

7-1-1937

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W. E. Hohenstein

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Recommended Citation

Hohenstein, W. E. (1937) "The Pastor and Intracongregational Organizations," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 8 , Article 54.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol8/iss1/54>

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Concordia

Theological Monthly

Vol. VIII

JULY, 1937

No. 7

The Pastor and Intracongregational Organizations

Little has been written on the history of intracongregational societies, except with reference to young people's societies. The ladies' aid is the oldest society within the congregations of our synodical organization. Then follows the young people's society (or societies) and, more recently, the men's club. Some congregations with parish-schools have a parent-teachers' organization and in connection with it a preschool mothers' circle. To the parent-teachers' organization any communicant member of the congregation may belong; but generally only the parents who have children in the parish-school take out membership in this organization. The membership of the preschool mothers' circle is limited to the mothers in the congregation who have children of preschool age or such as are in the first or second grade of the school. Not many congregations with parish-schools have organized these two latter societies. Still fewer congregations have an alumni association, composed of graduates of the parish-school. There are congregations within our Synod who have also boy-scout troops.

The present essay is to deal not with the history of intracongregational societies nor with their work in general, but is to give some thought to the pastor and to intracongregational organizations.

The pastor ought never to forget, nor ought he to permit the societies within the congregation to lose sight of the fact, that the congregation is a divinely ordained institution. It is God's will that those of the same faith living in the community gather together for public worship and the administration of the Sacraments. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews admonishes the Christians: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is," Heb. 10, 25. "The Christian is to maintain all possible worshiping union with the brethren of the faith, in the dawning light of the promised return of the now enthroned High Priest."

(H. C. G. Moule, *Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews.*) In praise of the congregation at Jerusalem Luke mentions the fact that the Christians there "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers," Acts 2, 42. In so doing, they were pleasing God and doing their God-given duty as Christians. The Christians are urged to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper with their brethren of the faith, not only for the strengthening of their faith and for their increase in Christian love, but also as a public testimony of the communion of faith, 1 Cor. 10, 17; 11, 17—21. 33. The Christians are *duty-bound*, through the insistent command of God's Word, to practise Christian fellowship for the building up and edification of the body of Christ; to "teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," Col. 3, 16; to incite one another to faith and good works, Heb. 10, 24; to use their several gifts for the general good of the congregation, Eph. 4, 15. 16. The erring brother is to be admonished not only by his fellow-Christians, but by the *church*, and as the context shows, this means the *local congregation*, Matt. 18, 17. According to God's will there is to be a local congregation for the upbuilding of the spiritual life of the Christians through Word and Sacrament, for brotherly encouragement and admonition, for the practise of Christian church discipline, and for the exercise of Christian charity.

When new members were added to the congregation at Jerusalem through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, we are told that the Lord added to the church at Jerusalem daily such as should be saved, Acts 2, 47 b.

We have, of course, also the example of the apostles for the founding of Christian congregations, and certainly the apostles did this in keeping with God's will and as an example for future generations to follow. As one reads the New Testament, one cannot escape the conviction that the New Testament regards it as *self-evident* that Christian faith and love and the desire of Christian fellowship will urge the Christians to seek Christian communion and spiritual strengthening by uniting with those of the same faith in the community in the holy fellowship of the Word and Sacraments, in prayer and mutual encouragement, and in the building and extension of the kingdom of God. The Christians in all ages of New Testament history showed their desire for spiritual communion and fellowship by founding Christian congregations.

As congregations exist according to God's will, thus the ministry of the Word (*Pfarramt*) exists according to God's will. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are *God's gift to the Church* for the edification of the body of Christ, Eph. 4, 11,

and God has given specific instructions regarding the qualifications of bishops and elders, 1 Tim. 3, 2—7; Titus 1, 6 ff. Paul makes it the duty of Timothy to care for the preservation of the ministry. "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also," 2 Tim. 2, 2. The elders of the congregation at Ephesus were told by Paul that the *Holy Ghost* had made them overseers of the congregation, Acts 20, 28.

Although the ministry of the Word is established according to Christ's will, it is left to the wisdom of the congregation, on the basis of its individual needs, to confer all the duties and functions of the office upon one person or to establish offices to assist the pastor by properly qualified men and women and to assign to them specific duties and work, Eph. 4, 11; 1 Tim. 5, 17. The office of the ministry is a divine institution, but the organization of auxiliary offices in the congregation is left to the wisdom of the congregation. When the circumstances demanded it, the congregation at Jerusalem elected deacons for the discharge of the specific duty of caring for the poor in its midst, thereby relieving the apostles, Acts 6, 1. See also "The Organization of the Church" in Foakes-Jackson's *The History of the Christian Church*, p. 209 ff. See also Walther, *Brosamen*, p. 349 ff.

The assembly, or congregation, of Christians who have united for the purpose of having the Word of God preached and the Sacraments administered to them by a pastor or pastors whom the congregation has called exists by divine right. The pastor or pastors of the congregation by the call of the congregation are the shepherds and overseers of the flock and through the call of the congregation are divinely charged with the care of the souls within the congregation.

But how the congregation itself is to be organized, which officers it is to have and which organizations are to be allowed to exist in its midst, is left to time and circumstances and to the wisdom of the congregation.

Important practical conclusions must be drawn from this doctrinal basis.

The congregation is the only divinely ordained institution. Therefore the formation of organizations within the congregation cannot be made a matter of conscience to the pastor and the congregation. A pastor and a congregation may well take care of the spiritual welfare of the members without the formation of *separate organizations*. The mere existence of many intracongregational organizations does not in itself indicate spiritual progress, nor is it a guarantee of spiritual growth and of a high degree of spiritual activity and advancement of the kingdom of God. When there

were no men's clubs, the congregational meeting of the voters was used for doctrinal discussion and the furtherance of Christian understanding and zeal for the Lord's work, and in the early history of our Synod these meetings were well attended by the voting members. At that time there was also a more general and frequent interchange of visits of the members, especially also the youth, in their respective homes, and at such visits doctrinal discussions and consideration of the welfare of the congregation and the Church at large were not anomalies. One has reason to believe that also the pastoral care and cure of souls was practised to a larger extent, and that private reading of the Bible and family worship were more generally engaged in, than at present. The influence of the home in those days of the simple life was greater than today, and the need of intracongregational societies was not apparent.

We must guard against overestimating intracongregational societies as a boon for the church and a sign of progress, and we must refrain from loveless criticism of the congregations of the past who did not maintain many intracongregational societies and of the congregations of the present day who sincerely endeavor to take care of the spiritual needs of young and old without resorting to the formation of *organizations* for all groups and ages. But though the formation of intracongregational organizations cannot be made a matter of conscience, the *proper spiritual care* of all age groups certainly is a matter of conscience for pastor and congregation. The formation of intracongregational organizations is an adiaphoron, but the proper spiritual care of the souls of the congregation certainly is not.

The congregation is the only divinely ordained institution. All intracongregational societies are of human origin. Certainly the congregation, in the exercise of its Christian liberty and prompted by Christian wisdom, has the right to organize societies within its midst if it believes that circumstances make a new organization expedient and that through such an organization the best interests and true aims of the congregation are not hindered, but *organizationally* better served. For reasons which may well prompt a congregation to do organized young people's work see *Walther League Manual*, pp. 5. 6.

Before an organization can be formed within the congregation, the congregation itself, through the male membership, to which, according to the Lord's own arrangement, 1 Tim. 2, 11. 12; 1 Cor. 14, 34. 35, has been entrusted the rule in the congregation, must give its permission. This is to be done not carelessly, but after due consideration and upon the conviction that the organization serves a real need and will constitute a blessing. The mere fact that organizations within the congregation may present a danger (ec-

clesiola in ecclesia) is not in itself sufficient reason to deny the permission, if ways and means can be devised which make it reasonably sure that with God's blessing the danger can be avoided.

As the congregation must give permission for the organization of any society within its midst, the *congregation* remains responsible for the work and activities of these organizations and has the right and duty of exercising proper control over these organizations. "The congregation is the real seat of authority, in so far as its own total life and work are concerned. To it therefore belongs ultimate control—not to the pastor, not to any other person, not to any group within it or outside it. There is no power that can rightfully take from the congregation itself its right or its responsibility to control its own affairs, all of them. . . . Accordingly, the plan of administration must, if it is to be true to Lutheran church polity, give to the congregation final administrative control of everything in its life." (*Our Congregation and Its Work*, by Paul E. Keyser.) It is therefore wholly proper that the congregation ask for reports on the work and activities of the intracongregational societies and that it delegate to some one or some committee (pastor and church board) the control and guidance of the intracongregational organizations.

It may be well for us as pastors to ask ourselves whether there is any real *unity* in the administration of the work of the congregation as a whole, whether, for all practical purposes, the intraorganizations are independent organizations or really under the direct administration of the congregation.

In most congregations the church board, or church council, or vestry—is the administrative, or executive, body charged by the congregation with supervision of all the work in the congregation. In some instances the church council is composed of the elders and trustees and the members of the board of education, in other instances only of the pastor, the elders, and the trustees. But also in the latter case the vestry and the board of Christian education, which supervises the work of the day-school and Sunday-school, naturally hold periodic meetings for mutual consultation and discussion regarding the welfare of child education. But apart from the supervision and guidance which the pastor gives, assisted in many instances by the parish-school teachers, which method of guidance and supervision and control does the congregation employ through the church council for the intracongregational societies?

"Naturally, in most situations, this total administration is too large a task for the church council and the pastor to handle effectively alone. Some further administrative provision is usually

necessary. This may be of various kinds. For example, to mention but a few possibilities, the council may work through a staff of paid directors, or through committees, or through a cabinet composed of all the officers of the church and of its various organizations, or through a workers' conference, which includes every worker in the congregation, or through any combination of these. These assisting bodies, whatever they may be, may be selected in a number of ways: by the congregation, by the council, by the organizations, by each of these — congregation, council, organizations — selecting a number of representatives, and so on. The subject is not what kind of assisting administrative body there shall be nor how this body can best be selected, but that some such body is very necessary if the administration of the congregation is to reach every nook and corner of the church's life with helpfulness, guidance, and control."

It goes without saying that the control which the congregation exercises through the church board and assisting committees over the intracongregational societies is not to be autocratic and domineering, but thoroughly democratic, in keeping with the fundamental nature of the Christian Church.

The plan of administration should make provision for consultation and conference with the officers of the societies. The committees which have charge of the guidance of the intracongregational societies together with the church council ought to have a few meetings a year with the officers of the societies, separately or together, for mutual discussion and for working out a *unified program of work*.

This leads us to a discussion of the *program* of intracongregational societies.

Since the congregation is the only divinely ordained institution in the congregation, it must appear self-evident that the program of intracongregational societies must be in harmony with the program of the congregation and that the only reason for the existence of such societies must be the purpose of helping the congregation effectively to reach its God-given aims and carry on its God-appointed work. There must be *unity of aim and work*.

The aim of the congregation is the furtherance of its members in faith and good works and the winning of further souls. To be helpful to the congregation in the realization of its aims the intracongregational societies, if they are worthy of existence, must make provision for an educational program and a program of church-work and service. The complete program of the society includes also worship and fellowship. Each meeting of the society ought to be opened with a brief devotion, consisting of the singing of a hymn, a Scripture-reading, and prayer. It is not necessary that

the pastor always lead these devotions, but for the development of leadership it may be well to have members of the society appointed to lead these devotions. The educational program may include the following: Bible-study, doctrinal essays, topics dealing with the work of the Church in general and missions in particular. The *Walther League Manual* lists the following under its program of Christian Knowledge: topic studies (the world, the Church, the local congregation, personal life), debates, open forums, lectures, Bible-studies, lectures on the Bible, illustrated lectures, mission-studies, methods of soul-winning, mission-plays, etc. (See *Walther League Manual*, pp. 131—222.) Under the title of Christian Service we find the following: missionary endeavor, soul-winning, canvassing, hospitality, soul-keeping, travelers, publicity, road markers, window displays, newspapers, public libraries, division of welfare, cheer, social service, poor relief, unemployment relief, Wheat Ridge promotion, etc. (See *Walther League Manual*, pp. 227—285.)

When we speak of *fellowship*, let us not forget that the Christians practise the holiest type of fellowship when they join in prayer, in meditation upon God's Word, and in joint endeavors for the promotion of the kingdom of God. The recreational fellowship, if it is kept on the high plane prescribed by Christian principles, is indeed wholesome and has a place on the program of the societies, but dare never become the chief, much less the only, reason for the existence of these organizations. "It is always better to begin . . . with small numbers rather than with low ideals."

In order that the whole program of the intracongregational societies be *integrated and correlated with the program of the congregation* and that the program of all groups form a balanced unity, it is necessary that the church board at the end of the year meet with the officers of the societies to work out a unified program of education and Christian service. If, for instance, the congregation wishes to center its work for the year upon the introduction of the family altar into the homes of the congregation, this aim of the congregation ought to find a prominent place in the educational program of the societies, and the societies ought to be willing to cooperate with their resources of money and members to help the congregation reach its aim. If each society is allowed to work independently, there will be much overlapping and a lack of striving to reach a common goal.

The congregation is a divine institution. This truth the pastor must keep vividly in mind and not permit the members of his congregation to lose sight of this fact. The congregation must remain *first* in the thought and interest of the members of the societies within the congregation. The societies and their work dare never overshadow in importance the work of the congregation as

such. Membership in an intracongregational society must not be regarded as a substitute for church-membership. The first duty of the members of the men's club and ladies' aid and young people's societies is not the attendance at the meetings of their respective society, but the attendance at the services in the sanctuary. The members of the men's club should realize that attendance at the business meeting of the voting members takes precedence of the attendance at the club meeting. The young men of the Walther League must know that, when they are twenty-one years of age, they ought to become voting members of the congregation. If a member cannot find time to hold office both in the congregation proper and in a society within the church, his first duty is toward the congregation. If the members of the societies cannot pay both congregational and society dues, congregational dues must come first; for without a congregation there would be no intracongregational societies. It is important that the pastor stress these points in the meetings of the intracongregational societies.

Since the congregation is the only divinely ordained institution, it cannot be made a matter of conscience to a member of the congregation to affiliate himself with a society within the congregation.

The pastor must have a clear conception of the high dignity and the sovereign rights of the congregation and the proper relation of the intracongregational societies to the congregation if he is to take the right attitude to these societies.

As the congregation is the divinely ordained institution, the pastor cannot permit his time to be so engrossed with the meetings and work of the societies as to neglect his *chief* work in the congregation, the conscientious preparation of his sermons, the development of his own spiritual life, his fellowship with God in the upper room, his private study, his cure of souls (*Privatseelsorge*), his mission-work. If he cannot find time to do all the work, including the supervision of the societies and the attending of all its meetings, and the congregation is not financially able to provide specially trained help, he must delegate in the first place some of the work with the societies to properly instructed and trained and able lay leaders.

The pastor is the divinely called shepherd of the souls of the congregation. Therefore, by virtue of his office, he is the leader of the congregation. This means that the societies within the congregation should accept and respect his leadership. This means that the pastor cannot evade the responsibility of lending his efforts and influence to the proper organization and functioning of the societies within the congregation, so that the congregation is not hindered, but helped in the realization of its God-given aims and

opportunities by the intracongregational societies. The pastor is, and will remain, the key-man in the congregational set-up. The pastor ought to take a sympathetic and active interest in the work of the societies. Only in this way can he hope to gain and hold the cooperation of congregational societies. If the members know, and are made to feel, that their pastor regards their societies as a "necessary evil," that he only "tolerates" their existence, and that he believes that no possible good can be accomplished by them, the pastor need not be surprised if he must complain of a lack of cooperation on the part of the officers of the societies. As a general rule, the members of our societies are only too glad to seek the counsel and active support, and are happy to have the guidance and supervision, of a pastor who shows intelligent and sympathetic understanding of their aims and their work. It certainly is contrary to the Scriptural position which the pastor occupies in the congregation if a society within the congregation believes that the pastor has no business to attend its meetings and to guide and supervise it in its endeavors and work. If societies seek to do things behind the pastor's back and show an unwillingness to accept a pastor's advice and suggestions, they do not take the proper and Scriptural attitude to him whom the congregation has called as its shepherd and leader.

A word may not be amiss regarding the pastor's attitude toward affiliation of his societies with the Walther League or the Lutheran Laymen's League. Like Synod, these organizations do not wish to set themselves up as a supergovernment over the congregations and the societies. They wish to be only *service organizations, helpful agencies*, to assist the pastor and the individual societies in carrying on their work in a most efficient manner. In our humble opinion pastors ought to welcome the assistance which these organizations, with their program of Christian Knowledge and Christian Service, offer in order to make the work of the societies really worth while and worthy of the name of a church organization.

In this connection one always stumbles upon the question of dues. In the first place, let us seriously ask ourselves if the members of the society do not receive a dollar's worth of service for the dues which they pay to the extracongregational organization. Personally we are convinced that they do. In the second place, do we believe that, if the members of the society would not pay their dollar a year to the extracongregational organization, that the congregation would receive that extra dollar in church dues or contributions for the work of Synod? Or do we believe that, if the young people would not spend the money for Walther League rallies and conventions, a like amount would flow into the congre-

gational treasury? We believe the answers must be in the negative. We believe that it is poor policy to harp upon, and show dissatisfaction with, the expense connected with membership in the extracongregational organizations; but we ought rather to use our influence and station for the better inculcation of a deeper sense of the stewardship of money. The lack of generosity in the support of the congregation and Synod cannot be found in the support which the societies give to the extracongregational organizations, but to the weak understanding and half-hearted practise of Christian stewardship.

Must we as pastors insist upon the synodizing of these extracongregational organizations? In the first place, let us remember that these extracongregational organizations like the Walther League came into existence because Synod as such did not see fit to give to these societies the service helps and guidance which were felt to be necessary. In the second place, we must remember that, although the congregation, as a divinely ordained institution, has a right and a duty to control all societies in its midst, Synod as an organization of human origin cannot rightfully lay claim to the right and duty of controlling all organizations functioning within its confines and membership. Whether these organizations should be synodized is therefore a matter of wisdom and human expediency on which opinions may well differ. There are arguments on both sides. *Organizationally* it would be a more simple set-up if Synod as Synod would conduct works of benevolence and institutions for higher education of the laity and in an advisory capacity would assist the congregations in the work of men's clubs, ladies' aids, and young people's societies. As it is, these extrasynodical organizations are guided and supervised in their work by committees which Synod appoints or elects, and, as far as we have knowledge, the organizations have always shown themselves willing to accept this synodical supervision and have welcomed the assistance and advice of the synodical board or committee.

In regard to parent-teachers' organizations the pastor will be called upon to face the issue whether it is wise for this congregational society to join the local, State, and national P. T. A. Our own observation leads us to the conclusion that the pastor would do well *not* to advocate this affiliation. The State and national P. T. A. as an organization makes propaganda and works for the passing of laws regarding divorce, child labor, recreation, and education. Would it be wise or even right for a *church* organization to engage in political propaganda and political activity? No doubt some benefits could be derived by the congregational parent-teachers' organization, especially in reference to setting up its educational program, by affiliation with the P. T. A.; but the church

group could not join the P. T. A. in its political activities and remain true to the principle of the separation of State and Church.

Uppermost in our mind while we considered the subject of the pastor and intracongregational activities was the truth which should never be pushed into the background that the congregation is the divinely ordained institution. In every intracongregational organization and work our energies must be directed clearly and sharply to the presentation of a program and for the execution of work which will be a direct help to our congregational life. "It is, after all, the local congregation which pours into that section of the world immediately surrounding it the power of the Word of God and the continuing love of the world's Redeemer. If the congregation does not fulfil that obligation, or if it is too weakly and carelessly organized, the kingdom of God cannot prosper in that place. In the final analysis the voice of the Church means only the voice of the individual congregations, and the strength of the Church is no greater and no smaller than the strength of the individual congregation." (*Walther League Manual*, p.12.)

Furthermore there was uppermost in our mind the Scriptural truth that the pastor is the divinely called leader in the congregation and the shepherd of the souls entrusted to his care by the loving hand of the Savior. Only as he is faithful to the stupendous and yet glorious tasks and duties which are his by divine appointment, can the congregation as such and the societies within the congregation as an integral part of the congregation and its work prosper and successfully meet their problems and their opportunities.

Bloomington, Ill.

WALTER E. HOHENSTEIN

Das Datum der Verabfassung des Johanneſebangeliums

In einer Rezension von Fahlings *Life of Christ* im „Kirchenblatt“ (A. L. C.) schreibt F. Braun: „Die Annahme, daß das Johanneſebangelium erst kurz vor Ende des ersten Jahrhunderts geschrieben wurde, ist heutzutage nicht mehr haltbar.“ Ist diese Behauptung haltbar?

Während sich in den verschiedenen Einleitungen zum Johanneſebangelium und in den mancherlei Untersuchungen über das Johanneſebangelium allerdings eine große Verschiedenheit zeigt, so zeigt sich doch auch bei genauerer Untersuchung sehr bald, daß man die verschiedenen Schriftsteller auf diesem Gebiet in gewisse Gruppen einteilen kann. Das fundamentum dividendi der Stellung zu Gottes Wort gibt uns im allgemeinen die beste Einteilung, nämlich die der negativen und der positiven Kritiker. Wir könnten hier allerdings zurückgreifen in den