



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Lesson 13.20 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry**

#### **The Various Forms of Ministry in the Church**

We have already considered the fact that Christians have the freedom to create different forms of ministry as needed for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. In this section we want to explain the various forms of ministry churches in the United States that we have found useful at the present time. Christian congregations in other countries may use these forms or create their own forms that are more useful in their circumstances.

In the Church of the Lutheran Confession the most common form of public ministry is the pastorate of a congregation or several congregations. Such a pastor is called to preach the Gospel at the regular worship services of the congregation (usually held on Sunday mornings, but in some cases at other times on Saturday or Sunday) and administer the sacraments. The pastor is expected to become acquainted with all the members of the congregation in order to help them in their Christian walk. He visits the sick, counsels the troubled, conducts marriages and funerals and services on other special occasions. He is in charge of the educational program of the congregation, for both children and adults. In particular he is responsible for the instruction of the youth to prepare them to be communicant members. After a course of instruction of two or three years that includes a study of Bible history and Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, he declares them eligible for the Lord's Supper by means of a confirmation ceremony. At the present time the age of confirmation is around 13 or 14, although this may vary from one congregation to another. The pastor is also expected to encourage his members to bring the Gospel of Christ to those who do not know Him or who know Him imperfectly because they have been misled by false teachers. The pastor is expected to warn his flock of dangers that threaten their faith in Christ.

The pastor is assisted in his work by members of his congregation who have been elected to their offices by the voting members of the congregation. These voting members represent all the members of the congregation. Such officers may be called pastoral assistants, elders, deacons, or council members. Each congregation has its own constitution which the voting members have adopted. Voting membership is generally held by male members over a certain age (usually 18 or 21, as the constitution specifies) who are willing to attend church business meetings. These meetings are held about four times a year or more, as needed. Other helpers in the congregation may include secretaries of various kinds, teachers, trustees in charge of the church property, musicians of various kinds, and congregational officers such as chairman, secretary, treasurer, and financial secretary.

In the field of Christian education most congregations conduct a Sunday School for elementary school children, from ages three or four to around thirteen or fourteen or perhaps beyond that. For young people and for adults there is usually some sort of Bible class led by the pastor or an elder or one or more teachers.

Some congregations have a day school that meets five days a week except for the summer season. Such a school teaches the regular school subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic, science, history, geography) as well as Bible history and Christian doctrine. Trained Christian teachers teach all subjects from a Christian viewpoint. The pastor may teach some classes, but the congregation generally calls one or more teachers to teach most of the classes. Some congregations elect a board of education to supervise the school, together with a principal, who is usually one of the school's teachers.

In most cases congregational constitutions specify that the congregational business will be conducted by a church council, which is made up of various officers in the congregation. The final decisions on church matters are made by the voting members. The voting members are the ones who call the pastor and teachers and elect other officers in the congregation, including the members of the church council.

In keeping with Paul's instructions that women should not have authority over men, only male members may be voting members. In matters that affect the women and girls of the congregation, the voters seek and consider their opinions. Some congregations form women's societies that have their own organization for regular meetings, Bible study, and congregational projects that benefit all the members. Women regularly serve as teachers of the younger children in Sunday School and in the day schools.

In the United States most congregations voluntarily become members of an association of congregations known as a synod or church body. The constitutions these associations adopt state their purpose and how their work is to be conducted. Leaders of such associations are chosen by means of elections during the regular meetings of the association. Such elected persons are also ministers of the Gospel and part of the public ministry, carrying out the duties which they have been given. Synods need various officers and board members to carry out the work the congregations that part of the association have asked them to do.

Among the projects of the Church of the Lutheran Confession is the operation of a synodical high school, college, and seminary for the training of pastors, teachers, missionaries, and other church leaders. Such a school need special gifts: administrators, teachers, counselors, and helpers of various kinds. God gives gifts to His Church, and it is up to Christians to recognize these gifts and call individuals who have these gifts to be the teachers of future pastors and teachers, to teach specialized subjects such as the Bible languages of Greek and Hebrew as well as other languages useful for church work. The school also needs teachers of such subjects as mathematics, science, history, social studies, and language.

Another main project of a synod is mission work – the spreading of the Gospel of Christ in United States and other countries as well. Missionaries need to be called for special work in these areas. The Church creates and develops forms of ministry according to the needs of the Church.

Another main project is congregational education, including the preparation and printing of materials that will help in Christian mission work and Christian education. Thus, the synod authorizes the publication of journals and magazines that contribute to the cause of the Gospel.

As the Gospel goes out into the world and reaches other countries and other cultures, other forms of the public ministry may be created that better suit the circumstances in these other countries. We would not expect the congregations in India, Nepal, or Nigeria, for example, to use the same forms that American congregations use, although they may do so if it benefits their churches. There are many ways in which Christian work can be done.

It is especially important for those who have been asked to serve in some form of public ministry to be on guard against spiritual pride and a feeling of superiority over Christians who have not been chosen for such an office. Jesus' twelve disciples were in danger of exalting themselves over others. To teach them a lesson, **"Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea'"** (Matthew 18:2-6).

Those in the public ministry need to remember that ministry means service, not domination. They need to imitate their Master, Jesus, who said: **“Whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:44-45). Ministers in Christ’s Church need to keep in mind the example of Jesus, their Master, who washed the feet of His disciples as a servant. On that same night Jesus said: **“Who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves”** (Luke 22:27).

The aim of a minister in Christ’s Church is not to tear others down, but to build them up, that is, to edify them. The apostle Paul wrote: **“Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel”** (1 Corinthians 14:12). **“Let all things be done for edification”** (1 Corinthians 14:26). On the other hand, he said: **“If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another”** (Galatians 5:15).

Teachers in Christ’s Church should recognize their responsibilities and carry out the duties of their office to the best of their ability. James writes: **“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment”** (James 3:1). Since ministers often do not have an earthly supervisor watching over them but set their own hours and keep track of their own responsibilities, they can be tempted to become lazy and get by with doing as little as possible. But Paul teaches us something different: **“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them; if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it for ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness”** (Romans 12:6-8). And again Paul says: **“It is required in stewards that one be found faithful”** (1 Corinthians 4:2). **“He who judges me is the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 4:4).

One very important ministry is the training of future Christian pastors, teachers, and other leaders. As Paul awaited the sentence of execution as a prisoner in Rome, he wrote to Timothy: **“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”** (2 Timothy 2:1-3). Notice Paul’s concern for future generations. The Gospel of Christ must be passed on to them. This work requires faithful teachers. The Lord Himself delivered the Gospel of Christ to Paul. He then passed it on to Timothy. Timothy, in turn, was to pass this same teaching on to faithful men, who will teach yet another generation. Therefore, one of the foremost duties of a church body is to train future leaders. Every effort should be made to train these future leaders as thoroughly as possible.

## Questions

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1. What are the usual duties of pastors in American Lutheran congregations?
2. What forms of the public ministry are common in your locale?
3. Who is responsible for the weekly church services in your locale?
4. What are common organizational practices in American congregations?
5. What forms of organization are found in congregations in your locale?
6. What is meant by voting membership in a congregation?
7. What is special about the instruction given in Christian day schools?
8. How can church bodies or synods assist local congregations?
9. How can synods help congregations in doing mission work?
10. Why is it useful for congregations and synods to have constitutions?
11. Why is it so important for Christian leaders to be humble servants?
12. What is meant by the term “edification”?
13. How are ministers and church leaders trained in your locale?
14. How can this training be improved?