

Basic Principles in the Call to the Public Ministry of the Gospel

The following is a list of principles that should be followed when it comes to men being called into the ministry. Unfortunately, it appears today that in some Lutheran Churches, there is confusion or even ignorance in this area. Some men are called to be pastors even when no congregation has called them. Instead, they receive a call from a man-made organisation and are given the title "Pastor."

1. The ministry is essentially the preaching and teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments (Augsburg Confession V). Jesus Christ has won the blessings of forgiveness and salvation through His active and passive obedience. These blessings are available in the Gospel and the Sacraments. God chooses and sends men to apply these blessings through the Gospel and the Sacraments. The Gospel creates both the church and the ministry, and ministers have no other work and mission than to preach and teach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. What the office of the ministry is, and what its functions are belong together. We reject the view of any who argue that the ministry is no more than the carrying out of the functions of the ministry resting in the priesthood of all believers and that it is merely by human right.
2. The public ministry of the Gospel is a divine institution. God chooses and appoints men to serve in this office of preaching (John 20:21; Rom 10:15; 2 Cor 5:18-20; 1 Cor 12:28; Acts 20:28). The task of ministers is both to declare God's Word and protect His church against wolves. No one appoints himself. Though in an emergency, a church may exist for a time without a pastor, the office is necessary, and a commandment of God and the call to the ministry creates the office of the public ministry. It is God's will that a flock should have its shepherd. The call is absolutely necessary, for the faithful pastor must be certain that God wants to use his labours.
3. There is only one public office of the ministry of the Gospel, though it is known by many titles, such as bishop, elder, pastor, teacher, preacher, and minister. Any distinctions between them, such as the office of president or bishop in the modern sense, and assistant pastor, are not by divine right, but only by human right.
4. The apostles were chosen directly by our Lord. Ministers of the Gospel continue the work of the apostles in the church, but are appointed mediately, or indirectly, through the congregations who call them. God calls through the church (Acts 20:28; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 3:21; 1 Cor 3:5; Titus 1:5).
5. All Christians have the office of the keys and speak the Gospel privately as occasions demand, teach their children, and baptise in cases of emergency, but not all Christians are in the special public ministry of the Gospel. The minister teaches out in the open, in the name of his congregation, in and out of season, no matter the consequences. The public office of the ministry is a special office through which God serves the church. It is a sacred office entrusted by the conferral of a legitimate call upon certain suitable persons.
6. In the practice of the Lutheran church of the past, it is the entire company of believers who call to the ministry. Though a call is made by one congregation, it is a call of the whole church. At the time of the Reformation those who called included the civil magistrates, the ministers of the church, and the economic or domestic estates (the people). There was a case in USA in the 19th century where a congregation called a second pastor without the consent or involvement of its pastor, and Walther's opinion was that it was not a legitimate call, because it was the action of only some individuals.
7. The series of steps in a call in the Lutheran Church have been: examination, presentation, confirmation by officials, and the consent, vote, and approval by the people. The sheep must approve the shepherd.
8. Because the call is God's call, there should be no hiring and firing mentality in the church. As God calls through means, God also removes through means, and a pastor should be removed only when it can be shown with certainty that this is the will of God. The Lutheran Theologian John Gerhard once said that, as the whole church is involved in the call, the legitimate cause

for a pastor's removal pertains to the whole church. A pastor may be dismissed only when it is shown clearly that he is guilty of false doctrine, or an ungodly life, or that he is no longer able to teach. No one should allow himself to be put in the place of another who has been dismissed without due process. Luther says that such a person would be "a thief and a murderer." He has stolen another's call and destroyed his ministry (Luther's Works XII, 176). A call is also a legal document.

9. No one should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church unless he is regularly called (Augsburg Confession XIV; Treatise, 67). When a pastor other than the regular called pastor conducts a service, this also ought to occur only after the invitation of the congregation.
10. Being "regularly called" includes ordination and installation. No one should be ordained without a call. Though ordination is not a sacrament and in theory is not absolutely necessary for entering the office, in Lutheran practice ordination is never omitted for someone called to the public ministry of the Gospel. Ordination is the public attestation by the church of God's gift to the church. The reading of the document of call is an important part of the service of ordination and any subsequent services of installation.
11. The public minister of the Gospel is both a servant of God and a servant of the congregation. There may be times when a pastor, in God's name, has to resist even the majority of his congregation.
12. Because the call constitutes the ministry, a man who has been a pastor and is without a call (through early retirement or being deposed, for example) is strictly no longer a pastor, even though he may be called one out of respect.
13. The call to the public ministry of the Gospel may be part-time. For a while, Paul supported himself by making tents part-time.
14. The call should always be permanent. One should not merely quit such a high calling. It is irrevocable unless God Himself intervenes. For a couple of centuries after the Reformation, even the idea of retirement did not occur to people. Temporary calls are not objectionable when the tasks are by their nature temporary, but not those that have a built-in dismissal, which allows officials to terminate a call on unbiblical grounds.
15. No pastor should transfer to another ministry without another legitimate call. When a pastor, who has a divine call, receives a call from another congregation, he does not decide which call is divine, but in which divine call it is the Lord's will that he should labour.
16. In *The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy*, Robert Preus warns about the frequent dangerous movement from emergency to practice to doctrine, and applies it within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Among such wrong practices he includes public preaching by lay people who have not been properly called; the practice of referring to anyone who serves the church full time, privately or publicly (in bureaucratic and administrative positions), as "ministers"; the deposing of men from the ministry without cause; the placing by officials of some pastors on a restricted list; the firing of pastors without due process, on the grounds that the pastor is "an employee at will", and that the congregation is autonomous; the requirement that a called pastor undergo psychological evaluation, or counselling against his will; the controlling of call-lists by district presidents; interference by district presidents by talking with members and hearing complaints behind the pastor's back; temporary calls; forced retirements; and the calling of women to the public ministry of the Gospel.