



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 13.22 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

The Ordination and Installation of Ministers

When a person who already has a call into the public ministry is serving in that call and then receives another call to a different position in the public ministry or in a different location, he needs to determine where God wants him to serve. He has two calls, and he cannot accept both of them at the same time. In order to determine where God wants him to serve, he will examine himself and the gifts God has given him and the needs of the Christians who have called him, he will consult both groups of calling Christians and his Christian friends and associates, he will pray to God for guidance, and then he will make a decision to either serve under his present call or accept the new call.

When he accepts a new call and is ready to begin his service under the new call, it is customary among American Christians that he be installed into his new position. This usually involves some kind of church service during which the Word of God is proclaimed by someone chosen for this purpose, and both the calling congregation and the new minister are reminded of their duties and privileges as Christians and Christian servants. The person called is asked whether he is willing to teach God's Word in its truth and purity, according to the Bible and the congregation's public confessions.

This procedure is a matter of custom rather than a command from God, just like confirmation and other church practices that have been in use for a long period of time. God's instructions for pastors are summarized in the words of the apostle Peter: **"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away"** (1 Peter 5:1-4).

It has also become customary among many Christian groups for a person who has accepted a call into the public ministry for the first time to be ordained. By accepting a call into the public ministry, such a person is already a minister by virtue of the call he has received and accepted. Ordination is a public declaration that the person to be ordained has been called into the ministry indirectly by God through the congregation or synod and that he possesses the required qualifications. As part of the ordination ceremony those who are already serving in the public ministry in the area or who have some office in the congregation or synod lay hands in blessing over the person who is being ordained and installed.

The laying on of hands in blessing was practiced in the early church. When the seven deacons were chosen as assistants to the apostles in the Jerusalem congregation, we are told that these men were set before the apostles, **"and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them"** (Acts 6:6). After Barnabas and Paul had been chosen as missionaries to the Gentiles, the same procedure was followed. **"Having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away"** (Acts 13:3). Paul wrote to his assistant, Timothy: **"I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands"** (2 Timothy 1:6).

Nevertheless, description of what was done in those times is not the same as God commanding us to do it. Our Lord did not institute ordination, as He instituted baptism and the Lord's Supper. Therefore, we do not consider ordination an absolute necessity before a called minister of God can begin his work.

When Jesus gave the ministry of the keys to His disciples, He did not lay His hands on them. “**He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’**” (John 20:22). Another practice that was common in those days was the “**holy kiss**” (Romans 16:16); it was an expression of fellowship among the early Christians. That practice is no longer customary among us.

There are some Lutherans today who insist that ordination is a necessary practice commanded by God. But since there is no word of command in Scripture concerning ordination, the Church of the Lutheran Confession declares with the *Brief Statement*: “*Regarding ordination we teach that it is not a divine, but a commendable ecclesiastical ordinance*” (#33).

Questions

1. How may a person who has two calls determine where God wants him to serve?
2. What does it mean when a called minister is installed into his new position?
3. List some of the important points the apostle Peter makes in his address to elders, or called servants of the Word.
4. What is meant by ordination?
5. List some instances when Christians laid hands on ministers in the Bible.
6. What is meant by the laying on of hands?
7. Why should we consider ordination a custom rather than a sacrament?
8. How did Jesus convey the Holy Spirit to His disciples?