after securing a consensus of the congregation) so that they could learn by doing ministry, in order to perform tasks such as teaching, preaching, help with distributing the sacrament and leading worship in the absence of the pastor. Today one of them is a parish pastor and others are very effective leaders. In this sense, it was very normal for the IELA, that when a parish asked (called) a seminary student (vicar), it would authorize him to perform the functions of the ministry in their midst, and in principle, under the supervision and guidance of a pastor. Many of us did our vicariate as “pastors” because the parishes we were serving were without a shepherd; it was a matter of necessity. Of course, it is not ideal as a vicarage should be a year of practice, an assisted and supervised learning experience.

I disagree:

a. That to accomplish the tasks of the public ministry in the church a man must and should be, with no exceptions, a seminary graduate who has gone through the act of ordination. Regarding this I find no explicit biblical mandate; neither a ceremony that marks a before (that does allow you to serve) and a later (which now yes, allows you to serve) [as I mentioned above, about the idea of being part of a ‘click’].

b. That in some way, this person (the pastor) becomes something like a means of grace, or ‘funnel’ through which God’s grace only is able to flow; as if he were the only intermediate for administering Word and sacrament. And I especially disagree with this argument because laity are seen as useless and out of place in areas of witness, service and teaching. This is contrary to what Luther thought when he wrote: “...but the Holy Spirit carries on his work unceasingly until the last day. For this purpose, he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all his work” (Large Catechism II, 61).

c. That once done, this ordination is something given for a lifetime and for the church in general. For example, if former pastor is now retired, he can manage the administer the means of grace in any congregation because of his indelible calling. But a vicar or an authorized and constituted member of that congregation, cannot.

d. And I disagree with the position that a pastor of a large parish cannot have a team with people, who, with the consensus of the church and who are duly authorized, can help in tasks of public ministry.

On the other hand, I do believe that it is necessary to uphold the office of the public ministry, clearly sustain that the persons called by the church to occupy this office, exercise their function on behalf of and in the place of Christ himself. God wants there to be a distinction of functions between people exercising the tasks of the public ministry (pastor and his team) and the other members of the congregation. Those who serve and those who are served in the area of public worship. I also agree, that as a church, we should not neglect good theological formation of persons who will be called to fill the office of public ministry under normal circumstances.

In other issues, such as the use of clerical shirt and crucifix, I consider them adiaphora, but if their use is counterproductive, it is better to limit their use. Over thirty years ago, the use of the clerical

shirt, collar and cross were associated with liberal theology within the Missouri Synod (for example, the occasion of the St. Louis “walkout”), the confessionals avoided their use. In more recent times, the more “orthodox” began to identify with them. But that is another context. But people in our Latin American context, consider the use of the clerical collar and the crucifix as identifies with Catholicism. Incorporate this as a fad or an identification within the IELA and even judge who does not make use of them, is not healthy. Even more so when seminarians make use of them because they are not pastors. The clerical shirt usually produces more distance with those we wish to communicate with, or may even give the impression that the person is not sincere. Much better is a dialogue of equals. My thinking is that clerical shirt is for whomever wishes to use it, but maybe it is most appropriate for specific moments, such as visiting the sick in hospitals.

We can surely notice doctrinal deficiencies in members and pastors of the IELA. This is due, to a degree, largely because many years ago those who were prepared for ministry no longer had access to good literature in German or English, and began to relied too heavily on reformed theological literature in Spanish which is available everywhere. The solution is not to be on the “theological lookout” and rush to point out false doctrines, but help in love and wisdom to correct or to improve.

It is important that we strive to make available good biblical and Lutheran literature in Spanish, not only of high theology for theologians and pastors, but also, above all, simple literature to educate the people of God in the truths of our Christian faith.

The seminary has to be at the service of the church and theologically form needed leaders for the church. The seminary belongs to the church and is under the authority of the church, neither have independent existence. The seminary, as an active part of the church, can and should ensure pure doctrine, that it be practiced well and taught appropriately, but it has to do this with meekness.

There needs to be better and more fluid communication between the church, its authorities with the seminary, in both directions. For this communication is genuine, all need to exercise dialogue in humility.

At this point, it is also appropriate to remember that it is important that the church watch over a seminary that pursues a good level of theological and practical knowledge for pastors and church leaders. Its instruction cannot be mere academic theory, inconsistent with reality. It is therefore important to have a seminary that is well-integrated in the service and reality of the church.

Suggested paths, proposals or plans of action:

That we emphasize more theological education in the congregation, that it be clear and simple, easily grasped by the people (the laity), leading to a healthy confessional theological formation with an approach to the life and service of Christians in everyday life, as well as having the ability to overcome beliefs and practices that are not in keeping with biblical doctrine. Without falling into fanaticism, Christians who are capable of going beyond doctrinal essence.

The public ministry has been instituted by God to exercise the public functions of teaching, preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. This public ministry is not simply to serve an ignorant people or to replace those people in their priestly function, but rather to instruct each person so that they can better exercise their priesthood in the midst of daily life. The world can be

penetrated by the gospel of Christ through the exercise of the priesthood of all believers. “Ordinary” believers can reach others where they are, as happened for example, in Acts 11:19-21 and 1 Thessalonians 1:8. If pastors and missionaries were to try to accomplish this task alone, they will not achieve much. If we wait for the world to come on its own accord to our chapels to receive Word and sacrament served by public ministers, we have to sit and wait and see how our sitting congregations grow older, agonize and die.

It is best that there be harmony between pastors and laity to serve and mutually complement each other, which is the reality in most of our parishes. Of course, there still needs to be a delineation of tasks that can be performed by the laity and those that they cannot. At this point one must ask, what can laity do within the gathered community? I see no biblical argument against a layman with suitable gifts to be entrusted by the church and its pastor, to perform public duties when necessary (just as the waiter serving food to diners, needs helpers - assistance - to better serve those gathered). I think it’s a contradiction to insist and drown in extreme theories that prevent the means of grace from reaching the laity, simply because there is no ordained pastor available. I think this means to place human obstacles before the means of grace.

Luther argued that all Christians are to ensure that the Word is preached. In places where there are no Christians, any individual Christian can preach and teach. However, when a Christian community was formed, no layperson (priest) can claim the right to assume the tasks of the public ministry, but only with due consent of the others, as Luther says, “because we are all priests, no one should give importance to himself or dare do anything without our authorization and election in those matters in which we all have the same power, because what is common, no one can arrogate without authorization and order of the community” (LW in Spanish, Vol. I, p. 76).

In short, it is necessary that the church to again emphasize the theology and practice of the service of the laity by virtue of their vocation and their gifts (Ephesians 4:7,16; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12-15). Pastors must understand this and effectively educate the laity for active service each according to his vocation. This does not exclude that some of them can be authorized by the church in due order and seriousness, to perform tasks of the public ministry, not only in case of extreme emergency, but also to facilitate the administration of the means of grace. Similarly, when vicars and seminarians are requested by a pastor and a congregation to exercise these functions, they can do them in good conscience, because they are not usurping something that was not granted to them.

The church cannot be as such without the public administration of the means of grace, so therefore, they should always have ways that this can happens and that they not remain undelivered, simply because there is no graduate of the seminary. Therefore, we cannot conclude that “all are ministers” who preach, teach and “have a ministry” in the church and no one listens and receives. This would be utter chaos. It is always necessary for the church to proceed in order to choose and entrust the task to qualified servants, as suggested in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5.

The apostle Paul left a fundamental principle with the young pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 “...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also”. Moses accepted a similar advice from his father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 18; cf. Leviticus 11:16- 30, especially v. 29). This multiplication of workers which

consists of selecting, gathering, and instructing, is a reflection of Jesus' ministry, of Paul and all of the New Testament (Philippians 4:3; 2:25). Therefore, every pastor can bring together appropriate leaders, and prepare conditions so that they can help him in his task. As often happens, over time, pastors and full-time workers begin to emerge. In fact, there will be more experienced people who study in the seminary having had previous instruction and the opportunity to serve in their context. This has not been the case of many of our current seminarians.

Annex 2:
Position Paper - Antonio Schimpf

The ministry or the office pastorate is instituted by God to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments and be vigilant and judge doctrine. The task of pastors, as the name suggests, is to provide pasture in order to feed the flock. It is not, as some argue, one arranged human institution to safeguard order in the church. It is one of the marks of the true church (Luther: The councils and church) and is the institution through which God delivers the gifts of salvation to men.

The ministry has its roots in the same act of God, who comes to meet humans in their sinful situation and communicates with them, to lure himself through the law and the gospel. It is rooted in the ministry of the prophets and apostles, although it is different from them because the pastor bases his teaching on the disclosure of Scriptures and not from direct revelation. God not only works salvation, but provides the means (means of grace) and instruments (people prepared and separated by Him) so that salvation be known, delivered and received. Ministers or pastors must be considered as gifts of God to the church. A faithful and well trained pastor is an unparalleled blessing for the church. It is thanks to the ministry that Christ's work is disseminated and God creates and sustains faith in Christ by word and sacrament. You cannot conceive the church without the ministry nor the ministry without the church.

The ministry, according to my position differs from the Roman Catholic position as well as positions within Lutheranism leaning in that direction, such as the Loehe and Grabau. My position, at the same time, differs from the reformed compressions and others who do not properly distinguish between ordained ministry and priesthood. As we can appreciate in Luther (although the reformer seems to vary in his view on the subject) the doctrine of the ministry is situated between Romanism and the movements of the radical illuminated. Overall, I identify especially with the thesis of Walther, the so called middle way. The pastorate cannot be understood as an aristocracy in the church which considers the laity as a lower caste, but as a place of service. The value of ordination is not a sacrament, and therefore the concept of what is stated as a legitimate call must be underlined. The church as depository of the office of the keys has the power and the freedom to deliver those keys in the right people, duly tested and rightly examined. According, I believe, ordination, the rite of laying hands, is merely a public ratification before the church of what previously was given through a different means. What Melancthon highlighted in the Treaty, as I believe, is the right of the church to call and ordain and not so much the rite itself, which Romanism loaded with a quasi-magical halo, rather he wishes to eliminate.

The pastoral ministry, from the times of the New Testament, has alongside with other "offices", which we can call "auxiliaries". The ministry of word and sacrament is, according to Walther, "the higher office"; other offices are necessary, but not essential. Anyway, every congregation must be attentive to the needs and service opportunities arising in their midst, to train workers and give them the place to serve depending on the primary task: preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. Note that these offices (vocations) also have gifts that God has given to members of the priesthood of all baptized. These auxiliary offices are not called to

compete with the ministry of the word, but should help it focus more on its essential task (Acts 6:2-4).

However, Acts 6 is key to understanding why the auxiliary offices are not only one option, but sometimes imperative because they free ministers of the word of tasks that prevents them from fulfilling the essence of their ministry. Acts 6 also shows us that, although auxiliaries, they are not secondary, but the process by which they function is surrounded by a legitimizing framework (participation in the election, imposing of hands). But we also read in the book of Acts that of “auxiliary” is relative, given the “public ministry functions” that Stephen and Philip later carried out.

It is necessary to clarify terms when we speak of the pastoral office, since it seems to be equated to a means of grace, something capable of engendering the church and sustain her as a tree with its fruits. The church is engendering where the gospel genuine is present and sacraments are administered according to the gospel (CA, VII). Obviously, for the means of grace to be delivered and received, trained and faithful instruments are needed. But these instruments are not what makes effective the means of grace. If we believed this, we would be in a kind of neo-donatists (CA, VIII).

A strong emphasis is perceived regarding the centralization in worship as “the place” per excellence in which the Holy Spirit works, as if the word were only effective in the mouth of an ordained minister. Sometimes it seems there is a special interest in keeping under control the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers. There is no doubt that worship was, is and will be the center of Christian life. However, we have the testimony of several stories in Scripture where God has worked through ordinary believers whose testimony God used to do his work (his will) in order to bring genuine faith in unexpected times and places. I do not think Isaiah 55 can only be applied to the context of worship. The story of Naomi and Ruth leads the latter to say “your God will be my God.” The story of John 4, with the testimony of the Samaritan woman, illustrates what I intend to say regarding this point.

The Treaty in paragraph 26, says that, “...nor is this ministry valid because of some individual authority, but only because of the word given by Christ.” What do I mean by this? That the office exists and depends on the word and because of the word and not vice versa. The office, the ministry, ensures and guarantees that the gospel (the remedy) not be adulterated along the way, the road of life. The reason for this office is to ensure that the message reach its destination in a pure, unadulterated manner. The competences that the church checks in a candidate who will be called as a minister ensures that the candidate will not adulterate what is given to him, but will faithfully deliver an unadulterated, undistorted Word.

Finally, I express something about the relationship between Article IV of the Augsburg Confession and the following: the church is present where the Gospel is taught, where the sacraments are given in a pure manner ... and not “where there are pastors ...”. We do not have among us something like, “where the bishop is, there is the church.” Ours is more like, “where Christ is, where the word is and the sacraments present, there is the church.” What guarantees that the faithful and pure presence of the word and the sacraments? Usually it is the office, someone duly called. But not always, nor necessarily so. If a person comes to faith in Christ

through the testimony of a lay leader (someone not ordained), a student of theology or a vicar, we cannot declare that faith apocryphal: it is saving faith or it is not. The faith that has been engendered in this context makes that person someone who is a member of one sancta (Church of Christ), and if it is genuine faith, he will seek to join the communion with one sancta, that is where the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered.

Annex 3:
Position Paper - Leandro Hübner

The Ministry was given by God and instituted for the preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. It is not something given to all Christians, as if everything church member could be a minister (pastor), but those who received the vocation, were prepared, approved and then called by the church (for a congregation, chaplaincy or other ministry linked to the church) to serve in this position, always under the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is a ministry of service, as was that of Christ, not lordship over the church, yet it exercised the authority of Christ himself.

On the other hand, regarding the conversion of people through the work of the Law and Gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the ministry is not the only voice of God, but each baptized believer is a priest of Christ (1 Peter 2:9 and other texts), proclaiming the Word of salvation in their daily vocation in the opportunities that arise and the means they have received (words, deeds, life, diverse evangelistic materials, whether written, visual, audible or other), pointing to Christ and with their testimony, bring Christ to people and people to Christ and, consequently, to the church of Christ.

I disagree with a position that seeks to centralize everything in the minister or pastor, especially in the worship and liturgy, as if: (1) universal believers as priests have only a passive role and are not used by the Holy Spirit as living stones (1 Peter 2:5) for building the kingdom of God; (2) outside of worship without a pastor present, as in family or group Bible studies, the Holy Spirit cannot act through His Word, when they are led by believers and prepared under the supervision of the pastor; (3) the liturgy was something essential to the effectiveness of Word and Sacraments (cf. Luther in his sermon on the sacrament, you have to see what is essential in the sacrament and what is not; and as stated in FC, DS, X 9; CA, XXVIII, 50-52; Ap, XXVIII, 15-16; and FC, DS, X, 15, where we see the freedom in ceremonies and rituals).

I do not agree with a position that may consider or confuse the desire for growth in faith, in holy living (the sanctified life) and service to Christ with “pietism” or “Pentecostalism”. Nor do I agree that apart from or without the presence of the minister, a person cannot receive the faith by the Holy Spirit through a flyer, brochure, booklet or other biblical material, thus limiting the work and mission of God only to called and ordained ministers, and certain places and occasions, such as worship, for example.

I do agree with the position that ministry is a special office, but not superior, inside the church and is under the responsibility of everything that has to do with teaching the Word and administration of the sacraments. As well, all the preparation and supervision is part of that responsibility, as the case of Bible school teachers, catechists, deacons, leaders of Bible studies and other functions occupied by believers in addition to their vocations, as mentioned above.

Yes, I also agree, that all testimony and proclamation of the Word, either by ministers or universal priests, should lead the converted (or those who are attracted or taken to hear Word) to

church and worship, so that in worship and other church activities, they can mature in the faith (or be converted) and finally be part of God's family in a particular congregation.

I agree that worship is the center of the life of the church, but as a means and not an end: the worship is the primary means God gives us to be nourished, strengthened and comforted in faith, besides being oriented in the Word and have a special communion with our brothers, to (1) be firm to receive eternal life through faith in Christ and (2) always be prepared to bear witness to our faith in daily life and vocation as the apostle Peter affirms so clearly.

Yes, I agree that there must be a unity in liturgy, hymns and practices (as we have always sought to have in Lutheranism) that will lead us to Christ and be guided by the parameters of Law and Gospel and the centrality of justification by faith (the three solas), however, not condemning what is different, nor that which does not hurt the gospel nor sound doctrine. What is sacred? Word and sacraments, and not rituals, costumes, gestures and hymns, even though all this seems important and necessary, everything should point to Christ and our salvation through him.

I do not think it should become a doctrinal controversy, but the issue of the use of vestments, crucifixes, gestures and other adiaphora should be considered through continuous clarification.

The church needs to see the seminary as their own and not something outside of itself. It also needs see foreign contributions, whether academic, financial or other ways besides the same students of sister Lutheran churches are blessed by the Lord for the seminary and same church, and not something that will bring harm.

I have understood that we are all, seminary professors, students, authorities, pastors and members of the Church, on the same side and with the same intention, which is to bring Christ to all and feed, guide and strengthen those who are already members of the body of Christ.

So I think the best way for us to proceed is, where there were offenses, sincere, humble dialogue be sought with a desire for forgiveness and reconciliation; that where there is disagreement regarding doctrines, we seek understanding and consensus, always remembering that the Word is superior to the Confessions and our customs and particular positions.

Nor do I see as healthy as the practice of putting tags or labels to opinions different from ours, or brothers who think differently from us, such as "Pietists" or "ultra-orthodox" or the like, which do not build and do not see the possibility of others also wanting the best for the kingdom of God.

Thus, we seek increasingly to value the gifts and qualities of our brothers, teachers, students, pastors and members, as people whom God gave these gifts for the purpose of serving Christ and others and build the kingdom of God.

I conclude by saying that the pastoral ministry and the priesthood of all believers are parallel and interrelated, not being hierarchically superior nor more spiritual before God and men, but as a special office within the Church formed by "royal priests". The two are instituted by God and

depend on one another, serving one to the other and purposes of the Kingdom of God in the world, based on his Word.

Therefore, if we want to be a church that seeks to fulfill its motto “servants in mission” we increasingly value the ministry and the general priesthood of believers in our church, and I believe that this is one of the reasons why there is in our seminary an area of Missional Theology.

Valuing and uplifting some more than others, as I see it, is not consistent with healthy biblical balance and does not make a healthy church. Without believers, there is no church and with no ministry, there is no church, and both are totally dependent on Christ, who is the head of the church.

I deeply respect the opinions of my colleagues, and to seek the best for the kingdom of God.

Letters of support:

Porto Alegre, Rio Grande Do Sul
July, 2016

Dear brother Carlos, president of the ELCA, and other brothers in Christ!

We support your decisions, explanations, clarifications, statements, and we stand in solidarity with you. In fact, we are concerned about some positions taken and followed by some within the International Lutheran Council, but we understand that your position is very clear, well-founded and is what we always teach, believe and confess.

God help and bless, and confessional Lutheran church in the world.

A hug,

Pastor Egon Kopereck

President of the IEL Brazil

Guatemala, July 27, 2016
Rev. Carlos Nagel
President
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina

Dear Brother in Christ:

Receive our fraternal greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, on behalf of the pastoral body of the Lutheran Church in Guatemala we send our greetings and thanks for having responded to our concerns, continue to pray for you and receive part of the Lutheran Church in Guatemala our full support and solidarity.

Our only request is that we are sent all newsletters which we will share in the next pastoral meeting where we will make official the position of the Lutheran Church in Guatemala regarding this new theological current being disseminated in our church in Latin America and although our position is well known as it was expressed by me in the last ILC Assembly where we opposed remove the correct meaning of the priesthood of believers because if we cancel the function and the support of the laity in the church we would be doomed to disappear, much less raising the level of pastoral ordination to become sacramental.

Praying that our good God continue to prosper His ministry and His church, receive a fraternal embrace of the pastoral body of the Lutheran church in Guatemala.

Rev. Abdiel Orozco
President of the Lutheran Church in Guatemala

Villa Adelina, Buenos Aires
July 16, 2016

Greetings in Christ,

The centrality of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is simple. So simple that even a child is able to understand and enjoy it. God made the really important things simple so that everyone, even the least educated, culturally or less gifted, had access to their forgiveness and abundant life. God took care to not complicate matters, so that no one be put out of his saving plan by intellectual limitations or little knowledge.

Throughout the history of Christianity, for various reasons, some more worthy of consideration than others, church affairs have become tremendously complicated. It has created a real “war of knowledge” among ecclesiastical scholars. These wars have often sparked the worst conflicts, and have even led to bloodshed, sacrificed in honor of the idols of human vanity. Meanwhile, ordinary people generally remained outside these questions, enjoying the gifts of the simple gospel of salvation.

Jesus gave the great treasures of the kingdom of God to men and women of simple mind and heart. The Jews had high level rabbinical schools, where their doctors usually arguing over inconsequential for the welfare of man and of God's people issues. Jesus avoided them, because God's way was for all.

At one point the Lord said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because these things hidden from the wise and understanding and revealed them to children. Yes, Father, for so it pleases you” (Luke 10:21). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 8:1ff, makes this statement: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If someone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know how to know, but if anyone loves God is because God already knows “. The apostle does not belittle the knowledge, but puts it the service of love. Knowledge that is not governed by love, has conceited people. But when love governs, knowledge then makes it useful and able to serve as building for the lives of people and for the church.

Paul was not exactly a “simple-minded” man, but a scholar, trained in the higher studies of their time. A Pharisee beyond many of his peers. Jealous guardian of the faith, able to shed blood to defend what his knowledge demanded. And Stephen witnessed it in his martyrdom. But when it was known to the Lord, on the road to Damascus, all his knowledge was under the domination of love. And only then he began to be useful to God, employing, plus the new ancient knowledge that had been revealed. And so he could write the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, “and even if I had all knowledge ... but have not love, I am nothing” (v. 2). The chapter sums up everything in this sentence: “... but the most important of these is love.”

In this order of things, we must be content if we want to be in the duty of being the church of Christ.

Fraternally:
Pastor Carlos Nagel

President of the IELA