

The Public Ministry of the Word

Adopted 2005

Salvation Won by Christ and Received through Faith

We teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God accounts as righteousness in His sight, Rom. 3 and 4 (Augsburg Confession IV, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9).

Salvation Distributed

That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the Gospel. That is, God, not because of our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake. (AC V, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9)

We reject the teaching that the Holy Spirit comes without the external Word but through their own preparations and works (AC V, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, 9).

The Role of the Church in Salvation Distributed

I. The Office of the Keys

God has given to His church on earth the Office of the Keys (Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:18-20, John 20:21-23; also see Smalcald Articles, Part III, Art. VII, 1"). "The Office of the Keys is the special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth, to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners and

to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent” (Luther’s Small Catechism, “The Office of the Keys and Confession”, ELS 2001 ed.; “Doctrine of the Church,” Thesis III, ELS Synod Report, 1979, p. 31 and 1980, p. 76). The church uses the keys to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and practice church discipline. The keys are used privately or unofficially¹ when individual Christians, on behalf of Christ, speak the Gospel of forgiveness to others; when they forgive the sins of those who sin against them; when they retain the sins of those who do not repent, e.g., when they confront in a brotherly way those who need to repent of their sins; and when in “the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren” they comfort one another with the words of the Gospel (1 Peter 2:9, Matthew 18:15-18, Matthew 6:12 – The 5th Petition of the Lord’s Prayer; SA Part III, Art. IV). Christians also use the keys publicly or officially when scripturally qualified individuals, who have been called by Christ through the church, forgive and retain sins on behalf of Christ and His church (Romans 10:14–17, Acts 14:23, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 67). Christians also use the keys to judge the teaching of their pastors and teachers; they are to beware of false prophets (Matthew 7:15-16, 1 John 4:1, 2 Timothy 3:16).

1. We reject any teaching that denies individual Christians the use of the keys privately in their calling as the Universal Priesthood of All Believers.

2. We reject any teaching that treats the Universal Priesthood and the Public Ministry as one and the same thing.

II. The Public Ministry of the Word

This public use of the keys is the Public Ministry of the Word. “That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted” (AC V). This divinely instituted Public Ministry of the Word includes both a narrower and a wider sense. The narrower sense refers to a presiding office that is indispensable for the church; see II A. The wider sense refers, in addition to a presiding office, to offices having a limited public use of the keys, offices that the church, in her freedom, may establish; see II B. The divine institution of this preaching and teaching

office is not located in just one particular passage. Rather, throughout the New Testament, a divine ordering, establishment, and institution of the preaching and teaching office is indicated and presupposed (John 20:21-23, John 21:15ff, Matthew 28:18-20 [NKJV], Matthew 9:36-38, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 4:1; see also Treatise 10). Those in this office by virtue of God's call through the church perform their duties on behalf of the church and in the name and in the stead of Christ, so that whenever we hear Christ's servant we hear Christ Himself speak (Luke 10:16, AC XXVIII, 22, Apology of the Augsburg Confession VII & VIII, 28, 47).

3. We reject any teaching that the Public Ministry is a development of the church and not a divine institution.

4. We reject any teaching that holds that the Public Ministry is established merely by the orderly carrying out of the Universal Priesthood according to 1 Corinthians 14:40.

A. The Public Ministry of the Word in a Narrower Sense: The Pastoral Office in its Various Manifestations.2

The church is commanded to appoint ministers who will preside over the churches (2 Timothy 2:2, Titus 1:5, Ap XIII, 12), who must have the scriptural qualifications for a full use of the keys: "The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent....[T]his power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters or bishops" (Treatise 60-61). God commands that properly called men publicly preach, teach, administer the sacraments, forgive and retain sins, and have oversight of doctrine in the name of Christ and the church (1 Timothy 2:11-12). Therefore a presiding office, whether it is called that of pastor, shepherd, bishop, presbyter, elder or by any other name, is indispensable

for the church (Luke 10:16, 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Matthew 28:18-20, Hebrews 13:17, Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Peter 5:1-2).

5. We reject any teaching that denies the exercise of spiritual oversight by the pastoral office.

6. We reject any teaching that the apostolic authority of the Public Ministry of the Word or the validity of the sacraments depends on or is derived from ordination by a bishop standing in an unbroken chain of succession from the apostles, or the necessity of maintaining a "historic episcopate."

Scripture clearly teaches that women are not to be in the pastoral office, because this presiding office includes the exercise of authority over men (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Also, when Scripture refers to one who officiates at the Word and sacrament liturgy it speaks in male terms (1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 4:13). Therefore women shall not read the Scripture lessons in the divine service, preach the sermon, administer Baptism or distribute the Lord's Supper, for these things are intimately related to the pastoral office (1 Timothy 4:13-14, 1 Corinthians 4:1).³

The church is free to divide the labors of the pastoral office among qualified men (1 Corinthians 1:17, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6). While every incumbent of this office must be qualified for a full use of the keys, not every incumbent must be responsible for full use of the keys. Missionary, assistant pastor, professor of theology, synod president (who supervises doctrine in the church), and chaplain are some examples of this.

7. We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry of the Word is limited to the ministry of a parish pastor.

B. The Public Ministry of the Word in a Wider Sense: Other Offices That Have a Limited Public Use of the Keys.

The church has freedom⁴ in dividing the labors of the public ministry (for example, vicars, principals, Lutheran elementary school teachers and other

teachers), but must not go beyond the bounds of God's commands when calling men or women to carry out a limited public use of the keys (1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:12ff, etc). The extent to which one is authorized by the call of the church to exercise the keys publicly is the extent to which one is in the Public Ministry of the Word. Authorization to exercise a limited part of the Public Ministry of the Word does not imply authorization to exercise all or other parts of it (1 Corinthians 12:5, 28, Romans 12:6-8, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8, 5:17).

Teachers of Children in Christian Schools.

In the Old and New Testaments, our Lord commands parents to train their children in the fear of the Lord. He also has commanded His church and the Public Ministry of the Word to feed the lambs of His flock with His saving Word. Teachers of children in Christian schools established by the church therefore have their authority from both of these divinely established estates (Deuteronomy 6:1-7, Matthew 15:4, Ephesians 6:1-4, John 21:15-17, Large Catechism I, 141).

Extending calls to teachers who have spiritual care of children in Christian schools is not merely a laudable custom, but is in accordance with Romans 10:14-17 and Augsburg Confession XIV, not only for the sake of good order, but also because these teachers carry out a specific part of the Public Ministry. It is by human right that the church separates a limited portion of the office to one individual. But it is by divine right that one exercises that work on behalf of the Christians through whom the call has come.

8. We reject the teaching that only those qualified to carry out a full use of the keys are in the Public Ministry.

9. We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry is limited to any one divinely fixed form, that is, limited to the pastoral office to the exclusion of other teachers of the Word.

10. We reject any teaching which would conclude that the means of grace are effective only when used by a pastor.

11. We reject any teaching that makes the office of the Lutheran elementary school teacher, Sunday school teacher or any other limited office in the church equivalent to the pastoral office.

C. Qualifications.

Those in the Public Ministry of the Word by virtue of a regular call are to conform to the specific and general qualifications given in Scripture (see especially 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, as well as directives such as Matthew 28:19, 20, John 21:15-17, Acts 14:23, 20:28, and Romans 12:6-8).

III. The Divine Call Into the Public Ministry

One cannot hold the office of the Public Ministry of the Word unless called by God (Romans 10:14-17, AC XIV). Some men, such as the apostles, were called immediately, directly by God, to the Public Ministry. Since the time of the apostles God calls mediately (Acts 1:15-26) through the church so that there will always be qualified individuals who have been set apart to administer publicly His means of grace for the salvation of souls. The church in an orderly way extends divine calls in the name and stead of Christ and on behalf of the believers. Those who possess divine calls are serving in the Public Ministry of the Word in either a narrower or a wider sense (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23, 20:28; 1 Corinthians 3:4-9, 21-23).

12. We reject the teaching that every Christian is a public minister of the Word.

13. We reject any teaching that one may publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call (AC XIV).

IV. Ordination and Installation

In the Lutheran Confessions ordination is understood as the rite by which the church confirms a man to be suitable for a call to the pastoral office (SA Part III, Art. X, Treatise 66–69). Historically the Lutheran church has reserved this rite for those entering the pastoral office.

The church also has used rites of installation for all those called into the Public Ministry, in both the narrow and the wide senses. Through such rites, the church makes clear that those installed in office have been properly called to it and invokes the Lord's blessing on them. At the same time those who are called to serve the people of God give public testimony to their submission to the Word of God as it is taught in the Lutheran Confessions. Rites of installation also have been used among us for congregational officers and occasional teachers in Christian congregations (Sunday school teachers, etc).

1 In this document when we speak of the private or unofficial use of the keys we mean the duty and authority belonging to individual believers (the Universal Priesthood of All Believers) which is their personal responsibility toward their neighbor. When we speak of the public or official use of the keys we are referring to the duty and authority of those who are called to act on behalf of Christ and His believers.

2 The term "pastoral office" has been used historically according to a more restrictive meaning (referring only to those men who are called to the pastorate of a local congregation), and according to a less restrictive meaning (referring to all those men who are called to a ministry of pastoral oversight in local congregations, as well as in other specialized fields of labor). In this document the term is being used according to its less restrictive meaning.

3 Certainly emergency situations may arise, such as when our catechism states "Q: Who should administer baptism? A: Ordinarily the called minister of Christ should administer Baptism, but in emergency any Christian may and should do so" (ELS Catechism, p. 182). For further discussion of emergency situations, see the 1862 Lay Ministry Theses, parr. 5-7 (Grace for Grace, p. 139).

4 Christian freedom is given to the church by God. "By divine right" refers to those things which are commanded by God. "By human right" refers to those things neither commanded nor forbidden by God which Christians may arrange according to their needs and circumstances (Acts 6:1-7, 15:22-29, 4:32, 5:29, 1 Cor 3:21, 22, 14:40, Gal 5:1)