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**THEOLOGY OF THE DIVINE CALL AND INTENTIONAL INTERIM
MINISTRY IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY, ST. LOUIS
DEPARTMENT OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY**

BY

REV. J. DIRK REEK

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Approved by

_____ **Advisor**

_____ **Reader**

_____ **Reader**

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¹ Dr. Schmidt died very unexpectedly in the weeks following graduation exercises.

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INTRODUCTION

Victor Albers offers this observation about the consideration of a call by a pastor:

Few experiences reach as deeply into the life of a pastor as the soul-searching process when he evaluates his ministry and contemplates a call to another field of service. More often than not, this will be an agonizing reappraisal . . . Whether he is ultimately led to stay or to leave, the congregation also is deeply affected by his decision.¹

His second observation is of principal concern for this study, for few events can have as important an impact also on the congregation as the change of a pastor. Indeed, when a pastor leaves after a long period of service or when he leaves under difficult circumstances, the departure can have lasting and difficult repercussions in the congregation. There is appropriate great concern for pastors undergoing these transitions. There should also be similar concern for the congregations. A recent response to pastoral vacancies, especially in difficult circumstances, among various Christian churches in the United States is the development of intentional interim ministry. Some congregations and districts of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have begun making use of this special method.

In July, 1998, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in convention adopted this language:

Resolved, That we recognize the value of intentional interim ministries in certain cases when congregations choose them; and be it further

Resolved, That when congregations do choose to be served by intentional interim ministries, they be assisted by their District Presidents to select among available candidates; and be it finally

Resolved, That the Council of Presidents prepare policy and guidelines for intentional

¹Reinboth, Oscar H., ed., Calls and Vacancies (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 9.

interim ministry in harmony with this resolution.²

What is "intentional interim ministry"? Is the practice of intentional interim ministry in concert with the doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the Lutheran Confessions and in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod? What limits and directions do our confessions and practices establish for intentional interim ministry in the congregations of the Synod? This will be the subject of our investigation.

This study will first survey the development of interim ministry and its purpose and use in congregations. Second, this study will review the Lutheran Confessions regarding the call to the Office of the Holy Ministry and the implications for interim ministry. In order to hone our understanding, Luther's writings will also be examined. Pertinent to understanding what was confessed by the Reformers is what was practiced by the Reformers; therefore, the history of two important pastors and one exemplary situation of the Reformation era will be examined. The author believes these situations to be instructive at least as a parallel to intentional interim ministry. Third, the doctrinal and historical writings of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and volumes of pastoral theology will be examined. Here significant questions will be encountered that must be seen in historical context. A fourth matter of important consideration will be the current principles and practices of supplying a pastor for a Missouri Synod congregation when the office of the pastor is vacant and the way in which intentional interim ministry compares to these. Finally, growing out of this study, recommendations and

² "To Prepare Policy and Guidelines for Intentional Interim Ministries; Resolution 3-17B," in *To the Ends of the Earth: Proceedings of the 60th Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Reports and Overtures, July 11-17, 1998* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1998), 121.

suggestions for interim ministry in the Missouri Synod will be offered by the author.

CHAPTER 1
INTENTIONAL INTERIM MINISTRY: AN AMERICAN PROTESTANT
PHENOMENON

Christian congregations have been facing changes in pastorate from the Church's beginning. The Book of Acts recounts important examples of these transitions, beginning with the ascension of the Lord (Acts 1). Similarly, St. Paul warned the Ephesian congregation about the difficult transition they would undergo with his final departure (Acts 20:29-30, 37-8). Changes in the human leadership of God's people have frequently been accompanied by normal human distress (Deut. 34:8), by the Lord's assurances of stability and strength (Josh. 1:9; 2 Tim. 4:1-6), and by the human intrigues that untested leadership invites (1 Kings 12; 2 Tim. 3:1-9). While the Church is, indeed, God's kingdom, it is also altogether human. It is affected by emotions and it still struggles with sin's power (Rom. 7:21-25; 1 Cor. 3:1-3). Because the Church is still human, times of change can especially become occasions to revert to entirely human strategies to spiritual challenges (Exod. 16:2-3; Judg. 18:1; 21:25; Gal. 1:6-7).

While the time of a change of pastor is not the only time a congregation encounters the reality of its humanity, especially in some circumstances, it can be an occasion in which these are very evident. Roger Nicholson identifies ten characteristics that congregations often encounter at the time of pastoral change. These include grief, active or latent conflict, uncovered secrets, a new openness to the denomination, low self-esteem, lagging stewardship,

a rebuilding of management structure, awkward communications, ambivalence about change, and mixed emotions.¹ These characteristics could be demonstrated in the biblical examples of changing leadership cited above. The history of the church is surely replete with them.

Winston Sherwick observes a familiar scenario during pastoral change that is "moderately normal":

Problems arise because (1) the new leaders don't really want to lead, or (2) they want to lead too much. And unfortunately, their ideas often originate in their vocal cords, not their brains. The church lurches and jerks along with goals everyone thinks everyone else agrees with, but only a minority believe in. What's needed is some stock taking.²

The characteristics evidence an interim in the congregation's history, a time of $\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\omicron\varsigma$. Pete Steinke writes:

When pastoral leadership changes, the congregation becomes an open system. It is in a position to learn more about itself and its future, but it must be willing and ready to do so.³

Intentional interim ministry is the call or assignment of a specially trained pastor to a congregation as its pastor at a time of transition in the history of the congregation when the pastoral office has become vacant. Paul Svingen writes:

Even though it is still true that at the time of a pastoral vacancy most denominations allow congregations to call on any credentialed pastor in good standing to provide them pastoral services on an interim basis, it is also true that congregations are

¹ Roger S. Nicholson, "Characteristics of the Interim Congregation," in *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry* (Baltimore: The Alban Institute, 1998), 14-24. (All of these characteristics can be easily documented in the experiences of the Saxon immigrants in Perry County, Missouri, in 1839, when the leader Rev. Martin Stephan was deposed.)

² Winston M. Sherwick, "Helping Troubled Churches," *Leadership* (Fall 1983): 59-64.

³ Pete Steinke, Introduction to Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, v.

increasingly intentional about how they choose to use the interim period. Sensitive lay leaders today are more keenly aware of the normal increase in anxiety that manifests itself in their congregation when they lose their pastor. No matter what the reason may have been for their pastor's termination, they see their fellow members exhibiting a mixture of strong reactions.⁴

Interim ministry has come to be especially encouraged where the pastoral vacancy presents a difficult transition. These could include as examples longtime service of the previous pastor, the death in office of the pastor, major or chronic conflict between the pastor and congregation, or a public moral indiscretion by the pastor. These circumstances can engender congregation-wide matters of spiritual concern.⁵ The element of "intentionality" emphasizes the congregation's plan to focus on the concerns of the transition, a process of reviewing their history, assessing God's mission for them, facing problematic issues, and preparing to call their next pastor.⁶

Intentional interim ministry as a specific discipline is of recent vintage as a distinctive feature of pastoral care in vacant congregations. It began with work by the Alban Institute in 1974,⁷ which was spun off into the Interim Ministry Network in 1980. Officially formed in 1981, this is a nonprofit association of interim pastors and church leaders from over 25 denominations.⁸ It is committed to developing the skills and education necessary for

⁴ Paul N. Svingen, "The Interim Minister: A Special Calling," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 52-53.

⁵ Roger S. Nicholson, "The Challenge of the Interim Time," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ Roy M. Oswald, "Interim Ministries," *Christian Ministry* 1:29, 31.

conducting effective interim work.⁹

Lutheran pastors from The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and The Lutheran Church in America (LCA) were actively involved in the early stages of interim ministry development. When these two bodies, along with the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC), merged in 1988 to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), interim ministry was, therefore, already a regular practice among these American Lutheran churches. The specialized training for interim ministry has been sponsored in Lutheran circles since 1974 in association with the Interim Ministry Network (hereafter "IMN"). In 1994, interim pastors of the ELCA formed the National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors (hereafter "NALIP"), a professional "organization committed to helping Lutheran judicatories respond to the special needs of congregations in transition."¹⁰ In October 1998 the conference of bishops of the ELCA rendered pointed attention to the definitions of and practices surrounding interim ministry in specific response to a request from NALIP.¹¹ This specialized ministry is in process of being recognized in the ELCA.

The first pastors of the Missouri Synod to receive formal interim training were Rev. Don Taylor, Rev. Richard Krogan, and Rev. Martin Teske. At this writing, over 50 pastors of the Synod have been or are being formally trained to some degree in accord with the principles

⁹ Roger W. Schwarze, White Bear Lake, Minn, to Richard J. Bruesehoff, Chicago, Ill., 30 July 1998, copy appended.

¹⁰ Cynthia Stengel, "National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors: A Brief History of Our First Five Years," National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors, photocopied, 1999.

¹¹ "Interim Pastoral Ministry-Some Definitions and Descriptions." Chicago, IL: Report of the Secretary of the Conference of Bishops, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, October 1-7, 1998, Exhibit B, photocopied.

established by the IMN and NALIP. Interested interim pastors and district officials from the Synod have met annually for three years to discuss hopes and concerns surrounding interim ministry in the LCMS.¹² Intentional interim ministry has become a resource that 20 districts of the LCMS have at least explored, if not actively pursued.¹³

When the Alban Institute first devised training for intentional interim ministry, it was responding to research done on congregations going through a pastoral transition. The institute discerned that a congregation goes through eight stages during a vacancy: termination, direction-finding, self-study, search for a new pastor, decision or choice of the candidate, negotiation, installation, and starting up.¹⁴ Experience suggested that for a special interim pastor to be of assistance to the congregation, five developmental tasks were to be undertaken: coming to terms with the history of the congregation,¹⁵ discovering or re-discovering the congregation's identity,¹⁶ understanding and experiencing leadership changes,¹⁷

¹² "Minutes of Proceedings," LCMS Conference of Interim Pastors, 1997-99, Dirk Reek, secretary, in possession of author, n.p.

¹³ Ibid.-Districts that have active interim pastors-Eastern, Ohio, Michigan, Northern Illinois, Southern Illinois, California-Hawaii-Nevada, Pacific Northwest, Texas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa West, Wisconsin, Minnesota-South, Minnesota-North, Southeastern. Districts that are actively exploring interim ministry-Indiana, Southern, Oklahoma, Iowa East.

¹⁴ Nicholson, "Challenge," 5-6.

¹⁵ Bonnie Bardot, "Coming to Terms with History," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 65-74.

¹⁶ Linda Lea Snyder, "Discovering a New Identity," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 75-86.

¹⁷ Andrew E. Carlsson, "Leadership Changes during an Interim," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 87-98.

renewing linkages with the denomination,¹⁸ and aiding in committing to new directions in ministry.¹⁹ Once identified, these phases often become self-evident to most pastors who have assisted in a time of pastoral vacancy. More importantly, some of these tasks can be profoundly difficult when the transition is affected by traumatic events in the previous pastorate(s).

It is, perhaps, the increasing number of difficult transitions that have underscored the importance of specialized training for and commitment to interims in congregational life.

Thirty years ago, Lloyd H. Goetz could write:

Although it is no calamity when the pastoral office becomes vacant in a congregation, it is nevertheless an emergency. It is serious enough to require the personal attention of the District president or one of the vice-presidents.²⁰

While the same observation can often still be made in the case of many congregations, it cannot be a generalization. Nicholson writes more recently:

However, in the midst of all the complex cultural and societal change affecting congregations today, the end of many pastoral relationships appears to be happening sooner more often than later. The incidence of conflict in congregations is increasing. There is a disturbing increase in incidents of ministerial misconduct. Pastorates are tending to be shorter in duration. More and more congregations find themselves in transition, not only in terms of contextual change, but also in terms of leadership.²¹

Two situations into which interim pastors are frequently called because of the intense nature of

¹⁸ Nancy Miller, "Reviewing Denominational Linkages," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 99-107.

¹⁹ Philip G. Porcher, "Commitment to New Directions in Ministry," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 108-18.

²⁰ Lloyd H. Goetz, "Filling the Vacancy," in *Calls and Vacancies*, ed. Oscar H. Reinboth, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 35.

²¹ Steinke, *Temporary Shepherds*, xv.

the situation illustrate Nicholson's point. The first is in cases where sexual indiscretion by the previous pastor has taken place; the second is where conflict between the pastor and congregation or among the congregation has disrupted the ministry.

Darlene Haskins addresses the challenges presented to "after-pastors" in the situations of sexual indiscretion. In her conclusions she notes:

The after-pastor of a wounded congregation faces extraordinary difficulties. . . . The position is so stressful that it is difficult to remain in it for any great length of time. Also, the after-pastor is often blamed for the difficulties the congregation suffers as the result of the betrayal. . . . Support (for the pastor) is not likely to come from the congregation because the members are struggling to deal with the betrayal of their trust. . . . The congregation also requires professional help such as grief therapy, anger workshops and education on sexual misconduct and the uses of power. . . . The role of the after-pastor is very difficult.²²

To undertake such tasks while serving another congregation and without special training and support is ambitious and, perhaps, foolhardy. Studies have demonstrated that sexual indiscretion, when unaddressed will be repeated in the congregation by subsequent pastors.

Chronic or intense conflict in a congregation is another example in which a skilled interim pastor is often utilized. The number of these settings is on the increase as witnessed by the growth of special training workshops for addressing the issues of conflict.²³ Pete Steinke writes at length about the complicated inter-relationships in congregations that foster conflict

²² Darlene K. Haskins, "Afterpastors in Troubled Congregations," in *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser (Collegeville, Minn.: Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute, 1995), 163-64.

²³ Cited as examples are these well-known presentations: "Peace in the Parish," "Bridge-builders," "Peacemaker Ministries," Speed Leas conflict seminars from the Alban Institute.

repeatedly.²⁴ Fostering durable change can be enhanced by pointed and intensive work by a specially trained pastor.

As the principles and training for interim ministry were developed by the Alban Institute, several key emphases emerged. An interim pastor must be the pastor of the congregation being served. There is a mantle of trust and care to be assumed. There are issues that can be addressed only from "inside" the congregation. An outsider, a consultant, will never be enough a "part of the system" to affect it and effect change. And especially in trying situations, part-time work will not suffice.

Second, there must be a clear understanding that the interim pastor serves the congregation in all the normal pastoral duties; however, the work of the interim pastor is defined as the developmental tasks and preparation for the next resident pastor. Where conflict or indiscretion have torn the body of Christ, that is the principal focus of the interim pastor's work. Once the issue is resolved as best it can be, the interim pastor in the life of the congregation is over, ideally with the next pastor about to arrive. Therefore, the term of the interim pastor is understood to be ad hoc or temporary for the circumstance of the transition alone.

The interim pastor will serve the congregation only during this time period and may not be considered as a candidate for a resident pastorate in the congregation. This prevents the congregation from turning the time the interim pastor is with them into a trial period. Because the interim pastor is trained not to mesh with the "family system" of the congregation,

²⁴ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works* (Baltimore: Alban Institute, 1993), 69-102.

accepting a role as a resident pastor would completely subvert the interim work. The very nature of interim work requires that the pastor be present to the congregation, but not drawn into its patterns and future. The interim pastor maintains an objective, non-anxious stance, assisting the congregation to shape its future under the Lord's direction. The interim pastor never formally joins the congregation as a member and ideally physically leaves the community regularly to underscore and maintain objectivity.

Six specific reasons are cited by Terry Foland why the interim pastor is not to be considered for the next pastoral call of the congregation.

1. Interim pastors can enable congregations to deal with their agenda better if they have no vested interest in their own long-range call to that congregation.
2. Trust that persons keep their word is essential in covenantal relationship; changing the "rules of the game" may foster distrust in the pastor and the congregational leaders who "changed the rules."
3. Consideration of the interim pastor as a candidate will shortchange the search process.
4. It is risky to call an interim pastor when there may be underlying opposition to that individual by persons in the congregation.
5. It is best to keep clear the contract with the interim pastor as an interim position and not to "muck it up" with considerations of being a candidate for the open pulpit.
6. The church needs to be fair to all possible candidates and protect the concept of what an intentional interim ministry program can provide for congregations.²⁵

If the interim pastor is called to a circumstance with the specific understanding that his assistance is remedial or preparatory and then presents himself as a candidate for the next call, he disrupts his contract of trust with the congregation. Moreover, it is not uncommon for interim pastors to be pressured by a congregation to submit their name for the the candidacy

²⁵ Terry Foland, "No Candidacy Rationale," in *Interim Ministry Basic Education Workbook Introduction* (Baltimore: Interim Ministry Network, 1995), 5, 41-43. (This matter is important enough for the issue addressed by this study that this article is appended.)

list. This is addressed by Clark Hargus in the training manual for interim ministry.²⁶

Intentional interim ministry focuses not only on the pastor's contribution to problematic circumstances, but also the congregation's role in the situation. It emphasizes the congregation's plan to focus on the concerns of the transition, a process of reviewing their history, assessing God's mission for them, facing problematic issues, and preparing to call their next pastor. It must be emphasized, the term "interim" emphasizes this time period in the congregation's history, not on the length of the pastor's stay with the congregation. This specialized approach to pastoral vacancies is best defined by its aims and application. It recognizes there are *spiritual issues* affecting the entire congregation in a pastoral vacancy and the emotions surrounding them are best addressed directly before the congregation is ready to proceed. The pastor's work will aim at these along with the normal work of the pastor.

In the development of interim ministry theory and training, the Alban Institute drew heavily upon sociological research and group-dynamic theory to shape its approach. Valuable as these are in providing awareness of the church insofar as it is a human organization, a theological basis from which to understand a congregation in transition and the work of an interim pastor is generally absent. However, two Lutheran authors, Warren Schulz and Paul Svingen, both recognized nationally in "interim circles," have written about interim ministry based on biblical themes and images, thereby offering helpful theological insight. A congregation in no way ceases being the Church during a time of pastoral vacancy; for the existence of the Church is powered by the Word, not the pastor. However, the pastoral task

²⁶ Clark Hargus, "The Pressure for Permanence," in *Interim Ministry Basic Education Workbook Introduction* (Baltimore: Interim Ministry Network, 1995), Section 5, 38-40. (This matter is important enough for the issue addressed by this study that this article is appended.)

becomes different during the transition from one pastor to another, in some circumstances importantly different. One of the most important distinctions is that the focus of interim ministry is principally on the congregation as a group. By contrast, a resident pastor experiences a greater balance of ministry between the time he spends on the individual and the congregation. This is evidenced by the balance between group and individual concerns in the series of topics a typical pastoral theology manual addresses.²⁷

Warren Schulz has drawn attention to the important biblical realities of *change, transition, and transformation*. These realities lie at the heart of Christian faith and life and are applied to the body of Christ as a group, the congregation, just as much as the individual Christian. Schulz underscores these three elements of transfiguring as central to the Old Testament Exodus experience and to the emergence of the Church in the New Testament following Jesus' resurrection. An important observation he makes is worth hearing:

[The church] rests its case on the biblical witness that tells a moving, changing story of God's actions throughout history. . . Having then these theological understanding rooted deeply within our belief systems, one would assume the church to be an expert in the process of transition. As God's people, we are especially tuned into a God described as more "verb" than "noun."²⁸

If change is central to our experience at the hands of our God, then the transformation of congregations is an expected part of living under the grace and direction of the Lord. It is

²⁷ William H. Eifert, ed., *The Pastor at Work* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), vii-viii; C. F. W. Walther, *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, John Drickamer, trans. (New Haven, Mo.: Lutheran News, 1995), 3-4; Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, eds., *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 5-6.

²⁸ Warren Schulz, "The Biblical and Theological Basis for Interim Ministry," in Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds*, 122.

Schulz's contention that in the Scripture the "major pivotal points," the "special transition times" are the times when God appointed "special leaders to guide the people in the struggle toward transformation."²⁹ If the Lord established the model of putting a special leader into the pastoral role at these "major pivotal points", then the Church today has a solid justification for doing so. It is following the pattern the Lord already evidenced.

Another who has addressed the theological foundations is Paul Svingen. He drew upon the familiar section of Ephesians 4 to bring theological underpinning to interim ministry and used a variety of biblical images to convey the work of the interim.³⁰ But his core pericope for interim ministry is Eph. 4:15-16:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

This is central to Svingen's thinking about interim, for it is in the interim, no matter, relatively speaking, how difficult or peaceful the circumstances, that a congregation is most open to examining the truth about itself and to hear the truth from the Lord. This is an important presupposition of those who espouse intentional interim ministry. It is echoed by Pete Steinke when he writes:

²⁹ Ibid., 123.

³⁰ Paul Svingen, "Intentional Interim Ministry within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," D.Min. thesis, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary and the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools, 1990. (Svingen alludes to the Exodus experience and the return from Babylon, describing ministry as a journey and the interim as a "rest," a "Sabbath"[vi]. He refers to the shepherd/sheep image of John 10 and Psalm 23[3]. Another image borders on that of "death and resurrection" as he discusses the view that interim ministry is "grief ministry". [22-24, 66f.])

When pastoral leadership changes, the congregation becomes an open system. It is in a position to learn more about itself and its future. . . Trained interim pastors are integral to that process of learning. . . Interim ministry is an acknowledgment that keeping the system open for learning supersedes the instinct for returning to the old, balanced form of doing things.³¹

The element of the discovery of truth is found again in Svingen's quotation of the 1985 ALC

"A Manual for Interim Ministers":

[T]hat interim time is very important for at least four reasons:

2. It allows a congregation to discover its own identity and purpose without the influence of its pastor's identity and purpose.³²

Beyond this important theme for Svingen, he draws parallels between interim pastors and the transition from Elijah to Elisha,³³ the preparatory work of John the Baptist,³⁴ the comforter of Isaiah,³⁵ or the ministry of the Savior at the Mount of Transfiguration, drawing the "inner circle" away from past glory and to the challenges before them.³⁶

For these two authors, there is solid biblical basis for practicing intentional interim ministry. In Svingen's argument, the familiar pericope from Ephesians 4 that has been confined to the discussion of the more usual experience of pastoral ministry is seen to include the

³¹ Steinke, *Temporary Shepherds*, v.

³² Svingen, 84. (Svingen is citing *A Manual for Interim Pastors*, American Lutheran Church/Office of Support to Ministries and The Lutheran Church in America/Division for Professional Leadership, 1985, 5.)

³³ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

transition time between pastors. Svingen contends that intentional interim ministry is especially a time for seeing and "speaking the truth in love." Schulz, on the other hand, discusses interim using the metaphor of constant change. He contends that many examples of pastoral care normally taken as reference to a resident pastoral ministry, should be seen as the Lord's intentional interims. For these he has provided special care.

If the biblical rationale from either or both of these authors is a valid basis for the practice of intentional interim, what possible objections or concerns could be raised to its practice in congregations of the LCMS? Two important questions must be addressed.

First, interim ministry has been developed and is practiced by a number of denominations. Each denomination reflects the polity by which a pastor comes to the office in that particular church body. In episcopal bodies, for example, an interim pastor is placed by the bishop into the pastoral office. In a more congregational oriented polity, the local congregation has far more responsibility and right in the selection of either the interim process or the interim pastor. Among Lutherans only a divine call authorizes one to serve as a pastor in a congregation. Such a call cannot be of limited duration in a predetermined way, either by the pastor or by the congregation, as we shall see at length. This is the consistent affirmation of Luther, of the Confessions, and of their interpreters. This is also strongly affirmed in the teaching and the history of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In fact, in its early history, the Synod was very reticent to allow a call to be made except by a congregation to a man to serve as their pastor.³⁷ In fact, in both the Reformation era and in the history of the Missouri

³⁷ John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri until 1962: An Historical Analysis of the Doctrine of the Ministry in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (privately printed, 1992), 16.

Synod, a call to the Holy Ministry with a predetermined time interval is subject by definition to the whims of men and was held not to be a divine call. They were rejected as "temporary calls." If a congregation calls a man to serve as its pastor with the understanding that his work will focus on assisting the congregation only through the transition and then his work will be over at that place, has the congregation extended a "temporary call"? Or are intentional interim ministry and the often criticized "temporary call" two entirely different things?

Furthermore, in the Missouri Synod, in order not to limit the will of God, any and all qualified pastors should be considered eligible candidates for a congregation's call list. Theoretically, any man on the roster of the Synod could legitimately be called to the parish. And these raise questions about the practice of intentional interim ministry. By disqualifying an interim to be on a congregation's call list, are we tyrannizing a congregation and potentially standing in way of the will of the Lord?

Are these principles to be strictly applied in the cases of special congregational need and pastoral care? Do historical precedents or specific statements recognize exceptions to the principles and understand a call to a temporary circumstance to be a divine call? To what degree do the gifts, interests, or history of a particular pastor govern where he could be or should be considered for a particular congregation's call? Answers to these questions will guide the use of interim ministry in the LCMS.

CHAPTER 2

INTERIM MINISTRY AND THE CALL TO THE HOLY MINISTRY IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS AND THE REFORMATION ERA

Robert Kolb has observed, "The fundamental appeal of Luther's Reformation sprang from its effective address of the crisis in pastoral care which plagued the Western church at the end of the Middle Ages."¹ Luther's historic public influence actually began with an issue of pastoral care, his attack on the sale of indulgences by John Tetzel outside Wittenberg in 1517. Luther demonstrated the sale of indulgences to be contrary to the free forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus and to a biblical understanding of faith and repentance. The confidence and confession of the Gospel, God's justifying grace for Christ's sake, became the central focus not only of the Reformation, but also of Reformation theology. Subsequently, among Lutherans, the centrality of the Gospel message became the means by which all other elements and topics of Christian doctrine could be understood.² As a result, the entire purpose of pastoral care, public and private, became the communication of the Gospel.³

¹ Robert Kolb, "The Doctrine of Ministry in Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions," in *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, ed. by Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 49. (The need for reform of pastoral care had been a matter of concern in the church since the work of Jean Gerson a century before Luther.)

² *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 159, lines 4–12; 416, lines 3–6. (Hereafter identified as "BSLK.")

³ BSLK, 159, lines 13–15; Philip Melancthon, *Loci communes, 1543*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 85; John Johnson affirms the same understanding of the Lutheran ministry: "The Office of the Pastoral Ministry: Scriptural and Confessional Considerations," in *Church and Ministry: The Collected Papers of the 150th Anniversary*

This profound change in theology and pastoral care fostered an increasingly wide gulf between the followers of Luther and the papacy. The unity of the Holy Roman Empire was threatened. The Diet of Augsburg was convened by the emperor in 1530 to clarify the matters of controversy upsetting the church and empire.⁴ There the Lutheran party made clear their conviction that justification by grace through faith was the foundation of Christian faith and life (AC IV). They also made clear their conviction that this grace apprehending faith was generated by the Office of the Ministry, the *Predigtamt*, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments (AC V, XXVIII). Faith lays hold of the gift of forgiveness for Christ's sake offered in and through the Word; the Office of the Holy Ministry is nothing other than the exercise of the Office of the Keys.⁵ The exercise of the Office of the Holy Ministry creates and sustains faith. In order for this office to be exercised, men had to be placed into the office. Faith created and sustained by the means of grace could occur only by real actions, by the Word of God spoken, by water applied, by bread and wine, body and blood distributed. The confession further announced that "nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call" (AC XIV).

The final article of the Augsburg Confession, included in that section of the document

Theological Convocation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The Office of the President, LCMS, ed. Jerald C. Joerz and Paul T. McCain (St. Louis: privately printed, 1998), 83–87.

⁴ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 369.

⁵ BSLK, 121, lines 12–17. This same understanding is reflected in a Foreword to the Article found with a copy of the Torgau Articles in the Weimar Archives. This can be found in BSLK, 120, 27–30.

entitled "Articles in Which Are Reviewed the Abuses Which Have Been Corrected," asserts that the only power (*Gewalt, potestas*) exercised by a bishop according to the Gospel is that of the Office of the Keys specifically for the "comforting of men's consciences."⁶ It is instructive in the understanding of the pastoral office to note two elements in the article. The first is the most fundamental authority and responsibility of the bishop, namely, "to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments."⁷ This is by divine right.⁸ Second, however, bishops may have particular responsibilities for order in the church; but this is by human right,⁹ an office worthy of honor as a gift from the Lord.¹⁰ Observance of traditions has nothing to do with merit of God's grace.¹¹ However, when matters beyond the Gospel can in good conscience be utilized, then, for the sake of love and tranquility, they should be kept for the sake of order and the end of confusion.¹²

The Lutheran confessors at Augsburg recognized the essence of the Church, namely, God's action to deliver the Gospel to people. They recognized the vital role of the ministry to deliver the Gospel. They recognized one of the intended results to be the transformation of life as an impact of the Gospel. They recognized the exercise of the ministry to be granted to

⁶ BSLK, 121, lines 3–4.

⁷ BSLK, 121, lines 12–17.

⁸ BSLK, 123, lines 22–124, 5.

⁹ BSLK, 123, lines 14–19.

¹⁰ BSLK, 123, lines 12–13.

¹¹ BSLK, 127, lines 26–30.

¹² BSLK, 129, lines 27–34.

individual men by call and ordination.

The presentation at Augsburg was quickly followed by a more detailed presentation and defense written by Philip Melanchthon. When he more fully explained the biblical matter of justification in the Apology, he repeatedly pointed to the ultimate goal of this free grace of God, namely, the consolation of the terrified conscience.¹³ The goal of pastoral care is to apply the Gospel on behalf of God. Melanchthon held this consistently, asserting it again when he authored his doctrinal texts. While his *Loci* contains no specific section addressing the matter of clergy, nevertheless, his section "The Church" insists on the vocalized word of the Gospel and the practice of the sacraments.¹⁴ In the Apology, Melanchthon makes clear there was no question about the necessity of the call to the ministry to be the authorized spokesman of God to the congregation. The only difference was Rome's opposition to the preaching of the Gospel.¹⁵ When the Office of the Holy Ministry is accomplished, the effect is the salvation and healing of souls. Where grief and sin disturb and disrupt the individual or the group, the body

¹³ . . . et eripiunt *piis conscientiiis* propositas in Christo *consolationes* (BSLK, 159, lines 12–14) . . . De magna re disputamus, de honore Christi, et unde petant bonae mentes certam et firmam *consolationem* . . . (BSLK, 191, lines 36–38) . . . nisi audiant vocem Dei, in qua clare promittitur remissio peccatorum (BSLK, 210, lines 52–54) Non est enim hominis, praesertim in terroribus peccati sine certo verbo Dei statuere de voluntate Dei, quod irasci desinat (BSLK, 211, line 58–212, line 3) Haec est vera et simplex et germana sententia Pauli, in *qua maxima consolatio piis conscientiiis proposita est* . . . (BSLK, 217, lines 16–17) . . . et speramus afferre *perterrefactis conscientiiis piam et salubrem consolationem* (BSLK, 219, lines 27–28) Plurimum autem *consolationis* affert hic locus, quod cultus in evangelio praecipuus est a Deo velle accipere remissionem peccatorum, gratiam et iustitiam (BSLK, 220, lines 10–12) [emphasis added].

¹⁴ Melanchthon, 131–33.

¹⁵ BSLK, 296, lines 10–4.

of Christ, only the Office of the Keys will do God's work of forgiveness and healing.¹⁶ This is precisely what Melancthon defended in the Apology when he outlined the process for the ministry of the Word of God (AC XII, 28 –43).¹⁷ The Apology insisted that this office be conducted by one who is rightly called (*rite vocatus*) to it (AC XIV).¹⁸

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther reflected the same thinking:

. . .the Church must (*müssen, dürfen*) not remain without servants. . .Therefore, . . .we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office, and even according to their own laws they have not the right to forbid or prevent us.¹⁹

Or, as Luther writes elsewhere in the Smalcald Articles:

Wir wollen nu wieder zum Evangelio kommen, welchs gibt nicht einerleiweise Rat und Hilf wider die Sünde; denn Gott is überschwenglich reich in seiner Gnade: erstlich durchs, *mündliche Wort, darin gepredigt wird Vergebung der Sünden* in aller Welt, welches ist *das eigentliche Amt des Evangelii*; zum andern durch die Taufe; zum dritten durchs heilige Sakrament des Altars; zum vierden durch die Kraft der Schlüssel und auch per mutuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum . . .²⁰

¹⁶ Norman Nagel, "The Office of the Holy Ministry in the Confessions," *Concordia Journal* 14 (July 1988): 283–89. (The author demonstrates the link between the Office of the Holy Ministry and the Office of the Keys.)

¹⁷ Contrition and faith in Christ comprise the Lutheran's understanding of penitence. And faith in Christ results in five things: Strengthening of the contrite, obtaining forgiveness of sins, justification before God, true contrition, and a growing struggle with sin evidenced in love. BSLK, 257.1–258.59.

¹⁸ BSLK, 296, lines 10–13.

¹⁹ BSLK, 458, lines 3–7.

²⁰ BSLK, 449, lines 7–14. (Tappert's translation: We shall now return to the Gospel, which offers counsel and help against sin in more than one way, for God is surpassingly rich in his grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sins [the peculiar function of the Gospel] is preached to the world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.)

And, again, in the same document:

Und in diesen Stücken, so das *mündliche, äußerliche Wort betreffen*, ist fest darauf zu bleiben, daß Gott niemand seinen Geist oder Gnade gibt ohne durch oder mit dem vorgehenden äußerlichen Wort.²¹

The Church cannot be without this Office of the Ministry. If the Roman bishops refused to ordain the legitimately called pastors in the "Lutheran" territories, Luther contended Roman ordination was unnecessary. He had argued at length for this in his letter to the Bohemian Senate, *De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae* (1523), which will be discussed subsequently.

The *Tractate* asserted the same conviction: Hence wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists (*elegendi et ordinandi, wählen und ordinieren*).²²

When the Lutheran party used the terminology "regularly called" (*rite vocatus, recht berufen*), they were using language familiar to Christians back to the Council of Nicaea. In fact, the "regular call" of the church followed the apostolic example and included the elements of examination, election, call, and ordination/installation.²³ In the Lutheran Confessions, on occasion one of the four (usually "call") is used to refer to the entire process. AC XIV is an example. The important assurance of the "regular call" was to guarantee, as much as humanly possible, that the Lord had established the individual in the office and that, therefore, the Lord was operating through the man.

²¹ BSLK, 453, lines 16–20. (Tappert's translation: In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before.)

²² BSLK, 491, lines 18–24.

²³ Nagel, 291, citing Lieberg, *Amt und Ordination*.

Luther's writings also reflect this conviction. Already in 1523, as he advised the citizens of Leisnig in the matter of securing a pastor, Luther insisted that the office of the ministry had to be exercised by a man. He wrote:

[W]e must act according to Scripture and call and institute from among ourselves those who are found to be qualified and whom God has enlightened with reason and endowed with gifts to do so.²⁴

Or, in the same document:

Let this passage [I Cor. 14:39 –40] be your sure foundation, because it gives such an overwhelming power to the Christian congregation to preach, to permit preaching, and to call. Especially if there is a need, it calls everyone with a special call-without a call from men-so that we should have no doubt that the congregation which has the gospel may and should elect and call from among its members someone to teach the word in its place.²⁵

And again:

[I]f there is no such need and if there are those who have the right, power, and grace to teach, no bishop should institute anyone without the election, will, and call of the congregation. Rather, he should confirm the one whom the congregation chose and called; if he does not do it, he [the elected man] is confirmed anyway by virtue of the congregation's call.²⁶

Underscored, however, is Luther's insistence, which will appear again as he contends with Karlstadt, that a call is essential to exercise the Office of the Holy Ministry.²⁷

Luther would express this again in 1523 in his larger work "On the Ministry," written

²⁴ Martin Luther, "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture," trans. Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch, *Luther's Works*, 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970): 309.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 311.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

to the Bohemians:

We have clearly shown that to each one is given the right of ministering in the Word, and indeed that he is commanded to do so if he sees that teachers are lacking or if those in office are not teaching correctly, as Paul affirmed in I Cor. 14, so that the power of God might be proclaimed by us all. How much more, then, does not a certain community as a whole have both right and command to commit by common vote such an office to one or more, to be exercised in its stead. With the approval of the community these might then delegate the office to others.²⁸

For since the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the Word it ceases to be a Church. A Christian, thus, is born to the ministry of the Word in baptism. . .it but remains either to let the church perish without the Word or to let those who come together cast their ballots and elect one or as many as are needed of those who are capable. By prayer and the laying on of hands let them commend and certify these to the whole assembly, and recognize and honor them as lawful bishops and ministers of the Word, believing beyond a shadow of doubt that this has been done and accomplished by God.²⁹

The situation in Bohemia was remarkably unusual, so much so that we are rightly cautioned against making it a standard for Luther's understanding and practice.

Luther envisioned the possibility of small groups of Christians obtaining a minister by selection from their own midst. Supporters of the most advanced type of congregationalism can find confirmation of their views in this letter. But it should be remembered that the situation in Bohemia was highly abnormal and that Luther's suggestion is confined to an emergency. He advocated no such solution for Germany.³⁰

The office must be filled in order for the Word to be spoken and for the Church even to exist and be sustained. The office must be filled by a called individual for pastoral care to take place.

Luther would clarify the meaning of the Word and the role of the sacraments in the next

²⁸ Martin Luther, "Concerning the Ministry," trans. Conrad Bergendoff, *Luther's Works*, 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958): 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁰ Conrad Bergendoff, "Introduction to Volume 40," *Luther's Works*, 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958): x.

twenty-five years, but he continued to insist that the Word came through an office, populated by men as instruments in the hands of God.

The protection of the office, the people, and doctrine against the encroachments and disdain of the enthusiasts was a principal reason that Luther attacked their furtive practices in his letter to Edward Tannen, "Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers" (1532).³¹ He says very specifically there:

So we say, either demand proof of a call and commission to preach, or immediately enjoin silence and forbid to preach, for an office is involved –the office of the ministry. One cannot hold an office without a commission or a call.³²

The protection surrounding the exercise of the Office of the Holy Ministry underscores that it is God's office, as he gave it and commanded it, and that we can be certain he is operating through it to forgive sins. The office cannot be appropriated by one's own action.

For the same reason, there has been a complex discussion of where Luther found the source for the Office of the Holy Ministry, whether from the universal priesthood of the baptized or from the office of the apostles. So Bernhard Lohse writes:

At one point in his life, Luther derived the office of the ministry from the universal priesthood of the baptized—a view that emphasized the importance of the pastor's call by the congregation. At another time Luther derived the office of the ministry from the institution of this office by Christ—a view that emphasized the importance of ordination . . . we must always take the specific situation and controversy in which Luther made a particular statement into account in interpreting its meanings. . . . Luther always maintained that the bishops are responsible for the care of the pastors who preach the gospel. Congregations may take the initiative only when and if the bishops do not fulfill their responsibility. At a later time, however, Luther felt that the secular government

³¹ Martin Luther, "Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers," trans. Conrad Bergendoff, *Luther's Works*, 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958): 383–384.

³² *Ibid.*, 386.

should intervene.³³

Uuras Saarnivaara indicates in a footnote Luther struggled continually in the years from 1524 on with the unauthorized preaching of the "fanatics," because such preaching not only unsettled communities, but also led the faith of the God's people astray.³⁴ Brecht makes this important observation about the circumstances surrounding the letter to Edward Tannen:

Luther had always emphasized the necessity of a call to exercise the ministerial office, of course, but from now on his earlier understanding of the ministry of all who had been baptized receded completely into the background. Anyone who was immediately called by God had to demonstrate this by signs and wonders. Even if a properly called minister taught false doctrine, a simple member of the congregation had no right on his own to take over the office. In his attempt to support the ministers against the sectarians, Luther retreated greatly from his earlier views of the maturity of the congregation.³⁵

Similarly, in his pointed attack on the teaching of his former colleague Karlstadt, Luther summarizes:

In closing, I want to warn everyone truly and fraternally to beware of Dr. Karlstadt and his prophets, for two reasons. First, *because they run about and teach, without a call. . . Were he a true spirit he would at once have come forward and given proof of his call by signs and words.*³⁶ [emphasis added]

The common conviction of Luther and the Reformers that a call to the Office of the Holy Ministry was essential eventuated in Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession:

³³ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 182–83.

³⁴ Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951) 119, n. 250.

³⁵ Brecht, 447.

³⁶ Martin Luther, "Against the Heavenly Prophets," trans. Bernhard Erling and Conrad Bergendoff, *Luther's Works*, 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958): 222.

Vom Kirchenregiment wird gelehrt, daß niemand in der Kirche öffentlich lehren oder predigen oder Sakramente reichen soll ohne ordentlichen Beruf.³⁷

Call and Ordination to the Office of the Ministry

Luther outlined a suggested procedure by which an individual could be called to the Office of the Holy Ministry when he advised the Bohemians in the above-cited "Concerning the Ministry." Those seeking an individual to hold the office are to come together in prayer, trusting the promise of God that they are the Church by his grace and mercy, and to put the process at the disposal of God. The group seeks the direction of God, confident that he has promised to work through his people. Potential candidates are examined and found to be in doctrinal concert with the Church ("call and come together freely, as many as have been touched in heart by God to think and judge as you do"³⁸). One (or more) is elected from among these and hands are to be laid upon them to "certify and commend them to the people and the church or community" (ordination).³⁹ More simply, he says just a few lines later, "Use these instead of the papal bishops, to call and elect and ordain such as they think capable and you will endure, according to the foregoing and to the teaching of Paul."⁴⁰

This was no new thing. Melancthon would affirm in the Tractate that this practice had been in effect since before the time of Cyprian. Eusebius affirms this:

Wherefore the practice received from divine tradition and apostolic observance must be

³⁷ BSLK, 69, lines 2–5. (Tappert's translation: It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.)

³⁸ Luther, "Concerning the Ministry," 40.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 41.

diligently upheld and kept, which is also kept by us and by almost all the provinces, namely that to the due solemnization of ordinations, all the neighboring bishops of the same province should meet together among the people for who a prelate is ordained, and the bishop should be chosen in the presence of the people, who know most fully the lives of each, and are thoroughly acquainted with the character of every one from his conversation.⁴¹

This practice had affirmed by the "Canons of Nicea" (325).⁴² Melanchthon underscored the understanding of coming to office by means of election when he disputed the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Even this office, created historically by agreement in the church, was attained by election and, historically, confirmation by the emperor:

Postremo, quomodo potest papa iure divino esse supra totam ecclesiam, quum *ecclesia habeat electionem*. . . [emphasis added]⁴³

More significantly, he wrote in this same section:

Tribuit igitur principaliter claves ecclesiae et immediate, sicut et ob eam causam ecclesia principaliter habet *ius vocationis*.⁴⁴

Office is held by election by the Church which has the right to call.

In defense of the Lutheran practice and understanding, and in response to the Council of Trent, Martin Chemnitz would later affirm the practice with added historical footnotes,

⁴¹ J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to A.D. 337*, rev. W. H. C. Frend (London: SPCK, 1987), 236.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 339.

⁴³ BSLK, 477, lines 9–13. (Tappert's translation: Finally, how can the pope be over the whole church by divine right when the church elects him.)

⁴⁴ BSLK, 478, lines 27–30. (Tappert's translation: Therefore, he bestows the keys especially and immediately on the church, and for the same reason the church especially possesses the right of vocation.)

reiterating Luther's basic outline and affirming Luther's rationale:⁴⁵

Now, because the ministry of the Word and the sacraments is the ordinary means or instrument which God employs in matters pertaining to the dispensation of salvation, it is absolutely necessary to show to the church sure and firm arguments from Scripture in this question, namely, what is a true, lawful, orderly, and therefore divine call of ministers of the Word and the sacraments. . To begin with, it is certain that no one is a legitimate minister of the Word and the sacraments —nor is able rightly and profitably to exercise the ministry for the glory of God and the edification of the church —unless he has been sent, that is, unless he has a legitimate call . . .⁴⁶

These things must be considered in a call of the church, in order that both the minister and also the church can state with certainty that God is present with this ministry and works through it.⁴⁷

This same practice was the standard understanding of the Lutheran Church in the ensuing period of Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁴⁸ The practice of conferring the Office of the Holy Ministry by election and call was received from apostolic example and practiced among Lutherans. It was not merely an opinion of Luther that is suggested. Instead, as Eugene Klug's study demonstrates, the insistence on a call for entrance to a pastorate was consistently upheld by the

⁴⁵ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 2:705–14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 705; Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments-An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), 28–37. (Chemnitz treats in detail the theology and process for the calling of a pastor in this section.)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ James D. Heiser, *The Office of the Ministry in Nicolaus Hunnius' Epitome Credendorum: A Voice from the Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy* (Decatur, Ill.: The Johann Gerhard Institute, 1995), 51; G. H. Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1915), 87–97. (Gerberding's volume includes an entire series of translated quotations from the orthodox Lutheran fathers undergirding this teaching.)

orthodox fathers such as Johann Gerhard and J. A. Quenstedt.⁴⁹

This process is affirmed to the present.

Even though the ritual of ordination within the frame of Lutheran doctrine may legitimately be understood as an act of benediction and as public ratification of the call and the election, it is nevertheless true of the *entire* process of the call, election, and ordination—not clearly distinguished in the Confessions—that through this action of the church, or the church government, performed on a member of the church, *God* is calling into the pastoral office. For the church calls by God's command. Thus the act of benediction rests on a specific *mandatum divinum*, and the prayers have a specific *promissio divina*.⁵⁰

Allbeck understands this similarly:

The regularity of the call consists in proper church usage. . . The ministry of a man is legitimate when his summons to a task and his ability to perform it are certified by the ceremony of ordination. He has by no means set himself up in the office. He has not forced his leadership upon a congregation. He is a minister not only in the church, but also of the church.⁵¹

Heubach asserts similarly:

The NT evidence shows that the ordinary transaction through the call (*vocatio*), the blessing (*benedictio*) and the sending (*missio*) is characteristic. The church of the Reformation has held fast essentially (?) to these three foundational _____ (*Grundelementen*) for (?) ordination. Indeed there are since the Reformation for the individual act in progress of the commission to the office which now and then become divided very differently; however, the individual parts of the whole of these can be traced from three main things (*vocatio, benedictio, missio*). (Author's translation).⁵²

⁴⁹ Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 223–24.

⁵⁰ Edmund Schlink, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 246, n. 15.

⁵¹ Willard D. Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 98.

⁵² Joachim Heubach, *Die Ordination zum Amt der Kirche* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1956), 76–77. (Das neutestamentlich Zeugnis zeigt, daß das ordinatorische Handeln durch die Berufung [*vocatio*], die Segnung [*benedictio*] und die Sendung [*missio*] charakterisiert

Holsten Fagerberg may be cited to summarize the recognition of the importance of "call and election":

One looks in vain for such instructions (for the sending of ministers) in the Confessions. For information about appointment to clerical office one must look elsewhere, including contemporary church handbooks. Call, election, and ordination normally belonged together, and of these three the call was no doubt looked upon as most essential.⁵³

Summarily, Stein draws to our attention that this understanding for Luther was consistent from his earliest period:

Luther presented the manner and wisdom of the call in the introduction of the commentary on the letter to the Romans, 1515-1516 at 10:15. The apostles were sent out directly through God's confirming signs. From this original sending Luther derived the ecclesiastical sending authority for subsequent generations, an authority which today only the Roman Church has. Since those called subsequently derive their legitimacy from the sending of the apostles, one called in this way has no right to proclaim his own teaching.⁵⁴

God's purpose in establishing the office of the ministry was the communication of the Gospel.

God establishes men in the office by means of a call. Without a call, there is no summons to

ist. An diesen drei Grundelementen der Ordination hat auch die Kirche der Reformation grundsätzlich festgehalten. Zwar gibt es seit der Reformation für die einzelnen Akte im Verlauf der Bestellung zum Amt der bisweilen sehr verschieden eingeteilt worden; aber dennoch lassen sich alle einzelnen Teile des Ganzen auf die drei Hauptstücke *vocatio*, *benedictio* und *missio* zurückführen)

⁵³ Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions: 1529-1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 249.

⁵⁴ Wolfgang Stein, *Das Kirchliche Amt bei Luther* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag BMGH, 1974), 31. (Im Kommentar [Vorlesung über den Römerbrief, 1515-1516] zu 10, 15 präzisiert Luther die Art und Weise der Berufung. Die Apostel waren direkt von durch Gott bezeugten Zeichen gesandt. Aus dieser ursprünglichen Sendung leitet Luther eine kirchliche Sendungsvollmacht für die nachfolgenden Generationen ab, eine Vollmacht, wie sie heute noch die römische Kirche hat. Und da spätere Berufungen ihre Rechtmäßigkeit von der apostolischen Sendung ableiten, hat der so Berufene kein Recht, seine eigene Lehre zu verkünden.)

office, no authority of the Word.⁵⁵

Would the Reformers' Understanding of the Office of the Ministry Allow for *Ad hoc* Assignment of Pastors?

What can be determined from the writing and practices of the Reformation era about the duration or the specific goal of a pastor's work in a particular locale in relation to the matter of being called by God? Could the call to a particular situation ever to be limited in duration? And, if so, on what basis? On the one hand, we have, as an example, the difficult situation Luther faced with the city of Zwickau, a conflict that raged between Luther and the city council there for nearly nine years (1527-36). The council incurred Luther's ire for the problems created for Paul Lindenau (1528), Conrad Cordatus (1530), and Laurentius Soranus (1531).⁵⁶ Brecht's recounting of the history notes especially the Zwickau council's taking authority over the clergy that was not theirs.⁵⁷ He writes:

Those who were responsible had finally succeeded in getting Electoral Saxony to lose its ministers. Luther himself was thinking about withdrawing Cordatus, and Hausmann, from Zwickau without providing for replacements, in order to "cure the satiated and unbridled swine by a hunger for the Word." Contrary to what the Zwickauers thought, it was not up to them simply to choose anyone they wished to be a minister of the Word.⁵⁸

This would underscore an understanding that a call was to be permanent. Luther faced similar situations in which conflict with pastors in a locale necessitated his assisting them in finding a

⁵⁵ Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments—An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), 29.

⁵⁶ Brecht, 441–42.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 442.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 441–42.

call elsewhere and led to a good deal of suspicion on Luther's part regarding local level patrons and politics.⁵⁹

On the other hand, we have the historical example of John Bugenhagen, Luther's pastor and co-worker in the Reformation, who was called to serve as pastor on a temporary basis in Braunschweig and Hamburg. Besides these, he also "visited" Lubeck, Pomerania, Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, Hildesheim, and the territory of Braunschweig-Wolfenbittel.⁶⁰ Hendel says of him:

Wherever he went, he brought stability to volatile situations, defended the Lutheran cause, settled disputes, resolved theological differences, established educational systems, fostered relief for the poor, devised evangelical liturgies, and helped the new Lutheran churches organize their structures and programs. All this activity witnessed to and was in fact formed by the principles of evangelical theology.⁶¹

This *ad hoc* work was done not just with Luther's permission, but with his encouragement.

Brecht points out that Luther's specific request for the return of Bugenhagen to Wittenberg limited the duration of his call in Hamburg in 1529.⁶²

Bugenhagen's abilities were widely recognized from early on. And Luther was not shy about asserting pressure to secure Bugenhagen for the role of pastor at the city church in Wittenberg. The pastorate of the church was vacant due to the death of the previous pastor. Two candidates had already declined the call, and Luther initiated the solution himself. He

⁵⁹ Ibid., 440.

⁶⁰ Kurt Hendel, "John Bugenhagen: Confessor Behind the Scenes," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 7:4, 245.

⁶¹ Ibid., 245.

⁶² Brecht, 284.

announced from the pulpit one Sunday that Bugenhagen was the new pastor before Bugenhagen had any say in the matter.⁶³ Schild, however, observes of the situation:

Even Martin Luther did not often act that way, but the new church badly needed good order, so badly that it now needed Luther's charisma to distinguish between the real order of the church and the red tape which could well have led to the departure of Bugenhagen from the scene, which would have been a disaster of the first order.⁶⁴

What is important for our question about calls to the office of the ministry that may be limited in duration is the technical language that describes Bugenhagen's summons to Hamburg, then Pomerania. One biographer speaks of efforts by the city of Hamburg to secure Bugenhagen's services as pastor:

The first ones who sought to gain him [Bugenhagen] for themselves were the people of Hamburg. . . and while the [city] council adhered faithfully to the old [ways], *the Nicolai congregation called Bugenhagen as their pastor late in the summer of 1524*. . . He [Luther] made up his mind quickly to advise Bugenhagen. It is probably attributable to Luther's influence that the council as partner in the parish showed itself ready to release the one called [Bugenhagen]. [emphasis added]⁶⁵

Bugenhagen received a call that Luther encouraged him to take. Even more pertinent is the sentence in Hering's work which follows:

The [Wittenberg] congregation likewise granted their pastor *a half-year leave of absence*; and Bugenhagen himself, with the difficulty of the assignment obvious to him,

⁶³ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ D. Herman Hering, *Doktor Pomeranus, Johannes Bugenhagen*, (Halle, Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1888), 34. (Die Ersten, welche ihn [Bugenhagen] für sich zu gewinnen suchten, waren die Hamburger . . . und während der Rat noch dem Alten anhänglich blieb, *berief doch schon die Nicolaigemeinde im Spätsommer 1524 Bugenhagen zu ihrem Prediger*. . . Er [Luther] war kurz entschlossen, Bugenhagen zuzureden; und auf seinen Einfluß is es wohl zurückzuführen, wenn der Rat als Mitpatron der Pfarrstelle sich bereit zeigt, den Berufenen zu entlassen [emphasis added].)

made up his mind for the trip and gave himself into the will of God. [emphasis added]⁶⁶

The Wittenberg congregation gave him a half year leave of absence to assist in the emerging congregation in Hamburg.

This call was challenged by the city council of Hamburg, not because it would mean a "second call" for Bugenhagen; nor was it challenged because it was a call of "limited duration." The council did challenge it because of the emperor's edict against the Lutheran teaching and because the council couldn't guarantee Bugenhagen's safety.⁶⁷ Despite this, Bugenhagen served ably for five months in Hamburg. He was especially gifted in his administrative abilities established the beginning of the Kirchen-Ordnungen that would shape Lutheran congregational life.⁶⁸

Similarly, in 1528, Bugenhagen responded to a *call* to Braunschweig at the insistence of Lutheran burghers of prominence "because of his theological understanding and practical wisdom." Hering describes it in this way:

Als sie nach dem vorgange der Hamburger an die Einrichtung einer Armenpflege gingen, dein Anteil der Gemeinde *bei der Wahl und Berufung der Pfarrersicher zu stellen versuchten*, auch eine Reform der Schulen und zugleich mit ihr die Frage nach der Befoldung tüchtiger Lehrer führung am besten gelegt werden möchte. [emphasis added]⁶⁹

Note carefully the technical language Hering uses to speak of Bugenhagen's arrival:

⁶⁶ Ibid., 34. (Die Gemeinde [Wittenberg] bewilligte ebenfalls ihrem Pfarrer *einen halbjährigen Urlaub*; und Bugenhagen selbst, wie schwer ihm auch die Aufgabe erschien, entschloß sich zur Reise und gab sich in den Willen Gottes [emphasis added].)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 35–36.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 48.

Already on the evening of the very same day Bugenhagen assembled the evangelical preachers of the entire city in St. Andrews Church *to present himself before them as a called co-worker and as the custom was in Wittenberg since 1525, to confirm him as pastor of the Braunschweig congregation by prayer and the laying on of hands to allow him to initiate his work.* (Author's translation) [emphasis added]⁷⁰

He returned to Wittenberg after a stay of 18 months.⁷¹

Brecht affirms that Luther understood this to be a temporary circumstance. He reports:

However, from May, 1528, until June, 1529, Bugenhagen was away from Wittenberg, introducing the Reformation in Brunswick and then in Hamburg. During the period Luther substituted for him as pastor and thus assumed a great deal of additional work, simply because spreading the Word of God required it. Luther opposed Hamburg's attempt to retain Bugenhagen permanently and demanded in the spring of 1529 that he return.⁷²

Hering reports that Bugenhagen was sent into a critical situation of conflict in the city of Lübeck during the fall of 1530. This circumstance, like some elements of the other two situations, seems to have been an issue of authority and privilege between city authorities and a congregation. It was resolved by early 1531. Though Hering mentions no formal call and/or installation in Lübeck, he does observe that Bugenhagen conducted normal pastoral activities while in Lübeck.⁷³ We would expect this could be authorized only by a call.

Bugenhagen received a "formal invitation" (*formellen Einladung*) to come to

⁷⁰ Ibid., 49. (Noch am Abend desselben Tages versammelte Bugenhagen die evangelischen Prediger der ganzen Stadt in der Andreaskirche, um sich vor ihnen als *berufenen Mitarbeiter zu beglaubigen und sich, wie es in Wittenberg seit 1525 Brauch war, unter Gebet und Handauslegung als Pastor der Gemeinden Braunschweigs bestätigen und in seine Arbeit einführen zu lassen* [emphasis added].)

⁷¹ Ibid., 47–49.

⁷² Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 284.

⁷³ Hering, *Bugenhagen*, 89.

Pomerania to assist with church and cultural reform. The terms he used in a letter explaining his decision to go are technical: *aber er habe seine Sache seiner Person halben Gott befohlen und wollen, so er lebe und gersund bleibe, rechtzeitig kommen.*⁷⁴ This was followed in 1537 by a four-month period of work in Denmark at the request of the king: *Gleichzeitig erteilte er Bugenhagen Urlaub bis Calli (16. Oktober), also etwar vier Monate.*⁷⁵

In four instances, John Bugenhagen served as a pastor in a transitional situation for a limited period of time, then returned to the exercise of his office at Wittenberg. In the first two mentioned, specific language alerts us to "call/installation". In the discussion of this issue, an important distinction has been drawn between the call that summons into the Church's ministry, signaled by ordination that conveys permanence and the transfer from one post to another within the same ministry, signaled by local installation, induction, or investiture. Ministry is specific, local, and concrete and is spelled out in a legitimate call.⁷⁶ Bugenhagen's work to establish church order in Denmark, Schleswig-Holstein, Hildesheim, and the territory of Braunschweig-Wolfenbittel and his earlier assignment to foster the Reformation in Hamburg

⁷⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁶ Kurt Marquart, *Ministry and Ordination: Confessional Perspectives* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984), 16. [Alternately, however, Marquart adds this note: "A formal opinion by Joachim Mörlin, of 1564, also referring to Luther, is cited, which categorically denies the question: 'May a called preacher let himself be hired and employed for a certain number of years?'" This situation and Mörlin's letter are cited at length by Wendelin Linsenmann, "Lehrverhandlungen: Ueber den Beruf zum heiligen Predigtamt (Pfarramt)," in *Verhandlungen der zweiten Sitzungen des Canada-Districts der deutschen evang.-luth. Synod von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten im Jahre 1880* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1880), 15–16. The historical context demonstrates that the man was not called by a congregation, but at the whim of a nobleman.]

and Braunschweig was authorized by a call to a temporary situation. He was not founding a mission, but was leading, as a pastor, in reform.

A similar circumstance of transitional ministry served by a pastor of the early Reformation is that of Justus Jonas. Already in 1536, he was called to serve the church at Naumberg, then called back to Wittenberg.⁷⁷ He was called on a short-term basis by the Princes of Anhalt to work at Zerbst in 1538. Speaking of his work there, Lehmann observes:

The standards of ministry were raised, the well-being and harmony of the church life were promoted, and the moral and educational level of church members in general was put on a higher plane.⁷⁸

He was given leave of absence from his call to the faculty at Wittenberg to be the called pastor in the city of Halle beginning April 14, 1541.⁷⁹ The letter he wrote to Georg van Anhalt within days of his arrival indicates his joy at the success of his work and underscores the respect the Reformers had for the appropriate process of being called. Jonas recognizes in the letter that his work at Halle, though it is premised on the call extended to him by the city, was "for the time."⁸⁰

Ego scripsi electori illuss. Saxoniae, quod huc *ad tempus* me hac occasione vocaverit Deus. [emphasis added]⁸¹

⁷⁷ Martin E. Lehmann, *Justus Jonas: Loyal Reformer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 77–78.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 78

⁷⁹ Theodor Pressel, *Justus Jonas* (Elberfeld: Verlag von R.L. Friderichs, 1862), 82.

⁸⁰ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993), 297.

⁸¹ Gustav Kawerau, *Der Briefwechsel des Justus Jonas* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), II, 2.

Jonas continued to hold the call as dean and professor at the University of Wittenberg, a situation that eventually engendered a good deal of discord on the faculty, because Jonas committed to remain in Halle due to the success of his work.⁸² Subsequent to Luther's death and during the Smalcald War, Jonas was called to several different churches, especially when Wittenberg itself was occupied. These calls, however, were extended to Jonas to take advantage of his availability and not parallel to the temporary situation he served in Halle. For example, Bugenhagen recommended him to receive the call to Hildesheim in 1547 because he had been displaced by the war.⁸³ He also served on a short-term basis, under the authority of a call at Regensburg in 1552 and Eisleben in 1553.⁸⁴ His work at Regensburg is of special note as he was called there to restore order in the congregation. The more important, pertinent point is the temporary service Jonas rendered at Halle with the full permission and encouragement of Luther and the other leaders of the Reformation. The plan was that Jonas' gifts and abilities were to be made use of on a short-term basis.

Bugenhagen and Jonas' leaves of absence indicate that such temporary response to calls authorizing work in a specific place to accomplish a specific pastoral work do not run counter to the understanding of the Office of the Ministry at the time of the Reformation. What is evident is that the special abilities of an ordained pastor assigned temporarily would, in Luther's practice, be a legitimate consideration. Here the focus is on the care of God's people and the use of the Gospel. Allowing temporary pastoral assignment to become standard

⁸² Pressel, 84, 87–90; Brecht, *Preservation of the Church*, 300.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

⁸⁴ Lehman, 176–177.

practice in any situation or as a concession to human whims (the pastor or the congregation) would damage the authority of the Office of the Holy Ministry; for here the focus is on man's considerations. Luther's principle seems to be that the Office of the Holy Ministry is a gift from God, to be received by and exercised in faith, and that specific occasions of concern are to be responded to, under proper authority, in love and with wisdom.

CHAPTER 3

INTERIM MINISTRY AND THE CALL TO THE HOLY MINISTRY IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Faithfulness to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions and the difficult historical circumstances surrounding the Lutheran Saxon migration to Perry County, Missouri, have shaped a special sensitivity to the call into the Holy Ministry and calls to subsequent congregations in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (hereafter LCMS). The pastors that would eventually become the early leadership of the LCMS immigrated to the United States in 1838-39 under the autocratic leadership of the Rev. Martin Stephan of Dresden. Strongly influenced by their study of the Lutheran Confessions and Luther's writings,¹ the group left Saxony because of the Saxon *Agenda* of 1812 and 1836 and the Prussian Union of 1817.² They were convinced that the teachings of the Enlightenment threatened the existence of the true Church and that the safety of the American continent should be sought to create a pure church on earth.³ However, American Lutheran leader Dr. Benjamin Kurtz would report in 1839 that Stephan already in 1827 harbored dreams of a migration to the United States.⁴ Growing legal concerns for Stephan in Germany at least triggered the final plans for the

¹ Carl S. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 61–80.

² Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 26, 78; Meyer, *Frontiers*, 80.

³ The legitimacy of the emigration came under strong scrutiny in light of the debacle that occurred once they arrived in the United States.

⁴ Meyer, *Frontiers*, 133.

departure.⁵

Devoted as the group was to the truth of the Gospel and Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the Stephanite movement virtually invited persecution from both the government and other pastors of Saxony.⁶ At their best, they can be described as champions of an old orthodoxy out of vogue in nineteenth-century Europe. Their unyielding insistence on pure Lutheranism made them a faction in the face of a government that was bent on shaping a unified society under Enlightenment principles. The Stephanites became the target of enormous pressure to conform. Under this pressure, at their worst, they fell prey to self-righteous hypocrisy and demagoguery that in their minds justified a variety of illegal actions, especially at the time of their departure.

The attitudes of the clergy in the group were strongly influenced by the pietistic movement they encountered in their student days, a resistance to the prevailing "scientific" approach to Scripture, theology, and faith-life. C. F. W. Walther is a prime example of an individual so affected. His personal struggle to find a gracious God was finally satisfied through correspondence with Martin Stephan, the influential Bohemian pastor at Dresden.⁷ Walther became one of a company of young pastors and a significant body of laity whose devotion to Stephan bordered on the idolatrous. While the Saxons would never deny the efficacy of the Word of God and the sacraments, Stephan himself came to be viewed as the

⁵ Forster, 185.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60–82.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

means (a *means of grace*) by which God was coming to his faithful few left in Saxony.⁸ This attitude toward Stephan held sway among the Saxons even at the time it became necessary to depose Stephan and remove him from the colony in Missouri early after their arrival in the United States, and influenced the group's attitudes toward the role of the clergy.

Walther Forster⁹ and Carl Munding¹⁰ illustrate the traits of Stephan's autocratic nature. At the same time, they underscore for us the willingness of the immigrants and their pastors to be subject to his strategy. Part of this submission, the blind devotion to the leader, could readily be traced to the psychological dynamics of a group that perceives itself to be persecuted. However, another element of this devotion is drawn to our attention by Munding.¹¹ Pastors in Saxony in the nineteenth-century enjoyed enormous prestige and commanded definite obedience. Their position was supported by the government, both financially and in its exercise of power. Laity in Germany were predisposed to submit to the authority of any pastor by force of law. Stephan's psychological sway over his adherents created an even more dominant experience of the ministry's authority. By the time of the immigration in 1838, many of Stephan's adherents had become accustomed to such an increasingly dominant pastoral style for twenty-eight years.¹² It is not at all surprising that

⁸ Ibid., 63–64.

⁹ Ibid., 61–62, 278–80.

¹⁰ Carl S. Munding, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia 1947), 52–74.

¹¹ Ibid., 67.

¹² Forster, 31.

Stephan's insistence on being proclaimed bishop was accepted by the group. More importantly, this backdrop also influenced attitudes and expectations about the office of the pastor among the Saxon laity and pastors after Stephan's deposal. It is significant that the valid and legitimate calls held by the group of young pastors were resigned at the time of their departure in the fall of 1838.¹³ Stephan agreed to resign his office at Dresden as part of a settlement of legal action against him at the time of the emigration.¹⁴ Then, as his ship approached American waters, Stephan insisted on being made bishop of the colony by those on his ship.¹⁵ This office was ratified by the entire group when all had finally arrived at St. Louis.¹⁶ The ecclesiastical and civil government of the Saxon colony was episcopal. The legitimacy of the pastoral care by the entire ministerium rested on the office of bishop occupied by Stephan.

Since the entire enterprise was premised on the office and person of Stephan, when he was deposed and exiled from the colony on May 30, 1839, on moral charges, the theological warrant for the authority of the ministry was thrown into a quandry.¹⁷ Forster writes:

As Vehse [*a prominent layman among the Saxon group*] was to point out to them later, they were at this time no pastors at all. They had resigned their positions in Germany and had not been called to office since that time, but had merely been

¹³ Ibid., 178–79.

¹⁴ Ibid., 186.

¹⁵ Ibid., 215; cf. Meyer, *Frontiers*, 134–35, for the full text of the investiture.

¹⁶ Forster, 279.

¹⁷ C. F. W. Walther, *Walther and the Church*, ed. Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau and Th. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), v. (A terse description of the entire issue can be found here.)

appointed by Stephan. Now that the Bishop had been removed, they were deprived of any basis for such nebulous authority as they had claimed and exercised.¹⁸

While some leading laity among the immigrants remained skeptical, verbal "calls" were extended to the pastors, thinly establishing the legitimacy of their offices.¹⁹ Even the clergy remained uncertain of the legitimacy and validity of their positions as evidenced by their consideration of appealing to the Swedish Lutheran Church to legitimize the exercise of their office.²⁰ Although Rev. E. M. Buerger seems to have had an especially sensitive conscience in this affair, his comments in his memoirs demonstrate a common sentiment among the clergy:

These questions and doubts pressed more and more upon my conscience. I doubted the legality of my call to the ministry in Perry County, and whether I was worthy to administer the ministerial office. Added to that was the fact that my congregation had grown indifferent and distrustful toward me.²¹

Three of the leading laity, Dr. C. E. Vehse, H. F. Fischer, and Gustav Jäckel, who had been elected to roles on a committee of governance for the colony resigned by June 22 for a variety of reasons, principally the poor economic administration and looming financial collapse of the group. However, their objection to the constituting principles of the colony began to

¹⁸ Forster, 431; Meyer, *Frontiers*, 137.

¹⁹ Forster, 432. Forster's description of the confusion and despair of the colonists reflects a group in deep grief. It also evidences all the symptoms of a congregation that has suffered sexual and financial abuse. The colony was a group whose purpose evaporated, whose rationale for existence had disintegrated, and whose very survival was threatened from what is observed by eyewitness Gruber (430). The chaos Forster describes (509) is typical of such situations, as is this statement: The ingredients in this witch's cauldron of confusion, uncertainty, remorse, self-recrimination, attack, counterattack, confession, anathema, and all the other component parts of the bitter religio-factional feud which sapped the remaining strength of the colonies, combined to produce a pitiable and morbid situation (516).

²⁰ Forster, 438.

²¹ Meyer, *Frontiers*, 138.

widen to the theological. By August 5, these three men devised and presented to Rev. O. H. Walther a "Protest," six theses on the office of the ministry that they continued to revise until November of 1839.²² The thrust of their assertion, premised on the priesthood of all the baptized, called into question the autocratic role of the clergy following Stephan's expulsion. Essentially they contended that though Stephan had been removed, the clergy group that took his place had no basis of authority and was behaving just as Stephan had. The problem remained. Forster writes of the "Protest":

The Protest is composed of three positive points with a negative corollary. In its entirety the Protest constitutes a ringing assertion of the rights of the congregation as opposed to synod, episcopacy, a domineering clergy, or any other agency in the Church which would tend to curtail these rights. Hereby the three immigrant Saxon laymen gave strong utterance to a principle which has become generally accepted and firmly established in American Lutheranism and which, when applied as the Saxons interpreted it, has assured the autonomy of the local congregation.²³

Conflict was now clearly in the open, and it was theological in character.²⁴ It would disturb the colony for the next year and a half, and it would profoundly affect the understanding of the relationship of the pastor to the congregation in the future LCMS. Although it seemed to have subsided with the return to Germany of the Protest's chief architect and spokesman, Vehse, in December 1839,²⁵ the fundamental theological and moral questions

²² Forster, 461–63.

²³ Ibid., 466.

²⁴ Lawrence Rast has recently contended that Vehse initiated much of the conflict and interjected strong elements of democratic thinking into the emerging polity, an element foreign to Lutheran doctrine and practice. Lawrence Rast, "Demagoguery or Democracy? The Saxon Emigration and American Culture," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63:4 (October 1999): 263.

²⁵ Ibid., 471.

raised by Vehse were sidelined only by the desperate struggle for survival by the colony in its first years, and its financial and legal problems.²⁶ But by March 1840, the more secure segment of the colony, those who settled in St. Louis, began to scrutinize the entire foundation of the enterprise.²⁷ Vehse's arguments were reprinted and prompted no small amount of personal turmoil and confession and public polemic.²⁸

The united control by the ministerium also began to crumble as individual pastors came to grips with their personal responsibility for the condition of the colony.²⁹ The entire colony lived with the despair that something was profoundly wrong. They wrestled with the question whether they could even consider themselves Christian, a part of the Church and capable of extending a valid and legitimate call into the ministry.³⁰ When those in the colony preparing for the ministry announced that they would refrain from preaching, the debate tore at the fabric of the colony.³¹ The majority of the clergy, not the least of which was C. F. W. Walther, either resigned or tendered their resignations.³² The memoirs of Rev. E. M. Buerger reflect this turmoil:

I recognized that it had been premature, that, since the pure confession still had legal

²⁶ Ibid., 484–504.

²⁷ Ibid., 507.

²⁸ Ibid., 508–09.

²⁹ Ibid., 508.

³⁰ Ibid., 517.

³¹ Ibid., 512.

³² C. F. W. Walther, *The Congregation's Right to Choose Its Pastor*, trans. Fred Kramer, ed. Wilbert H. Rosin (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 1997), 8; Forster, *Zion*, 516.

standing in Saxony, we should have remained and fought; that we, disdain the cross, had lightly forsaken our divinely committed offices, that we had torn family ties asunder, and misled many souls into error and brought them into such misery.³³

This torture of conscience can seem strange to twentieth-century Americans so accustomed to the practice of self-appointed pastors. Self-ordained clergy were also well known to the Saxons, not only in the history of the Church, but also in their current experience on the American frontier. The Saxons would later censure such practices. All through their history, their keen conscience about a divine call underscored their devotion to the Lutheran Confessions and their convictions about the nature of the Church and ministry. They emphasized the insistence of the Augsburg Confession, "No one may preach or teach publicly without a regular call." By 1841 the qualms of conscience and doubt about the legitimacy of the entire endeavor came to a head. Two general positions emerged that were finally contrasted in a public debate among the colonists at Altenburg, Missouri, on April 15 and 21 of that year.³⁴ Adolph Marbach, brother-in-law of Vehse, represented the extreme position that the entire enterprise was so completely wrong that the colony was no longer a group of Christians and the pastors were pretenders to a rightful exercise of the office of the ministry.³⁵ Alternately, Rev. C. F. W. Walther argued for the existence of the Church among them as an act of the grace of God. Where there are Christians, they have the right to organize as a local congregation and to exercise all the rights of a congregation, including the valid and legitimate calling of pastors. Forster writes: "In practical application it meant the identification of the

³³ Meyer, *Frontiers*, 137–38.

³⁴ Forster, 523.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 517; cf. also the Memoirs of J. F. F. Winter, quoted in Meyer, *Frontiers*, 140–41.

characteristics and powers of a congregation and 'the church.'³⁶ This would prove to be the slender thread upon which the legitimacy of the congregations of the colony would find peace and establish their practice of faith. It would also be developed by Walther in subsequent writing and became foundational to the polity of the LCMS.³⁷

The substance of Walther's position in the debate undertaken at Altenburg was formally published eleven years later in Walther's *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*,³⁸ a position subsequently adopted by the LCMS as its doctrinal position regarding Church and the Office of the Holy Ministry.

Several of Walther's ten theses on the Office of the Holy Ministry are especially pertinent to the calling of a pastor, and, therefore, to the question about interim ministry.

Thesis III. The ministry is not an arbitrary office but one whose establishment has been commanded to the church and to which the church is ordinarily bound till the end of time.

Thesis V. The public ministry (*Predigtamt*) has the power to preach the Gospel and administer the holy sacraments as well as the power of spiritual judgment.

Thesis VI. A. The ministry of the Word (*Predigtamt*) is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed.

B. The ordination of the called (persons) with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite (*Ordnung*) established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call

Thesis VII. The holy ministry (*Predigtamt*) is the power, conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of the priesthood and all church power, to exercise the

³⁶ Forster, 522.

³⁷ Ibid., 530.

³⁸ Dallmann, *Church*, vi.

rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office in the name of the congregation.³⁹

Not only at Altenburg, but also over the ensuing decades in conversation and conflict with other Lutherans in America, the understanding of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the LCMS sought a middle ground. It avoided the extreme congregationalism that Vehse had promulgated in 1839 and the extreme clericalism represented in America by Rev. J. A. A. Grabau and the Buffalo Synod.⁴⁰

This theological basis for understanding the Church and the Office of the Holy Ministry was reflected practically in Walther's *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Independent of the State*. Through the immigration, the Saxons were freed from the centuries old situation of a state-controlled Lutheran Church and could devise an entirely new Lutheran church polity.⁴¹ Much of what Walther recommends in the sixty-six sections of the work have to do with the day-to-day structure and conduct of a Lutheran congregation.⁴²

Section 21 is most pertinent to the calling of a pastor in the LCMS:

Section 21. In order to perform the highly important act of choosing and calling a minister properly, according to the provisions of God's Word, the congregation proceeds in this wise: Imploring God's blessing and guidance, it secures, if possible, the advice and presence of one or more experienced ministers of the Church, entrusting to them the direction of the public election, Titus 1:5. Cp. Acts 1:15–26; 6:1–6; 14:23.

³⁹ C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 22.

⁴⁰ Dallmann, *Church*, 48–51.

⁴¹ Norman Nagel, "The Divine Call in *Die Rechte Gestalt* of C. F. W. Walther," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 59:3 (July 1995): 161–90. Dr. Nagel includes a thorough review of the divine call in the article.

⁴² Of interest to note is that only one section has to do with outreach to the unbeliever, and that the second to the last.

Every voting member has the right to propose a candidate. Inquiring after the qualifications (I Tim. 3:2–7; Titus 1:6–9; II Tim. 2:15, 24–26) of the persons proposed, the congregation acknowledges those as candidates who have been found eligible and recognizes and accepts the candidate who receives all or a majority of the votes as the person whom God has called through the congregation. The diploma of vocation, approved by the congregation and signed by the proper officials (I Cor. 16:3), pledges him to adherence to the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the Word of God, as also to the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and to the faithful administration of the holy office in all its parts (Col. 4:17; Acts 15:23; 26:22; 20:21, 26, 27; II Tim. 1:13, 14, 8; 4:2, 5; I Pet. 5:1–4) and carries the promise of the congregation to recognize him as its shepherd, teacher, and overseer, to receive as the Word of God the divine word preached by him, to obey him, love him, be at peace with him, honor him, and provide for his sustenance, Luke 10:16; I Thess. 5:12; 2:13; Heb. 13:17; I Thess 5:13; I Tim. 5:17; Luke 10:7; I Cor. 9:13–14; Gal. 6:6. Upon his acceptance of the call he is, according to apostolic usage (I Tim. 4:14; Acts 6:6; 13:2, 3), ordained or, in the case of an ordained minister, publicly and solemnly installed into his office. I Tim. 3:10.⁴³

The rite of ordination (installation) is the solemn and public ratification of the call and includes the

solemn and public ordination vow.⁴⁴

Walther's presentation of *The Correct Form* was the focus of the doctrinal study at the 1863 synodical convention. Two quotations from Walther's more complete commentary there highlight the understanding of the call to the Office of the Ministry in a congregation:

[W]e also see quite clearly that our church assigns to the Christian people (Volk) the right to call. In fact, we must get used to looking at the quotations contained in the note as true foundations of the doctrine that the people, the congregations, are to do the choosing—especially since people like Loehe, Harms, and others, misuse these quotations from Scripture and turn them into their opposite.⁴⁵

The election is both valid and divine if only the congregation and no one else has

⁴³ Dallmann, *Church*, 97–98.

⁴⁴ C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 1:85.

⁴⁵ Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 1:75–76.

undertaken it. If the bishop alone does it, it is null and void, but the congregation alone can make a valid choice. However, it is another question whether the election was undertaken with good judgment, wisely, and with appropriate humility.⁴⁶

The call to the Office of the Holy Ministry was to be extended by the congregation. The call was focused on the service as the pastor of a congregation. This office was protected zealously as is evidenced by comments recorded at the convention:

[O]ne who is no longer head of a congregation [wer keine Gemeinde mehr hinter sich hat] can no longer say, ". . . by virtue of my office."⁴⁷

When a pastor performs official acts in a parish other than his own, on behalf of his brother fellow pastor, he does that also not by virtue of his [own] call, but by virtue of his fellow pastor's call.⁴⁸

[Our church] has never allowed the transfer of the full office to one who himself does not have the full office. In addition, the temporary transfer of the office can absolutely never take place without consent of the congregation. The administration of the sacraments presupposes pastors, which preaching as such does not do, and therefore the latter may be transferred to a professor, but he should refrain from the former. Even a pastor should not conduct confession in another congregation if it is not necessary, least of all private confession, because that presupposes even private cure of souls (*sogar Privatseelsorge*).⁴⁹

By 1863 the Synod had authorized trained men as "missionaries at large" (itinerant preachers) to reach the migrating and scattered German population in the Midwest. The Synod's protection of the congregation's right to call and the divinity of the office is reflected in what the convention said of them:

The itinerant preachers go out without a call to a parish and therefore without

⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 85.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 85.

ordination; their only call is the call of love. . . . Under certain circumstances an itinerant preacher can perform all official acts, namely if, on the one hand, he does not meddle in the affairs of others and, on the other hand, if no state of disorder is caused. If I come as an itinerant preacher to a place where the people ask me to perform official acts, then they are extending a call to me.⁵⁰

Perhaps the most foundational piece of evidence for Walther's understanding of the call is to be found in the material edited by Walther for the doctrinal training of pastors in the Synod's seminary. The Synod had produced a revised edition of Baier's *Compendium* as its doctrinal textbook for pastoral training. Each of Baier's assertions was copiously substantiated by quotations from Luther and the orthodox Lutheran fathers. Walther's edition of Baier affirms the time-honored practice for the entrance of a pastor into the Holy Ministry:

However, God calls men to church office whether at times immediately, by no interceding arbitrary work by other men, and at other times mediately, to be sure through the church which in the name of God commits the office to certain persons. When this happens, the church by no means has the power to say it is the principal cause of the calling of ministers. [author's translation]⁵¹

For the calling of ministers which happens through the mediation of the church, three things concur: (1) Election, the judgement concerning the worthiness of the person moved to the sacred ministry, whether they have the reasonable understanding and gifts to perform the official duties necessary. (2) Ordination or the inauguration, solemn and done through certain rites, of the elected person to the sacred office. (3) Vocation in the special sense of the seminarian to teach the Word of God in the public assembly and to administer the sacraments and the entrustment of performances. [author's translation]⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁵¹ Joh. W. Baier, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, ed. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1879), 689. (Vocat autem Deus homines ad officium ecclesiasticum aliquando *immediate* seu nulla intercedente arbitraria aliorum hominum opera, aliquando *mediate*, nempe per ecclesiam, quae nomine Dei munus illud certis personis committit. Unde, cum hoc fit, ecclesia *minus principalis* causa vocationis ministrorum dici potest.)

⁵² Ibid., 699. (Ad *vocationem* ministrorum, quae fit mediante ecclesia, *tria* concurrunt: [1] *Electio* seu iudicium de dignitate personae ad ministerium sacrum admovendae, ratione eruditionis

Walther continued to uphold this understanding as is evidenced by his remarks at the English Lutheran Conference in 1872.

Thesis XIV

- A. Ministers do not form a peculiar holy priestly order in opposition to laymen.
- B. The pastoral office is nothing but an office, instituted of God, of ministering unto the church.
- C. To call preachers is a right of the congregation to whom they are to minister. Ordination is only a confirmation of this call and an apostolic ecclesiastical institution.⁵³

1872 also marks the appearance of Walther's *Pastoraltheologie*, a re-edited and bound collection of essays that had been previously published in *Lehre und Wehre*. Concerning the call to the ministry, Walther wrote:

Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession teaches according to God's Word (Rom. 10:15; Jer. 23:21; James 3:1 Heb. 5:4–5; see the beginning of almost all of Paul's epistles): "no one should teach or preach publicly in the church or administer the Sacraments without a regular call." After the ability for the office has been acquired, the first requirement for God-pleasing and blessed conduct of the office is that the preacher be regularly called to it and be certain of it.⁵⁴

Though the congregation is the instrument to extend the call, the call is understood to come from the Lord. The pastor is the Lord's representative to the people and the servant of the Lord. Therefore, only the Lord can determine when the pastor is to be moved. This is reflected in subsequent discussion in *Pastoraltheologie*, as Walther addresses the American practice of the temporary employment of pastors.

ac donorum ad actus officii recte obeundos necessariorum, ejusque ad ministerium designatio. [2] *Ordinatio* sive personae electae solennis et per certos ritus facta inauguratio ad officium sacrum. [3] *Vocatio* specialiter sic dicta, seu potestatis ad verbum Dei in conventibus publicis docendum et sacramenta administranda concessio ac functionis demandatio.)

⁵³ Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 1:241–42.

⁵⁴ C. F. W. Walther, *American Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. John Drickamer (New Haven, Mo.: Lutheran News, 1995), 16.

Here in America many congregations have the custom of calling the preachers only temporarily. But a congregation is not justified in extending such a call, and a preacher is not authorized to accept such a call. It is an abuse. It fights against the divinity of a correct call to a preaching office in the church, which is clearly testified to in God's Word. (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; I Cor. 12:28; Ps. 68:12; Is. 41:27)⁵⁵

There is an early and strong denunciation by the pastors of the LCMS of the American practice of temporary calls. Mundingger has a lengthy footnote that is worth citing in its entirety. It not only attests the universal rejection of temporary calls among the LCMS, but also enables us to more clearly specify the circumstances to which the synodical leaders were objecting:

Th. J. Brohm . . . wrote a strong denunciation of the time limit in a series of articles in *Der Lutheraner*, I (1845), pp. 61–63 and 65–66. The time limit, Pastor Brohm claims, is contrary to the doctrine of the divine call. . . . It is contrary to the law of love. Above all, it undermines the obedience which hearers owe their pastors. . . . Pastor Wyneken was still stronger in his denunciation of the temporary call. In his "*Aufruf an die lutherische Kirche Deutschlands zur Unterstuetzung der Glaubensbrueder in Nordamerika*" . . . Wyneken writes: "Nothing is more depressing than the sight of these so-called preachers and the manner in which congregations saddle themselves with these tramps. They are hired like deceivers."⁵⁶

The argument that was advanced against temporary calls can be summarized in this way:

1. If God is really the one who calls, then God only is the one who can dismiss.
2. A pastor who accepts such a call turns the call into a human contract; for he can be dismissed according to human whims.
3. Such a call fights against the obedience due a pastor by a congregation.
4. Every temporary call is against the faithfulness and constancy until death which God requires.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁶ Mundingger, *Government*, 185, n. 43.

⁵⁷ Ernst Eckhardt, "Beruf des Pastors," *Homiletisches Reallexikon nebst Index Rerum*, vol. A, (St. Louis: Success, 1907), 358–59; *Verhandlungen der vierten Versammlung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika*, Cleveland, Ohio, July 14–20,

With no proper call, there was no divine assurance of authority for the message of the pastor, no assurance of the validity of the sacraments. Entrance to the Office of the Holy Ministry could be treated as an avocation instead of a lifelong vocation. There was no commitment to Confessions and doctrinal standards, nor supervision of the same. The dignity of the office would be trampled. With no proper call, with only a contractual arrangement with a group of Christians, the admonishments of God's law by the pastor, corporately and private, could be ignored by the people since he served at their caprice. This was the great risk of extreme congregationalism.

Shortly after Walther's *Pastoraltheologie* appeared, the Synodical Conference met in Cleveland, Ohio. The eleventh thesis of their agenda for discussion similarly rejected the practice of a temporary call. Such a call was termed not only "un-orderly" (AC, XIV), but a rejection of the Confessions:

Furthermore, it contradicts our confessional position, if the church organization tolerates that its pastors have no orderly call, or only a time-conditioned one from its congregations or even from itself, or if it strengthens even more this disorder through the system of licensing. (author's translation).⁵⁸

The practice of "licensing" graduate Lutheran seminarians had been part of American Lutheran practice for some decades. Essentially, it certified a man as a trained Lutheran pastor and invited him to create his own congregation. On the frontier, many of these "licensed" pastors

1875 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1876), 37.

⁵⁸ *Verhandlungen der vierten Versammlung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika*, Cleveland, Ohio, July 14–20, 1875 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, 1876), 25. (Es widerspricht ferner dem Bekenntniß, wenn die kirchliche Körperschaft es sich gefallen lässt, daß ihre Pastoren keinen ordentlichen, sondern nur einen zeitweiligen Beruf von ihren Gemeinden haben, oder sie gar selber diese Unordnung durch das Lizenzwesen stärkt.)

arrived at contractual arrangements with congregations of mixed Lutheran and Reform confession. In some cases, graduates of German theological schools, unable to secure a call in Germany, came to this country to gain experience while they sought a call to a congregation back in Germany.⁵⁹ As the revival of Lutheran confessionalism reached American shores in the early nineteenth century, American Lutherans besides the Saxons began condemning the custom.⁶⁰ Mathias Loy and the churches of the Ohio Synod reflect this.⁶¹

At the gathering of the Canadian District of the Synod in 1880, the same conviction regarding temporary calls was expressed:

The call must not happen for a pre-stated duration in the manner of a hiring contract. This follows from all which we have already heard. If God has not established a time, then no man has the right to establish a time. Therefore, one must not entertain a temporary, that is a call under a time duration. (author's translation).⁶²

The importance of an orderly call to a congregation was not a conviction held only by the Missouri Synod at the end of the nineteenth century. Even those who disagreed with Walther's theory of transfer of the authority of the office underscored the importance of the special call mediated by the congregation. G. H. Gerberding wrote:

⁵⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁰ Eckhardt, "Beruf," 360.

⁶¹ Matthias Loy, *Story of My Life* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), 202.

⁶² Wendelin Linsenmann, "Lehrverhandlungen: Ueber den Beruf zum heiligen Predigtamt (Pfarramt)," In *Verhandlungen der zweiten Sitzungen des Canada-Districts der deutschen evang.-luth. Synod von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten im Jahre 1880* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1880), 13. (Der Beruf darf nicht auf eine bestimmte Zeit nach Art eines Miethcontractes geschehen. Das folgt aus allem, was wir schon gehört haben. Setzt nun Gott keine Zeit, so hat kein Mensch ein Recht, eine Zeit zu setzen . . . Daher darf man sich auf einen temporären, das heißt, zeitweiligen Beruf nicht einlassen.)

[W]e must distinguish between (a) the *general* command and call . . . and (b) the *special* call by which it is demanded that the ministry of the Word and Sacraments be administered in the public assembly of the church, according to the public consent of the church, by certain persons fit for it.⁶³

Gerberding's volume is important to our understanding of this question for a second reason. He emphasizes the conviction of the orthodox Lutheran fathers, the insistence that a call to the office must be to a specific congregation. He cites at length Chemnitz, Gerhard, and Hollaz in this regard. A citation from Chemnitz is exemplary.

Chemnitz (L.T., *De Ecc.*, iii., 124): "For teachers (*doctores*), pastors, bishops, presbyters are called to certain churches, and have not absolute power of teaching everywhere or in all churches (Acts xiv. 23; Tit. i.5).⁶⁴

Sixty years after Walther's *Pastoraltheologie* was published, the synod again published a manual of pastoral theology, authored by Dr. John Fritz; and the position on "temporary calls" had not changed.

Some non-Lutheran congregations have the custom of calling a minister temporarily, so that, *whenever it pleases them, they may again dismiss him*. A congregation is not justified in extending such a call, since before God it is neither valid nor legitimate. . . . If a congregation assumes to tell a minister who has been given to it by the Lord how long he is to remain with them, it puts itself above the Lord, its Master, and interferes with His government. . . . Such a "temporary" call would not be a divine call, but simply a contract made by men, not a life's calling, but merely "temporary" employment outside of God's own prescribed order of things. . . . The "temporary" call would admit all manner of hirelings and cause much disorder in Christian congregations. [emphasis added]⁶⁵

Nor had the Synod's position changed by the 1950s at the publication of a series of doctrinal

⁶³ G. H. Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1915), 81.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁵ John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1931), 45–46.

essays honoring the centennial of the founding of the Synod. The Rev. P. F. Koehneke would write:

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a permanent call, because sooner or later everyone serving in the Kingdom of God must die. . . . According to these plain Scripture passages the time any person is to serve is in the hands of God, he is to determine how long a man is to serve in any special office. To make the service of a pastor or teacher a matter of contract, subject to termination by either side upon ample notice, is contrary to the Scriptural doctrine of the call.⁶⁶

The essence of the temporary call does not consist in this that a call is limited as to time, but in this that *human beings arbitrarily limit a call as to time* that is, that they want to determine how long a pastor is to be active at a certain place. [emphasis added]⁶⁷

If a congregation issues a so-called temporary call, that is, if it in advance and arbitrarily decides that the man to be called is to leave his place after one, two, three, or four years, it becomes guilty of encroaching upon God's office and work.⁶⁸

Late in the 1950s, an updated pastoral theology manual was published by the Synod edited by Rev. William Eifert. The understanding of temporary calls to the pastoral office had not changed:

We cannot sanction the practice of hiring a minister for a limited time or with the provision that after several years he be *dismissed or that his contract be renewed if he has given satisfaction*. [emphasis added]⁶⁹

⁶⁶ P. F. Koehneke, "The Call into the Holy Ministry," in *The Abiding Word*, vol. 1, ed. Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 379–80. (Cited is the fact that in the original constitution of the Synod one of the conditions of membership was "Regular (not temporary) call of the pastor. . . . Licenses to preach which are customary in this country are not granted by Synod because they are contrary to Scripture and to the practice of the Church.")

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 381–82.

⁶⁹ Albert H. Schwermann, "The Doctrine of the Call," in *The Pastor at Work*, ed. William H. Eifert (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 97.

The permanence of the call to the Office of the Holy Ministry in a congregation recognizes and affirms the action of the Lord. And this is reflected, finally, in the doctrinal writings in the Synod even in more recent years.

The call from and by God through the church is essential for entry into the pastoral ministry or its auxiliary offices. In order to clarify what is meant by a call we define it as follows: A person is "called" when he or she is summoned by the church to the office of Word and sacrament or to an office auxiliary to it on a full-time *permanent* [emphasis added] basis and by education, by certification, and by solemn and public act (e.g., ordination or commissioning) is brought into a unique relationship with the church from which he or she has unique authority and through which he or she is authorized to perform functions of that office of the church into which he or she has been ordained or commissioned, at a specific post *for the length of time which is ordinarily continuing and indefinite, but which in certain cases and under certain special circumstances may be a specified period of time* [emphasis added], which is evidenced by the individual's name being placed on and retained on one of the official rosters of the Synod.⁷⁰

In the most recently published manual of pastoral theology produced by the Synod, the insistence upon a valid and legitimate call to enter the pastoral office is again affirmed.⁷¹ This volume affirms readily what earlier pastoral theologies intimate, namely, that the lack of permanence of a call may not in all circumstances invalidate its divine nature.⁷²

Recognized theologians of the Synod have also addressed the matter of the call and its permanence. Dr. Robert Preus wrote in *The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy*:

⁷⁰ The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, "The Ministry: Offices, Procedures, and Nomenclature" (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), 29.

⁷¹ Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus, eds., *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 26.

The call is always permanent. The notion of a temporary call is inconceivable in the nature of the case, and, therefore, the matter is not even considered by Luther or the Confessions or any Lutheran theologian. The function of the ministerial office, Calov asserts, is to work for the church as a servant (*diaconus*), not as a lord, to do the work of an evangelist to the grave, to guard and be an example to the flock, an angel of God's revelation of His Word. One never quits such a calling.⁷³

A faithful steward has no right to leave his charge without compelling and justifiable mitigating circumstances. This conviction permeates the teaching and examples of Luther and the confessors. And why would the church wish to extend only a temporary call to a minister? Like God's call to be saints and priests, the call to this special office is for life; "as long as you live," Luther says.⁷⁴

*A "temporary call" is a violation of the divinity of the call to the ministry of the Word. Such an action is an oxymoron. Although a divine call and letter of call is indeed a legal contract, it is much more, as we have seen. It is God's own placement in the ministry of the Word. A "contract call" for two or three years, an idea contemplated here and there in our Synod, is equally pernicious.*⁷⁵

Kurt Marquart has written:

To presume, without valid cause, to drive called ministers out of their divinely assigned tasks and responsibilities, is to interfere sacrilegiously with God's government of His church. It is to mistreat God's servants as if they were the servants and hirelings of men. Such lawless usurpation of divine prerogatives amounts to "temple-robbery." . . . *It is in this context that the so-called "temporary call" must be seen for what it is: a "call" with built-in dismissal on unbiblical grounds.* [emphasis added]⁷⁶

A formal opinion by Joachim Mörlin, of 1564, also referring to Luther, is cited, which categorically denies the question: "May a called preacher let himself be hired and

⁷³ Robert D. Preus, *The Doctrine of the Call in the Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy*. (privately printed, 1991), 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁶ Kurt Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, vol. 9, ed. Robert Preus (Fort Wayne: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1995), 157–58.

employed for a certain number of years?"⁷⁷

Finally, it should be noted that the Missouri Synod has officially understood and interpreted CA XIV ("ordentlicher Beruf"—orderly or regular Call) to exclude and forbid temporary calls. This understanding was written into the Missouri Synod's constitution as originally adopted.⁷⁸

These authors have been quoted extensively to demonstrate the consistent position of the Synod on the call to the Office of the Holy Ministry and the understanding that such a divine call is not temporary. Indeed, any *a priori* time limitation on a call, whether by the pastor or the congregation, voids the divine nature of the call. In either case, the serious discrepancy is the refusal to subject self to the will of the Lord. The congregation is the instrument by which the Lord calls the pastor to the Lord's office; therefore, the congregation dare not lord it over the Lord's servant. Alternately, because the pastor is the Lord's servant among the Lord's people, his respect for the office he holds must also be one of complete obedience until such time as the Lord gives different direction.

Nevertheless, from the very earliest documents that address the permanence of the call to the most recent, there is also a consistent recognition of special circumstances that call for a variation to this principle. The synodical fathers knew the history of the early Reformation, and they knew the challenges of their own recent history. Rev. P. F. Koehneke is typical when he writes in *The Abiding Word*:

⁷⁷ Kurt Marquart, *Ministry and Ordination: Confessional Perspectives* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984), 16. (The letter from Joachim Mörlin is quoted at length in the proceedings of the Canadian District in 1880. Mörlin is challenging the legitimacy of a pastor's call in a state church situation.)

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16–7, where he quotes C.S. Mundinger, *Government in the Missouri Synod*, 185, n. 44.

But the *call for temporary help* as described above has nothing in common with this temporary call, as already stated. *The factor of human arbitrariness is not present.* Sickness, weakness, being overburdened with business, necessary temporary absence are sent by God, and *the congregation which provides for temporary help for a presumably temporary need is not going its own way, but is going the very way which God is leading it.* [emphasis added] The congregation issuing such a call is acting altogether correctly, and the person called in such a manner is also acting correctly when he accepts such a call, and the man called temporarily for help is serving God in the public ministry no less than a man called for permanent service at the congregation. Therefore, if no other obstacles prevent the acceptance of the call, no person eligible for office dare decline to accept a call for temporary help. A similar statement is found in the Report of the Nebraska District, 1898, p. 27.⁷⁹

In order to demonstrate this, let us consider from the sources cited above that reject the temporary call this series of quotations that affirm the exception. They draw a distinction between a temporary call and a call to a temporary situation.

Those preachers are by no means guilty of conducting the office on a temporary basis who, without giving up the office to which they have a regular, legitimate call, and with the approval of their congregation, serve another one for a time on a loan basis.⁸⁰

Those pastors, however, in no way make themselves guilty of carrying on the office on the basis of a temporary call who, without resigning the office to which they have a regular call, with the permission of their own congregation serve another, on loan as it were. Chr. C. Zeibich has published a writing of his own about these cases under the title: *Schediasma de theologis ad tempus commodatis* (Leipzig, 1709.4). In a summary of this writing Loescher writes: "He (Zeibich) shows (Section 6) which *Theologos* he understands by *commodatis ad tempus*, namely those who leave their congregations with the intention of returning and are loaned to another church, to which they more than others can render good services, for a certain time, in order that they can rightly establish its church work. (The reader is) referred in Section 7 to the holy examples of Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, the Savior Himself and His Apostles, Peter, Paul also Barnabas. After these and in Reformation times are the examples of Luther, Amsdorf, Melancthon, Justus Jonas, Casper Cruciger, Bugenhagen, who almost from the beginning of the Gospel was loaned by Wittenberg to Braunschweig," and so on. Zeibich clarified explicitly, however, that he does not say of them, "they for a certain time were hired for church work, which would be a hireling way." (author's

⁷⁹ Koehneke, 382.

⁸⁰ Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, 28.

translation)⁸¹

A genuine temporary call is not to be considered a divine call, for there are those also which appear to be a temporary call, e.g., a vacancy. With such vacancies it is a similar situation as with Bugenhagen, who was and remained the pastor at Wittenberg although he was also sent into other districts. (author's translation)⁸²

With the rejection of the time-conditioned call in no way should the time conditioned service of a vacant congregation be condemned. A congregation can, to be sure, borrow a pastor for itself for a time who has his regular call in another congregation. The pastor is performing to it based on a call of love. Bugenhagen remained, for example as pastor in Wittenberg, and was still often borrowed from there for years by Pommerania, Lübeck, Hamburg and Denmark, where he organized the churches. (author's translation)⁸³

A distinction must be made between a "temporary" call and supplying during the illness or the absence of a regular pastor or temporarily filling a place during a vacancy while a congregation is calling another pastor or for the purpose of taking care of an unusual situation, as, for instance, when a pastor of another congregation is called in to assist in arranging certain affairs which may need special attention and expert advice (emphasis added). Since such a supply pastor has his own regular charge (emphasis added), and since another congregation is only requesting his assistance until a regular pastor, who can take full charge, can be called or until the emergency of a situation has been relieved, the question of a temporary call does not at all come into consideration. In all

⁸¹ Ibid., 44, fnt.

⁸² Linsemann, "*Lehrverhandlungen*," 14. (Ein wirklich temporärer Beruf [denn es gibt auch scheinbar temporäre Beruf, z. B. bei Vacanzen] is also nicht für einen göttlichen zu halten. Mit solchen Vacanzen hat es eine ähnliche Bewandniß wie bei Bugenhagen, der Pastor in Wittenberg war und blieb, obwohl er auch in andere Gegenden geschickt wurde.) The paragraph of this essay goes on to criticize pastors who present themselves from situation to situation, "testing their good luck," and criticizes them as vagabonds. The essayist is clearly rejecting an opportunistic approach of running from one vacancy to another and using Bugenhagen's example as a rationalization for this selfish practice.

⁸³ *Verhandlungen . . . Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika*, 28. (Mit der Verwerfung des zeitweiligen Berufes soll jedoch keineswegs das zeitweilige Bedienen einer vacanten Gemeinde auch verurtheilt werden. Denn es kann sich wohl eine Gemeinde einen Prediger, der in einer anderen Gemeinde seine ordentlichen Beruf hat, auf eine Zeitlang borgen. Der Prediger erfüllt dann an ihr einen Liebesberuf. Bugenhagen blieb z. B. auch Pfarrer in Wittenberg und war doch oft Jahre lang geborgt von Pommern, Lübeck, Hamburg und Dänemark, wo er die Kirchen einrichtete.)

such cases neither the congregation nor the pastor (or student) serving are walking ways of their own choosing, but are merely supplying a need which God permitted to exist.⁸⁴

The call for temporary assistance occurs in various forms in our midst. If a pastor, as a result of illness for a time is totally incapacitated for the duties of his office or if, as a result of physical weakness or because of being overburdened with work, for instance, by taking over the District Presidency, he is not in a position to perform all the work connected with his office, the congregation calls an assistant for the pastorate with the express condition that the call is to have only temporary validity, that is, only as long as sickness or physical weakness or overburdening with work makes such help necessary. . . .The call for temporary help stays within the bounds of divine order and has nothing in common with the objectionable temporary call.⁸⁵

In the category of "temporary call" we do not include activities which a congregation requires for a limited time. The illness or the absence of a regular pastor, the vacancy of a congregation, the need of expert advice—such and similar situations justify a congregation to request limited services of another pastor.⁸⁶

That such special situations were generally recognized among other Lutherans in the United States is hinted at in the previously cited work by Gerberding:

(The Lord) may have had a special work to do where he is and it may now be done. And now the Lord may need him for a special work elsewhere. The great consideration is that he be called, and that he follow the Master's leading. Here we would only indicate that, as a servant of his Lord, the pastor must ever be at that Master's beck and call, ready to abide or to go as He may direct.⁸⁷

Clearly, from the beginning of synodical history, there has been an insistence on upholding the confessional Lutheran understanding and practice for entrance to the Office of the Holy Ministry and for placing a man into that role in a congregation. The current, official

⁸⁴ Fritz, 46.

⁸⁵ Koehneke, 380–81. (Koehneke is citing Dr. Francis Pieper, *Lehre und Wehre*, 1898, 339–41.)

⁸⁶ Schwermann, 98.

⁸⁷ Gerberding, 103.

handbook of the Synod recognizes that the initial call by a congregation serves not only to summon a man to service to the Church at large, to his place in the ministerium, but also to a specific place where that service is to take place until God indicates differently through the Church.⁸⁸ This is also clarified and reasserted in recent doctrinal essays of the Synod.⁸⁹ God's call to service in the Church is a lifelong vocation. Reflecting apostolic practice, God's call is embodied in the elements from ancient Church practice: election, call, examination, and ordination. No one of these elements of itself makes the role divine; but taken together, as a process, faith trusts the results as the will of the Lord.⁹⁰ The locatedness of that service may change. Although the Synod has adjusted its understanding of the call in the matter of auxiliary offices and synodical positions,⁹¹ the most fundamental role—pastor of a congregation—remains unaltered.⁹²

Determining where and for how long any pastor should offer particular service to the

⁸⁸ *To the Ends of the Earth: 1998 Handbook, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1998), 23–25.

⁸⁹ Samuel H. Nafzger, "The Called and Ordained Servant of the Lord and the Priesthood of All Believers," Presentation to the Nebraska District Pastoral Conference, February 8, 1999, photocopied, 33–34.

⁹⁰ Nagel, "Divine Call," 181.

⁹¹ John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri until 1962: An Historical Analysis of the Doctrine of the Ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (privately printed, 1992) 24.

⁹² Roland D. Martinson catches effectively the pressures and expectations on Lutheran clergy in the twentieth-century and the manner in which our society's changes have altered classical patterns of ministry. Nevertheless, he brings the reader back to the foundations for the practice and authority of the Office of the Holy Ministry in a Lutheran congregation. (Roland D. Martinson, "The Pastoral Ministry," in *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, ed. Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress 1990), 181–94.

Lord and the Church is not bound by rules in the Synod's writings. Walther's essays address the concerns of the Church at large, encouraging the local congregation to bear in mind the needs of their fellow Christians.⁹³ The published letters of Walther suggest some of the principles he employed in offering advice to individual pastors as they considered challenges to service in different congregations. Consistently we find these questions being raised: What are the needs of each congregation? What are the gifts and abilities of the pastor? Where would the kingdom of God, as best we can determine, best be served?

Since all gifts are given for the common good, a pastor will consider above everything else, therefore, if essentially he can use his gifts according to all human calculations, more profitably for Christ's kingdom in the congregation that is calling away than in the congregation where he is. Furthermore, since every congregation is a member of a larger body, he should give consideration not only for this member but at the same time for the entire body to which it in a lesser or greater degree belongs.⁹⁴

The same approach is consistently reflected in pastoral theologies and theological writings.

Fritz, for example, wrote already in 1932:

No church may therefore rightfully claim a pastor as its own exclusively during the entire period of his life if there are clear indications that a pastor, with the gifts which God has given him and developed in him in the course of time, can serve the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom much more at another charge. Whether, therefore, a pastor should accept a new charge depends not only upon the *greater* importance of that charge and the greater influence it exerts or might exert in the Church but also whether *a certain pastor* can use *his* gifts at *that* charge to *greater* advantage for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom.⁹⁵

Perhaps exemplary of the consideration of a call are the encouragements cited by Victor

⁹³ Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 1:72.

⁹⁴ Carl S. Meyer, ed. *Walther Speaks to the Church: Selected Letters of C. F. W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 50.

⁹⁵ Fritz, 52.

Albers:

When has a pastor made his optimum contribution in a given congregation? When has the purpose for which he accepted his call been achieved? When can he feel that his mission has been completed? When are "years of service" a critical factor? When is the "stage of development" in the *congregation* the vital factor? When is the "stage of development" in the *pastor* the key factor? It is obvious that there are many questions to which the best answers are beyond the scope of a brief manual such as this. Much research could possibly be required to find objective answers to these questions and to many others. All the more reason for our dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶

From the early history of the Synod, Walther especially advised and encouraged that both pastors and congregations facing such decisions consult with those responsible for oversight of congregational concerns, that is, district officials and area pastors. That process of consultation guards against the whims of pastors and the self-centered focus of individual congregations. He underscores the special responsibility district presidents have for entire groups of congregations with the question constantly lurking in the background, "What best serves the kingdom of God?"⁹⁷

These synodical leaders were outlining principles to be observed when the "locatedness" of the pastor's service should or could change. This advice regarding a change of position was given even though the assumption in 1875, when rejecting "temporary calls," was that a pastor served in a position until death.⁹⁸ The obvious implication is that a change

⁹⁶ Victor G. Albers, "When a Pastor Receives a Call," in *Calls and Vacancies*, ed. by Oscar H. Reinboth, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 18.

⁹⁷ Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 1:71; Albers, *Calls*, 14; Kenneth Fischer, "The Circuit Counselor Handling Vacancies," published procedures secured from the Missouri District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, privately printed, September 12–13, 1994, photocopied, 1.

⁹⁸ *Verhandlungen, 1875*, 25. (Zeitweiliger Beruf widerspricht ferner auch dem, daß ein Prediger in seiner Gemeinde treu sein soll bis in den Tod.)

of place, based on the call of a congregation, under the advice of the church—at-large, with the consideration of where talents could be used best, was not considered a "temporary call" by the synodical fathers. And there is no reference to the length of duration of stay. Moreover, the synodical fathers observed the disarray in the American church scene (and their own history in Perry County) and criticized unseemly attitudes and actions by both laity and clergy in the "temporary call" situations. Eckhardt summarizes the inherent dangers to have been the risk of a lack of faithfulness by the pastor, a lack of warmth shown to the congregation by the pastor, and the power of a congregation merely and easily to dismiss a pastor.⁹⁹

Perhaps the observations of two authors capture the LCMS at its best in history and possibility with regard to the call to the office of the ministry. First, in the summary evaluation of the development of polity in the LCMS, Munding writes:

Walther. . . accepted principles of church government which his lay opponents had gathered from the writings of Luther. To these he added from Luther certain provisions which safeguarded the dignity of the ministerial office: his transfer theory, the doctrine of the divinity of the call, the absolute authority of the Word of God, and *permanence of tenure*. (emphasis added)¹⁰⁰

The power and authority given to the laymen, on the other hand, was not permitted in any way to undermine or affect adversely the authority and dignity of the holy ministry. The principle of pastoral leadership was honored. The provisions of congregational and synodical polity not only made effective leadership on the part of the pastor possible, but probable.¹⁰¹

And secondly, Robert Kolb, assessing Luther's transformation of the understanding of the ministry, observes:

⁹⁹ Eckhardt, "*Beruf*," 368.

¹⁰⁰ Munding, *Government*, 213.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions of Luther's understanding of the ministry have often been framed by questions about power in the church¹⁰² which Luther was not answering. . . . That question indeed commanded the attention of the medieval church although the context for posing it changed with the coming of the modern era. Luther conceived of the entire relationship between clergy and laity differently. He ignored questions related to dominance and dictation by one or the other, questions of who controlled whom and what in the church. Instead, he pursued the definition of the power to serve, both God and one another, within the assembly of God's people, through God's Word.¹⁰³

Or, again:

Hermann Sasse caught the spirit of the Wittenbergers when he observed that "the church is correctly ordered in the sense of Lutheran teaching when it is so constituted as to offer the office of the ministry a maximum of possibilities to accomplish its service of the proclamation of the pure gospel and of the proper administration of the sacraments in the name and according to the commission of the Lord of the church and when it preserves a maximum of possibilities for the congregation which Jesus Christ himself has called through the Word and the sacraments to live its life in the world and to carry out its service for human creatures."¹⁰⁴

Would Walther concur? We can only surmise. Because of the disaster of 1839, it was necessary to find again a solid foundation for the ministry in the Saxon colony in Perry County, and to continue to strengthen that foundation in the ensuing decades for the Synod. Walther contended not merely for the prestige for pastors found in the nomenclature "called," but for the potency of the entire exercise, "called to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments."¹⁰⁵ His motivation and the motivation for the Synod, historically and presently, is

¹⁰² It is appropriately observed that as soon as our discussions turn to questions of power, we have entered the domain of the law and have lost the Gospel core and assurance—Nagel and Bretscher . . . and most likely Luther also.

¹⁰³ Kolb in Nichols, 51.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 61

¹⁰⁵ C .F. W. Walther, "The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Independent of the State," *Walther and the Church*, ed. Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau and Th.

the salvation of the lives of people, the strengthening of congregations. Pastors are called to be the Lord's tools to foster that. Walther's criterion for deciding responses to a call to another congregation evidences the concern for the overall benefit of the kingdom.

With that in mind, would he and his contemporaries equate the calling of a particular pastor from "difficult situation" to "difficult situation" with the practice of "temporary call" they so assailed? Not likely. He specifically recognized such circumstances in the history of the Lutheran Church as different from the "temporary call." He would probably insist on the close supervision of it by those responsible for the broader context of the Church. Furthermore, his criticisms of the "temporary call" were aimed at the self-satisfactions and disaffections of congregations and pastors. Would he recognize the individual abilities of particular pastors as capable of assisting congregations in distress to find an even keel again? Decidedly, yes, for he himself had faced such a situation. Additionally, he encouraged individual pastors to consider their particular gifts and abilities in the consideration of calls. At the same time, he would maintain that no effective work of ministry is ever based on or the result of mere human ability; rather it is the result of the Word and promises of God.

Would he recognize the validity of calling a particular pastor from "difficult situation" to "difficult situation"? That is less likely. Walther asserted in his era an observation regularly repeated, "Frequent leaving of congregations and acceptance of others is a great hindrance to establishing congregations in a Christian ethos."¹⁰⁶ The historical precedents from the Reformation era, especially in the case of John Bugenhagen, specified a "leave of absence"

Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia, 1938), 97–98.

¹⁰⁶ Meyer, *Walther Speaks*, 50; Reinboth, *Calls*, 18.

from an otherwise permanently tenured call to a congregation. That emphasis on life-calling, stability and dignity of the office would arrest his attention.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, no matter what liberties the synod has taken in the calling of professors, missionaries, chaplains, and district or synodical officials, Walther would likely be far more guarded about calling a pastor to an artificially created role in a district from which he would then be available for assignment in a congregation. He would be suspicious of the potential for the tyranny of the Synod over the congregation. He would most likely strongly approve of that principle in the practice of intentional interim ministry that the interim pastor is assumed not to be on the congregation's ensuing call list, for that, indeed, would turn the interim circumstance into a trial pastorate, truly a "temporary call."

¹⁰⁷ Perhaps that could serve as a model for districts of the LCMS that believe intentional interim ministry is a valid and important tool of pastoral ministry to have available, namely, that those trained and set aside for such service are regularly called to serve on the staff of larger congregations in the district over against such time as a sister congregation may, by a secondary call, request their special assistance.

CHAPTER 4

CURRENT VACANCY ARRANGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the history and practices of the Synod, pastoral vacancies in congregations have always been served under a contract arrangement known as "vacancy pastor" or supply pastor.¹ Typically, a neighboring pastor's assistance is secured for basic pastoral care. In most instances, such work is accomplished by the called pastor of another congregation, sometimes by a retired pastor, a professor, or a seminary student under a pastor's supervision. In 1990, the Synod produced a set of materials to guide the circuit counselor in his responsibilities. This manual includes principles to be followed in assisting a congregation in selecting the vacancy pastor. The verb used in this official document of the Synod to describe the action that creates the relationship between the vacancy pastor and the congregation is "appoint."² The authorization to serve as a pastor has been premised on the call the pastor has to his congregation or teaching office. (Because retired pastors are not actively called to such an office, their role as vacancy pastor has come under question recently in the Synod. Some are convinced that retired pastors serving "permanent vacancies" should receive a call from that congregation rather than live under merely agreed upon terms.) An examination of

¹ John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1931, reprint edition. Springfield: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1963), 40; Albert H. Schwermann, "The Doctrine of the Call," in *The Pastor at Work*, William H. Eifert, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 98; "Circuit Counselors Manual: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1990), 39–40.

² Circuit Counselors Manual, 39.

representative materials used by district presidents currently to assist circuit counselors with the process of selecting and securing a vacancy pastor indicates the recommended synodical procedure to be consistent among the districts. Some district materials, in fact, are photocopies of the material made available at the level of the Synod.³

These contractual arrangements have never been considered to be a call in the formal sense; yet, at some level, they surely must respond to that definition.⁴ If they do not, then the so-called vacancy pastor has no authority for the ministry of Word and sacrament in the congregation. And, if they are considered to be of the nature of a secondary call, perhaps, then they are surely of a temporary nature.⁵ If the vacancy pastor is serving another congregation based on the call he has to his own congregation, then such a practice runs counter to the historic emphasis among the Reformers and orthodox fathers that a man must be called to a specific place. He is not, by his call, authorized to serve wherever he wishes.⁶ The point of this line of reasoning is to suggest that the call to a congregation for specific, remedial

³ "Calls and Vacancies" (Aurora, Col.: Rocky Mountain District, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, n.d); "Indiana District Circuit Counselors Manual" (Fort Wayne: Indiana District, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, n.d); "The North Dakota District Vacancy Manual" (Fargo, N. Dak.: North Dakota District, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, n.d.); "The Vacancy Process" (St. Louis: Missouri District, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1999). Materials secured from the South Wisconsin District are photocopy reproductions from the synodical material. Other districts indicate no published materials, but that the synodical procedures as outlined in the manual are followed.

⁴ Linsenmann, "Lehrverhandlungen," 14.

⁵ J. H. C. Fritz cuts through this question by underscoring that the pastor and congregation are responding to a situation that God has permitted to exist. They are not walking the way of their own choosing. Fritz, 41.

⁶ Gerberding, 96.

assistance is not out of character in the Synod's current practice. It has not been formally addressed in this manner.

There are additional reasons to consider the validity of calling pastors to transitional situations. Since a vacancy pastor is serving also in another congregation, his work in the second congregation is necessarily limited in scope. Moreover, he doesn't have the authority to address specific issues of grief, conflict, or indiscretion unless he is specifically requested to do so by the congregation.⁷ Often these issues are buried or ignored out of the mistaken notion that once the pastor has left, then tension may decrease, and the problem has gone away. Even if he is approached to assist with a problem, he is serving in an advisory way, as he does not have the full authority in that congregation, to serve as their pastor. Normally, however, the agreed upon work of ministry for a vacancy pastor is to maintain the preaching and teaching of the Word and visit the sick and infirm.⁸

Larger concerns that may face a congregation during a vacancy, e.g., the residual impact of conflict, grief from loss of the pastor, or the devastating impact of moral indiscretion by the pastor, are typically left to a circuit counselor or a busy district president. Neither the circuit counselor nor the district president are in a position to be within the daily flow of the congregation; nor are they able to be involved in the regular preaching, teaching, confession, and counseling that the congregation can benefit from in these circumstances. Nevertheless, synodical materials advising the circuit counselor recognize the great difficulty of congregational conflict. In the case of resolving conflict, nearly one-sixth of the circuit

⁷ Fritz, 41.

⁸ Ibid.

counselor's manual is devoted to a brief overview of the levels of conflict that can arise in a congregation.⁹ Of interesting note is the remark made in the last two, the most intensive levels of conflict that can arise. The material says about "Level IV":

At this level the congregation must ask the District President to recommend a highly trained conflict consultant. He must be someone who has absolutely no connection with the status of career advancement of any of the parties. He must be perceived as completely neutral with no ax to grind.¹⁰

About "Level V" conflict, the manual observes:

Once again, an outside consultant can help facilitate an orderly disillusionment, where the damages are kept to a minimum, legal and ecclesiastical rights are spelled out, conditions for the involuntary termination or expulsion are mediated. . . . Referral is the order of the day.¹¹

A circuit counselor is often assisted in these situations by trained pastors in the district.

Unfortunately, many of these are also serving their own congregations and can be present only on a limited or short-term basis. The availability of trained pastors skilled in addressing conflict resolution, especially in the context of the regular Word and sacrament life of the congregation could prove to be an enormous benefit.

The challenges facing a circuit counselor assisting a congregation through a vacancy in their pastorate can be even more difficult than conflict. Anytime a pastor leaves, a congregation experiences grief. It is the way of human beings. That is experienced at the time of a normal departure of a pastor, or the retirement of a faithful servant. This is more intense when a congregation faces the grief over the death of pastor who has died in office. Such

⁹ Ibid., 75–96.

¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹¹ Ibid., 93.

times have been observed to have long-term residual impact in a congregation if not faced honestly and openly. The circuit counselor's manual does encourage the counselor in his care for the family of a deceased pastor. No mention is made of the grief in the congregation.

Moral indiscretion by a pastor can leave an even deeper and more difficult wound in a congregation that affects it for a long time if unaddressed.¹² It is suggested that the intensive pastoral care necessary to overcome this pain is beyond the time, energies, training, and experience of most vacancy pastors.¹³ In fact, neither of these more troublesome issues are even addressed by the Synod's circuit counselor manual.

If The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod makes use of intentional interim pastors for these and other times of transition in congregations, some recommendations might be considered in order to keep the practice consistent with its doctrine of the call. These would include the following:

1. When a man serves as an intentional interim pastor, he should be called directly and specifically by the congregation. This recognizes that "the call is 'valid' when issued by those whom God has given the right to call."¹⁴ This raises concerns about the "in-between times" for a pastor called from situation to situation; however, the call issued by the congregation, contrasted, for example, to an intentional interim pastor being called by his district, is far more

¹² Cf. chapter 1, p. 7

¹³ Mark Laaser, "Long-Term Healing," in *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, ed., Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser (Collegeville, Minn.: Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute in association with The Alban Institute, 1995), 235–50.

¹⁴ Fritz, 34.

in concert with the Synod's doctrine. Perhaps the historic Wittenberg example might be considered in which a large congregation in the district committed to this act of service might extend a call to such a pastor as an adjunct to its regular pastoral staff.

2. It is recommended that intentional interim pastors be specifically chosen, trained, and rostered as such. This avoids confusion as to gifts and responsibilities. It also avoids the issue of a man seeking his own call. That easily sets up difficulties for a call being legitimate; for it is always open to "wire-pulling."

3. In line with the previous, it is recommended that intentional interim pastors be under the direct supervision of the district president or his appointee and that they be rostered in the district where they serve. Depending on need and resources, each district could have available a list of men for this service. This also makes it possible for the district president, as a called representative of the Church, to assure that the process of call be regular and legitimate. Again, such would avoid "wire-pulling" and the same circumstances the synodical fathers saw in the situation of licensing.

4. It is strongly recommended that the principle from intentional interim pastor training be observed, that the intentional interim pastor is not to be on the candidate list for the next call. This would truly turn his work into a "trial pastorate," a true temporary call. This is not new to the Synod. The current synodical manual for vacancy matters strongly urges that the vacancy pastor not be on the call list.

5. The final recommendation is that the Synod make consistent distinctions between a "vacancy pastor" and an "intentional interim pastor." In recent years, as the matter of interim has drawn attention, the term "interim" has been applied to simple vacancy service. This

clouds the distinctive goal of service in a call to serve as an intentional interim pastor.



July 30, 1998

The Rev. Richard J. Brueschoff
Director for Leadership Support
Division for Ministry, ELCA
8765 West Higgins Road
Chicago, IL 60631-4195

Dear Rev. Brueschoff,

The National Association of Lutheran Interim Pastors is an organization committed to helping Lutheran judicatories respond to the special needs of congregations in transition. At our 1998 Annual meeting we were pleased to welcome you in your new position at the Division, and to receive your report and contributions to our discussion. NALIP is a growing organization, with a membership of more than 180 pastors.

Many issues of continuing concern were discussed at our June meeting, and it was agreed to summarize the most urgent and forward them to you for referral to our ELCA bishops at their annual Conference in the fall. The following areas elicited the most discussion and concern:

1. Roster status for pastors on the active rolls.

Currently, some interim pastors are called to serve congregations in Word and Sacrament ministry and some are called to serve as synod staff and/or synod interim coordinator. In addition, some are serving in interim ministry positions only with contracts while their roster status is "On Leave From Call." For retired pastors, this presents no problem, but for pastors on the active rolls this lack of status has both operational and psychological implications. Issues of inter-synodical mobility also need to be addressed. Currently there is a variety of informal practices regarding the status of pastors serving in interim situations outside their rostering synod.

2. Clear and consistent definitions of interim ministry churchwide.

Terminology is needed to differentiate various types of short-term pastoral service, such as a) oversight by an area pastor during a vacancy; b) a full- or part-time "maintenance ministry" during self-study and the call process; and c) ministry with specific tasks and goals to be accomplished during the interim period (generally termed "intentional" interim). Without such clarity, congregations are confused about just what to expect when they are assigned an "interim pastor."

3. Structures for accreditation and accountability of interim pastors

In the absence of professional standards, synods' experience with interim pastors has been

inconsistent. Accreditation and accountability for pastors in intentional interim ministry would serve to deter unskilled and unhealthy pastors from seeking shelter in interim work. Other areas of specialized ministry such as chaplaincy do have such means of accountability

4 Compensation during "down time" for pastors who serve the church in Intentional Interim Ministry.

Pension and insurance coverage are essential in today's world. Income assistance during the gaps between congregational service would enable younger, active pastors to respond to this special type of service. The specific pastoral gifts, experience and education required by congregations in transition or turmoil are best fostered among pastors who feel called to intentional interim ministry and are willing to commit themselves to it, but few are able to handle extended, uncompensated down time. Discussions about the number of interim pastors needed in a synod would help to keep down time at a minimum.

5. A churchwide clearinghouse for Intentional Interim Pastor information.

A central--or even regional--location for information such as mobility, next date of availability, special skills or gifts, training, and references would be very helpful both for bishops seeking pastors to serve congregations with special needs, and for Intentional Interims wishing to make their availability known. While this has not been an issue in synods with ample trained pastors, or for pastors in heavily Lutheran areas, it has been difficult for some synods to connect with available skilled pastors willing to commute or relocate.

That the church itself is in transition at the end of this millennium is agreed by all who love her. In what is being called a post-modern and even a post-Christian era, congregations are challenged to find leadership to help get on track after a time of stress, prepare for the next mission to which God is calling them and do the work necessary to have a successful connection with their new pastoral leaders. As pastors who feel called to the "duty and delight" of such work, we trust that the Holy Spirit is present in this opportunity for healing and renewal of Lutheran congregations through intentional interim ministry.

The issues listed above summarize the discussions at the 1998 NALIP meeting at Wake Forest University June 23-24, and also reflect the thinking of the newly elected NALIP Governing Board. If we can be of further help in clarifying these or other interim issues, please let me know.

In service to Christ's church and on behalf of NALIP,

Roger W. Schwarze
Chair

cc: Rev. H. George Anderson, Presiding Bishop
Rev Lowell Almen, Secretary

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS

*October 1-7, 1998
Chicago, Illinois*

A. INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRY—SOME DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Interim pastoral ministry is a common need in every synod. Yet a variety of practices and understandings can be found in that regard.

Some questions related to interim pastoral ministry include:

1. May an interim pastor under a term call from one Synod Council be placed "on loan" to another synod for interim pastoral ministry?
 - a. The answer appears to be "maybe,"
 - (1) provided the original Letter of Call was not issued for a specific congregation in the synod originating the call, and
 - (2) provided the service is rendered under a general "term call" that is not "place specific," or under contract or agreement with the specific congregation.
 - b. There is a restriction. Only the Synod Council of the synod to which a congregation is related may issue a "place specific" Letter of Call within that synod.
 - (1) To give a theoretical example: The Northwestern Ohio Synod Council could not issue a "place-specific" Letter of Call to an interim pastor on the roster of the Northwestern Ohio Synod to serve in Mount Olive Lutheran Church in the Minneapolis Area Synod.
 - (2) The Northwestern Ohio Synod has no jurisdiction or authority related to a congregation of the Minneapolis Area Synod.
 - (3) Only the Minneapolis Area Synod could issue a Letter of Call to interim pastoral ministry in a congregation of the Minneapolis Area Synod.
 - (4) Upon the issuance of that Letter of Call, the ordained minister would be transferred onto the roster of the Minneapolis Area Synod if not previously rostered in that synod.
2. Do the constitutional references to "interim pastor" refer only to ordained ministers with specific training for interim pastoral ministry? No.
 - a. Section I.B. on "interim supply" and Section I.C. on "interim training" in the policy on interim pastoral ministry [below] spells out the distinction.
 - b. The term "interim pastor" is used generically for interim pastoral service.
 - (1) In a practical way, we may envision at least three types of interim pastors:
 - (a) An "intentional interim" served by a *specialty trained pastor* who has a goal of attending to conflict or to handling specific transitional issues in a congregation's life. Such service likely is needed following a long-tenured pastorate, a period of conflict, problems of misconduct, or other matters.
 - (b) A "maintenance interim" served by a pastor *with or without special training* to address transitional issues, while providing general pastoral leadership and care, assisting the congregation with preparation of its profile.

- (c) A "supply interim" served by an available part-time, full-time, or neighboring pastor on the active or retired roster who provides pulpit-and-altar supply and general pastoral care while members of the congregation attend to preparation of the congregation's profile and call process.
3. Should only pastors who have had intentional interim pastoral training be appointed to serve as interim pastors?
 - a. Not necessarily.
 - b. The applicable constitutional provisions require interim pastoral care but do not specify a particular pattern of preparation or appointment from a specialized cadre of clergy.
 4. Why do some ordained ministers providing interim pastoral service continue to be listed as "on leave from call" during that service?
 - a. Only service "under call" is recorded in the roster record.
 - b. Service rendered by "on leave" clergy but under contract is not recorded.
 - c. Wherever possible, I believe that a Letter of Call should be considered from the Synod Council. Such a call could be for either a "place-specific" interim pastoral ministry or a Letter of Call could be issued for a defined term on a "non-place-specific" basis.
 - d. Such a step would reflect appropriately our "table of sources of call" and would be in keeping with the Augsburg Confession (Article XIV): "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."
 - e. Retired ordained ministers serving in interim responsibilities, however, may not be placed under call. One cannot be both "retired" and "under call" at the same time. Interim service provided by a "retired" pastor always would be "under contract" or "agreement," and not "under call."
 5. Are term calls for interim pastoral ministry completely open ended? No.
 - a. The policy on interim pastoral ministry makes clear that such "non-place-specific" term calls may be for a duration of one to three years.
 - b. Such term calls are subject to annual review (see Section III.F. of policy on interim pastoral ministry [below]).
 6. May a term call be issued for service in a specific congregation of the synod and only for that period of service? Yes.
 - a. A term call may be made co-terminous with the end of the need for that service.
 - b. Further, a Letter of Call to interim pastoral ministry may be terminated by the Synod Council, as provided in churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.
 7. How is an interim pastor to obtain compensation and benefit coverage between assignments to interim pastoral settings? The individual must plan accordingly because no general fund exists for open-ended funding of interim pastors.
 8. May anyone serve as an interim pastor? Not necessarily.
 - a. This church currently does not have a standard accreditation process for interim pastors in the way in which one exists, for example, for hospital chaplains.
 - b. The constitutional provisions, however, related to interim pastoral ministry require the consent of the synodical bishop for such service.

- c. Interim service should not be treated as a way to "stay on the roster" in view of the "three-year limit."
 - d. Persons who have not served *at least three years* in a regular congregation call normally are not eligible for interim pastoral ministry.
9. Could a churchwide listing be developed of interim pastors, including such information as their potential for mobility or their particular skills for situations of special need? In my opinion, "No," unless or until a churchwide system of accreditation and accountability were developed. Perhaps such a system could be similar to that which exists for certification of chaplains. Some questions:
- a. Would such a churchwide accreditation process for trained interim pastors be helpful for synodical bishops?
 - b. If developed, what elements should be included in any churchwide accreditation process for trained interim pastors?
 - c. Would synodical bishops be interested in and willing to make recommendations in regard to those who should participate in interim training and accreditation?

For wise and necessary reasons, provision is made for the interim pastoral care of congregations between the service of regularly called pastors. Specifically, we read in the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

- *C9.06.** At a time of pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor shall be appointed by the bishop of the synod with the consent of this congregation or the Congregation Council.
- *C9.07.** During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties *in the congregation* [emphasis added] of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to a supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of the synod and this congregation or Congregation Council. The interim pastor and any ordained pastor providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor.

Similar language is found in the Constitution for Synods:

- S14.17.** During service to a congregation, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor. The interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim supply pastor with the consent of the bishop of this synod. The interim pastor and any ordained ministers who may assist shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor. Upon completion of service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop of this synod that the parochial records, for the period for which the interim pastor was responsible, are in order.

A careful review of these constitutional provisions reveals:

1. The possibility of interim pastoral service:
 - a. The term "interim pastor" applies both to:
 - (1) an ordained minister selected to fulfill such responsibilities on a full-time basis or a part-time basis, or to

- (2) a specially trained ordained minister for specialized service in interim situations.
 - b. Such service may be rendered
 - (1) By contract or agreement;
 - (2) Under a specific *call* (named place for specified period) *from the Synod Council* of the synod to which the specific congregation is related; or
 - (3) Under a “not-place-specific” *term call from a Synod Council* for interim pastoral ministry in various settings throughout the duration of the term call.
2. **Source of Call:** The *source of call* for interim pastoral ministry is always and only the *Synod Council* (churchwide continuing resolution 7.44.A96.b., sub-section 1.5.).
3. **The manner of selection and appointment (*C9.06.):**
 - a. “...an interim pastor shall be *appointed by the bishop* of the synod [to which the specific congregation is related]
 - b. “...with the *consent* of this congregation or the Congregation Council.”
4. **Scope of responsibilities (*C9.06. and S14.17.):**
 - a. “During the period of service, an interim pastor shall have the rights and duties *in the congregation* of a regularly called pastor....”
 - b. **Possibility of delegation:** An interim pastor “...may delegate the same [responsibilities] in part to a supply pastor....”
 - c. Such delegation requires approval: “...with the consent of the bishop of the synod and this congregation or Congregation Council.”
5. **Protection of the call process (*C9.06. and S14.17.):** “The interim pastor and any ordained pastor providing assistance shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor.”
6. **Care of records (S14.17):** “Upon completion of service, the interim pastor shall certify to the bishop of this synod that the parochial records, for the period for which the interim pastor was responsible, are in order.”

In November 1996, after recommendation by the Division for Ministry and review by the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council adopted the following policy related to interim ministry:

GUIDELINES RELATED TO INTERIM PASTORAL MINISTRY

Congregations periodically experience transitions in pastoral leadership. Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provide for the care of congregations during a time of pastoral vacancy through the appointment by the bishop of the synod of an ordained minister to provide pastoral care on an interim basis. An interim pastor is appointed by the synod bishop with the consent of the congregation or the Congregation Council (*C9.06. in the Constitution for Congregations). Pastoral care is then provided on a contract basis, either through appointment or a term Letter of Call.

The following policy statement describes the guidelines by which interim ministry is provided to congregations.

I. Congregations in Transition

- A. Because of the importance of the ministry of Word and sacrament, the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America seeks to ensure appropriate pastoral leadership for congregations during a time of pastoral vacancy. Interim ministry is provided by synods during the time of transition following the completion of service by the congregation's former pastor and prior to the calling of a new pastor. This also is provided for in a congregation served by a multiple staff when a congregation's senior pastor leaves, or when an associate pastor or other pastoral staff leaves. The interim period is thus a time in which pastoral care is provided a congregation by the synod as the congregation moves through a process of self-study and change toward new pastoral leadership.

- B. A congregation facing the normal range of congregational concerns related to a pastoral transition may be served by an interim pastor without formal training. The synodical bishop arranges for the congregation to receive Word and sacrament leadership during the period prior to the regular calling of a pastor through the appointment of an interim pastor.
 - 1. An appointed interim pastor assumes the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor and may delegate the same in part to an "interim supply pastor" with the consent of the synodical bishop (S14.17. in the Constitution for Synods).
 - 2. The interim pastor normally serves the congregation in a contracted and compensated arrangement.
- C. A congregation in a situation of significant concerns and stress related to a pastoral transition may benefit from the leadership of an experienced and trained interim pastor. Situations in which this is particularly appropriate include the transition following a long pastorate, a congregation facing new mission opportunities and/or a changed context for ministry, a transition following the resignation of a pastor related to disciplinary action by the synod, or a transition marked by significant discord or upheaval within a congregation.

II. Appointed or Called Interim Ministry

- A. An interim pastor may either be appointed by the synod bishop or may serve under a term call extended by the Synod Council (Bylaw 7.41.11.b. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*).
 - 1. Calls to interim ministry may not be extended by a congregation.
 - 2. A pastor serving either under appointment by the bishop or under a term letter of call normally serves the congregation in a contracted and compensated arrangement.
- B. Unless previously agreed to by the Synod Council, an interim pastor is not available for a regular call to the congregation served during this time of transition and shall refrain from exerting influence in the selection of a pastor (*C9.07. in the Constitution for Congregations).

III. Guidelines for Called Interim Pastoral Ministry

- A. A called interim pastor shall provide a minimum of a half-time ministry (at least twenty hours per week) to the congregation with commensurate compensation in accordance with synod guidelines, and consistent with the ELCA guidelines for shared-time calls.
 - 1. A call to interim ministry shall be primarily for the benefit of the congregation served, not for the status of the ordained minister.
 - 2. Such a call may either be a term call to a specific congregation, or a term call to interim ministry in the synod. The determination of this will be with the concurrence of the congregation being served.
- B. Prior to being eligible for a call to interim ministry, the pastor shall normally receive

- appropriate training for interim ministry. The Division for Ministry will review interim ministry training programs and serve as consultant to synods in evaluating such programs.
- C. Only pastors who have served in a regular called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years are eligible to serve in a called interim ministry.
 - D. The interim ministry agreement between the congregation and the called interim pastor will specify compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry. The Letter of Call issued by the Synod Council may include salary and benefit matters. Normally, however, matters of compensation and benefits are stipulated in the interim ministry agreement with the congregation.
 - E. In issuing a call to interim ministry, the synod assumes no responsibility for guaranteeing continuous employment, compensation, or benefits for the pastor under call (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.).
 - 1. Compensation and benefits are normally provided entirely by the congregation or ministry setting being served. Where possible, continuity of Board of Pensions health benefits will be advocated by the synod.
 - 2. It is explicitly understood that the synod is the calling body and not the employer of record at any time during the service of an interim pastor under call from the Synod Council.
 - F. Calls to interim service within a synod may be issued for a one to three-year term of service, with an annual review by the Synod Council or its designated committee.
 - 1. If a pastor under a term call to interim ministry has not served in a congregation during the preceding twelve months, however, the call may be terminated by the Synod Council.
 - 2. A term letter of call issued by the Synod Council may also be coterminous with the duration of service within the congregation served (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.).
 - 3. The term call may be terminated by action of the Synod Council.
 - 4. A pastor may resign a call to interim ministry at any time.
 - G. Initial issuance of a call to interim ministry by the Synod Council shall be upon the recommendation of the synodical bishop. The initial interim ministry agreement with a congregation may be reviewed by the bishop or synod staff prior to the acceptance of the contractual arrangement by the interim pastor.

IV. Guidelines for Appointed Interim Ministry

- A. An appointed interim pastor is authorized to provide Word and sacrament ministry to a congregation by the synodical bishop with the concurrence of the Congregational Council.
 - 1. The interim pastor assumes the rights and duties in the congregation of a regularly called pastor.
 - 2. The appointed interim pastor may delegate the same in part to an interim supply pastor with the consent of the synodical bishop (S14.17. in the Constitution for Synods).
- B. A retired pastor or pastor on leave from call who serves an interim ministry is recommended by the bishop and signs an interim ministry agreement with the congregation which provides for the compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry.
- C. Normally, only pastors who have previously served in a regular called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years will be eligible to serve in an appointed interim ministry.

Some points in the policy on interim ministry merit emphasis:

1. **Matters of compensation:**
 - a. As indicated in Section III.D.: "The interim ministry agreement between the congregation and the called interim pastor will specify compensation, benefits, and the specific goals and expectations related to the period of interim ministry...."
 - b. If the synod is the salary paying entity in an ongoing way, the Letter of Call issued by the Synod Council may include salary and benefit matters.
 - c. If compensation and benefits are provided by the congregation only for the period of service, such a commitment is stated in the agreement between the interim pastor and congregation. As indicated in the policy, "Normally..., matters of compensation and benefits are stipulated in the interim ministry agreement with the congregation."
 - d. Section III.E.1. of the policy on interim ministry indicates: "Compensation and benefits are normally provided entirely by the congregation or ministry setting being served. Where possible, continuity of Board of Pensions health benefits will be advocated by the synod."
2. **Clarity needed related to "employment" relationship:**
 - a. As indicated in Section III.E. of the policy on interim ministry: "In issuing a call to interim ministry, the synod assumes no responsibility for guaranteeing continuous employment, compensation, or benefits for the pastor under call (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.)."
 - b. Section III.E.2. of the policy statement declares: "It is explicitly understood that the synod is the calling body and not the employer of record at any time during the service of an interim pastor under call from the Synod Council."
3. **Letters of Call issued by the Synod Council for interim pastoral ministry are to be viewed as "term calls":**
 - a. As provided in Section III.F. of the policy on interim ministry: "Calls to interim service within a synod may be issued for a one to three-year term of service, with an annual review by the Synod Council or its designated committee."
 - b. **Duration of term call:**
 - (1) Section III.F.1.: "If a pastor under a term call to interim ministry has not served in a congregation during the preceding twelve months..., the call may be terminated by the Synod Council."
 - (2) Section III.F.2.: "A term letter of call issued by the Synod Council may also be coterminous with the duration of service within the congregation served (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.)."
 - c. The Synod Council has the authority to terminate a Letter of Call to interim ministry (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 7.43.).

NO CANDIDACY RATIONALE

Terry Foland

IBT Vol. 7, No. 5, Page 4

The Question: *Why is it not a good practice for interim pastors to be considered as a candidate for the "installed" pastor of the congregation? And how can we keep this from happening?*

The questions were raised by a middle judicatory executive and are representative of an issue faced by everyone who works with the selection processes of calling pastors. The executive who asked that the issue be addressed went on to write, "We desperately need . . . a rationale which is relevant to the average congregation, specifying why this is not a healthy practice." One other pertinent point was made by this executive, "It does not seem to matter whether or not interim ministers have received specialized education . . . they seem to be as vulnerable as those who have not received training."

My experience indicates that congregations care very little for policies that prohibit certain practices just because there are policies set by some governing body at some time. Congregational leaders will, however, be reasonable if certain practices do have clear rationale which makes some sense to them. Here are six rationale statements that can perhaps be useful to middle judicatory folk as they deal with this issue.

Rationale One: *Interim pastors can enable congregations to deal with their agenda better if they have no vested interest in their own long-range call to that congregation.*

The interim pastor needs to be free to be involved from a perspective or stance of "what is best for this congregation to engage in during the interim period." Interim pastors need to help congregational leaders identify key agenda needing to be addressed at this time. It is essentially impossible for an interim pastor to be objective when the question becomes, "what must I do to get the call here as the installed pastor?"

Rationale Two: *Trust that persons keep their word is essential in covenantal relationships; changing the "rules of the game" may foster distrust in the pastor and the congregational leaders who "changed the rules."*

When an interim pastor becomes a candidate for the open position it changes the conditions/agreements upon which the interim pastor was hired for a specific purpose. Usually there has been no general congregational involvement in a search process and no congregational vote or concurrence to the call issued by the governing board of the congregation for the interim pastor. Some people may feel betrayed, fooled, or taken advantage of, and distrust may then be part of the climate in which a new long-term relationship will begin.

Rationale Three: *Consideration of the interim pastor as a candidate will short change the search process.*

When a search/call/nominating committee decides to consider the interim pastor, it will probably short change the search process. The focus will likely be on the personality of the interim pastor rather than on an objective definition of what the congregation is wanting to be in the future and the appropriate skills, strengths and abilities needed in the next pastor. When the search/call/nominating committee decides to find a way to "keep the interim" they can no longer be objective in the crucial task they are performing on behalf of the congregation.

Rationale Four: *It is risky to call an interim pastor when there may be underlying opposition to that individual by persons in the congregation.*

The interim pastor may be liked by many, but usually there will be some persons who do not like the interim pastor for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the interim pastor has had to push, confront, challenge or strongly discourage certain behavior, actions or policies. This may have angered or alienated the interim pastor from some individuals or groups. The anger or hostility can usually be tolerated knowing the interim pastor will one day (not too far in the future) be leaving, but now if the interim pastor is called for a long-term position there will likely be strong opposition and undermining of the interim pastor's ability to be effective for the long haul.

Rationale Five: *It is best to keep clear the contract with the interim pastor as an interim position and not to "muck it up" with considerations of being a candidate for the open pulpit.*

Suppose the interim pastor is considered as a candidate and then is not chosen by the decisions making bodies during the process? It will likely make it extremely difficult for the interim pastor to continue as an effective interim pastor for that congregation. Feelings generated by the interim pastor and those who either supported or opposed him/her for the position cannot be easily discarded after a decision has been made.

Rationale Six: *The church needs to be fair to all possible candidates and protect the concept of what an intentional interim ministry program can provide for congregations.*

It is not fair to other persons who want to be considered for the open position. The interim pastor will have a decided advantage in the call process. If interim pastors become the called/installed pastors the trend will build up a distrust in the interim program of a conference/region/synod and do irreparable harm to the concept of intentional interim ministry.

Of course there are probably some exceptions where the interim pastor could indeed be the best possible candidate. However, the attitude that "we are an exception" is really a myth predicated on the false assumption that "there is only one person" who is right for us as our pastor now. There will always be many candidates who can serve that congregation. The search/call/nominating committee needs to be free to screen all

interested candidates without the undue, though often unintentional, influence of the interim pastor.

How do you respond to the original question?

In a free call system (which most readers operate in), I know of only one way, and that is to rely on the interim pastor to simply say, "No thank you, I'm not a possible candidate." It is a matter of ethics and trust. If the interim pastors do not believe in the six rationales, then those of us in middle judicatory positions will never "sell them" to congregations.

THE PRESSURE FOR PERMANENCE

Clark Hargus

(IBT, Volume II, No.3, Page 4)

The board Chairman came into my office and sat down. In less than an hour the board was to convene and consider the search committee's recommended candidate for permanent pastor.

"I was just talking to someone," he said, "who thought that if we approach you just right, you would consider becoming our permanent pastor. Just say the word," he continued, "and we will not consider this other candidate further."

In a similar incident involving a friend of mine, the board was in session and had concluded an interview with a pastoral candidate. As the candidate left the room so the board could discuss the call and vote, a member turned to the interim pastor: "Just nod your head and we will stop the process and hire you," he said.

Those of us who are in the professional interim ministry agree that we face our greatest problem when the interim is considered for or becomes the permanent pastor. It defeats our purpose, divides the congregation, and destroys our credibility with judicatory leaders and other pastors.

We are quick to point out all of the reasons why the interim should not be a candidate for the permanent job, but we fail to prepare the interim for the pressure he/she will face from members of the congregation.

The pressure often begins in the interview process. Someone will ask, "If this interim works out will you stay as our pastor?" As illustrated by the above stories, the temptation continues through the final hours and minutes of the interim ministry. We need to know more about, and be better prepared to face, the urging of members of the congregation to make the temporary arrangement permanent.

Reasons for the Pressure

Following are some reasons why members of the congregation tempt the interim pastor with the permanent position.

1. The competent interim pastor is a model of effectiveness, and the people begin to see values in the interim which they want continued. Good relationships are built and the interim congregation does not want to face the grief of breaking these ties.
2. There is less risk involved in keeping the interim pastor than in hiring someone unknown. Most churches have made mistakes in calling pastors, and they do not want to risk making another error. They may feel safe with the interim pastor and want to lessen the risk by keeping her or him.
3. It would be convenient and less expensive to keep the interim pastor. The search process is costly. It requires hard work. There are many meetings to attend and

decisions to be made. Travel for visits and interviews is expensive and time consuming. It is much less trouble to decide to keep the interim pastor.

4. The pressure is often intensified by a power struggle within the congregation. The "ins" are on the search committee and are not trusted by the "outs" who make the interim pastor their candidate. The interim pastor is the favorite candidate of people who are trying to have influence because it is easy to document his or her qualities. The search committee is pledged not to consider the interim pastor, so the setting is perfect for a real test of power and influence.

5. Interim ministry as a professional clergy choice is not understood by the laity. The professional interim pastor is relatively new in the church. Until the professional choice is understood, the people will think that one in interim work is looking for something permanent. Naturally they will think permanence is the preference and try to help by hiring the interim.

Ways of Dealing with the Pressure

Avoiding the problems created by the possibility of the interim pastor becoming permanent calls for the cooperation, understanding and good judgment of the interim pastor, the congregation's leaders, and the judicatory. Some suggestions for dealing with the pressure are as follows:

1. A covenant stating that the interim pastor will not be a candidate for the pastorate should be agreed to and signed by the interim pastor, the leaders of the congregation, and the judicatory officials. The temptation to break the covenant is lessened by the ethical question of breaking one's word by both the interim and the congregation. The covenant must be communicated to the total congregation as part of the contract. When asked to consider the pastorate, the interim pastor can reply, "I will not, I have given my word."

2. Communications during the interim period must be exact and clear. The agreement must be clearly shared with everyone, as noted above, and should be reported over and over as the interim period progresses. Interim pastors get in trouble and encourage those who would make her/him the next pastor by being evasive with answers. It's okay to say no. In fact, it is necessary for "no" to be clearly communicated as the answer.

3. The interim pastor must expect the pressure and be prepared emotionally for it. When the compliments begin, they must be interpreted as normal and not as exceptional evaluations of one's work. If the interim pastor is insecure and in need of affirmation, he/she may welcome the response and be tempted to stay where personal needs are met.

Clergy who are in transition and are working on personal agendas often find themselves in interim ministries for their own reasons. When there is uncertainty in our lives, we are more vulnerable to manipulation. Judicatory leaders must be extremely

cautious about placing transitional clergy in interim pastorates. The interim church is experiencing grief, uncertainty and change. If the interim is having the same feelings, unwise decisions are likely.

Interim pastors must expect the pressure that will most certainly be imposed. They must prepare mentally to avoid vanity in response to the compliments that accompany the requests to be the permanent pastor.

Conclusion

We are in the process of establishing professional credibility for interim ministries. The relative newness of this ministry as a separate clergy profession puts the responsibility for success of the career on those who have chosen it as a specialty. Interim pastors must lead in avoiding the major pitfall of being tempted by or accepting the pastorate.

If you are an effective interim pastor, you will hear . . .

- . . . that your preaching is outstanding
- . . . that you should not start something and leave without finishing
- . . . that you can get the salary you want if you will stay
- . . . that you do not like the people if you refuse the pastorate
- . . . that no pastor has been able to do what you have done
- . . . that the church will decline when you leave
- . . . that the attitude of the judicatory is unimportant
- . . . that together you and the church have a great future

The response made to these pressures will deeply affect the future of the interim pastor, the congregation, and the witness of the church in that place.

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