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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

Commitment in the Ordained Ministry

CHARLES S. MUELLER

(We live in years that take their toll of ministers. Resignations have certainly been more highly publicized than in former years, and probably are more numerous. But, given the peculiar strains of the temper of our times, the number of men in the ministry who have not resigned—certainly a much larger and more significant number—ought to be given greater publicity. The job opportunities that made a shift in professions practicable are not as numerous as they were in the past few years, but it was during those years of professional alternatives that the vast majority of ordained clergymen remained in their ministry. Obvious, of course, but worth publicizing.)

The article which follows stresses commitment to the tasks to which the clergyman is assigned in ordination. It was written by the Rev. Charles S. Mueller, then the pastor of St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, Md., and now the president of the Southeastern District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is the first of two lectures in the series named for Dr. Frederic Wenchel, who was for many years the pastor of Christ Church in Washington, D.C. In his introduction to this abridged printing President Mueller paid tribute to Dr. Wenchel: "If the astronauts could pay their homage to the past by saying, 'We stand on the shoulders of giants,' you and I as Christian workers must echo these words in spades. There is Dr. Wenchel, and thousands others like him, imbedded in our history. We draw from the experiences and adventures of these nameless men daily. In their turn and time they built the platforms on which all great men, at one moment or another of Christian history, have stood. I mention this not only to honor their memory but also to emphasize that their style of life, their faith, and generally unnoticed service in the shadow of the great and near great will be the posture which most of us will assume in our ministries. As John the Baptist and his prophetic precursors, most of us, too, will go before to prepare the way for others who will place the divine mark, writ large, on some event or expression or understanding of God's great, good will for men in Christ Jesus. It is to you, the majority, who will not evangelize the millions in massive gatherings, or utter final pronouncements that will shape the course of Christian history, or teach with superb authority the humbler humanity which seek guidance, that I address myself. You will spin out your time serving as a parish pastor and preaching the Word every seventh day more or less. I want to say that this is a great way to live, a thrilling way to serve, and an exhilarating and meaningful expenditure of life."

It is to this committed majority, anything but silent the other six days of the week as well, that these words are addressed. The title President Mueller chose he explained as "only accidentally alliterative"—*Pastoral Preaching to People in the Parish*. "I would like to accent in our time . . . the words *pastoral*, *people*, and *parish*. I do this because I believe understanding the dimensions of those words is central to good preaching." His words come through pastorally to those who are in the parish as well, to remind them that "this is a great way to live, a thrilling way to serve."

The sermon which follows President Mueller's essay was delivered last year at the ordination of the Rev. David C. Yagow, a member of the executive staff at Concordia Seminary and assistant managing editor of this journal. It was composed by the Rev. Prof. John Damm, also of Concordia Seminary. It has much to say to all the men who have themselves entered into the service of the Lord Christ through ordination, even as it expresses a personal relationship

between ordained and ordinator. It may serve as something of a welcome to Mr. Yagow and an expression of regard for the editorial pencil which he has been wielding for a number of months. It carries certain other obvious emphases which will be apparent in days when men scrutinize seminaries and faculties engaged in a ministry to young men who prepare for ordination.)

GEORGE W. HOYER

PASTORAL PREACHING TO PEOPLE IN THE PARISH

Pastoral preaching does not take place by virtue of seminary graduation. Most of those who returned from vicarages last year are by now aware of that — or at least have a haunting suspicion that such is the case. Pastoral preaching is quite distinct from that which takes place in a chapel exercise, or from rally sermonizing, or from a capable communicator's speaking at a congregational anniversary, a dedication, or an ordination. Pastoral preaching is the kind of preaching that grows out of shared joys, miseries, heartaches, and hopes between a pastor and a given band of people. It begins to break ground during the early months of ministry in a given place and comes to full bloom only after as much as 5 to 10 years of close-quarter living. It's not totally unlike courting. The first date is great, but it gets better and better and better as the relationship improves and deepens and passes through the gates of engagement, marriage, childbearing, family development, and the peace of advanced years.

The difference between pastoral preaching and other varieties is the difference between eating crab imperial at a fine restaurant and eating at home, where one's wife or mother offers hamburger as the main course — again. But the main course, in that instance, is more than just hamburger. It's my wife's hamburger or my mother's hamburger. The ingredients for that kind of concoction include ground beef, an egg, perhaps some bread crumbs, suitable seasoning — *plus* the entire history of the little band of people who share that meal, flavored with all that makes them a family and served with heaping portions of love. It is hard to make hamburgers exciting

for the 700th time, but there is a compensatory excitement and joy that flavors the food simply because it is the 700th time. Those hamburgers are more than food to be wolfed down with the greatest speed possible. They are love, care, concern, sharing, warmth, forgiveness, and a desire for oneness, to be slowly savored and consumed with pleasure.

It is such understanding of preaching that helps interpret the fact that visiting preachers do not go over very well in my parish. Pastor William F. Bruening first told me about this phenomenon. When a guest preacher comes, attendance doesn't go up, it generally goes down. If we announce in advance that a guest will occupy the pulpit, great effort must also be exerted to accent the family character of the occasion which prompts the invitation, or else attendance drops. The reason this happens is not that the quality of preaching suffers when a guest occupies the pulpit. The reason is that the quality of relationship between pulpit and pew is different. Preaching is much more pastoral presence than content on the parish level. I worried a great deal about that last sentence. I was worried, first, because it sort of fell out of my pen and appeared on the paper almost against my will. I worried, second, because it seems to refute a lot of what I have read and what I have been taught about preaching. So I tried it out on a number of very fine laymen and some brothers in the ministry. The brothers in the ministry were bothered by it. The laymen, with one accord, said, "Of course. We've known that for years and have been trying to say that to you." I'm still not completely comfortable with it. I don't think I want to defend it, but I see potential implications and I've brought it out here to leave with you. Your people in general do

not really know the difference between a good sermon and a bad one, at least not by the criteria that a professional might use. But they know the difference between a man with whom they can identify and one with whom they cannot. Attendance is sometimes very high in some churches even though a very mediocre message is usually the pulpit fare for the week. And the converse is often true also.

More than anything else, commitment shapes the pastoral image. As pastors we generally think of commitment in terms of our commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Second, we think of commitment in terms of our commitment to the mission of God's church. These are important uses of the word. But commitment also has something to do with the question of parish style and with the people of the parish and the kind of involved, complicated, and potentially disturbing relationships that are initiated when a pastor and his people get serious about living meaningful lives together. We'll come back to these two areas a little later. For the moment we'll discuss the concept of commitment especially as it applies to the pastoral self-image.

Commitment is a very difficult word to define. I rather suspect that it is indefinable, much like a companion word — love. It took me a long time to understand that love is never defined — not in the dictionary, not in the Bible. The Bible does say that "God is love," but that is hardly a definition. To define one abstract term by another abstract term is very unsatisfactory. Communication then hinges on concurrent opinions and commonly held views of one abstraction or the other. Love — and by implication, commitment — is always described.

We could begin a description of commitment by saying that it implies an attitude of giving. More than that, it is giving that is responsive to the desires and needs of the one to whom giving is aimed. This aspect of

commitment involves the voluntary placing of oneself at the disposal of others. It also involves freely setting aside a part of one's life for someone or something. Until there is this almost blind giving, all relationships — at every level of the potential commitment spectrum — are very tender and very tentative.

A man can never experience peace in his vocation as a parish pastor until this commitment has taken place. Without commitment to the pastoral office he must constantly wrestle with a vocational decision that has to be reconsidered with every shift in theological, institutional, family, or personal circumstances. Every ruffling of personal, congregational, District, or synodical waters chases him back to the question, "Why should I have to go through this kind of folderol?" The folderol level of life is enormous. A man may study with a jaundiced eye every salary scale published, whether it be for teachers or custodians or salespeople or doctors, and wonder why his salary should not be the same or proportionately higher. He may begin talking about "career" with "career" objectives and decisions based on "career" priorities, so that his professional future becomes paramount in his thinking. Until there is a commitment to the concept of parish ministry there will be little peace in the life of a parish pastor.

Being ordained is not the same as starting out life as a second lieutenant while harboring secret aspirations of someday becoming a general. On the day of ordination one's brethren place on his shoulders, as it were, the highest rank of the Christian army. All the real "advancement" possible takes place in that moment. There is no ecclesiastical pecking order other than that of servanthood. Seminary professors stand in the same line and on a peer level with the pastor of the smallest parish. I've never known any professors who had a problem understanding that. District presidents are servants of the

servants of the servants of God, so their role is especially clear. From time to time one may be asked to take on additional duties like watching over the youth program of a District or lecturing at a Bible institute, but what is that? The world gets excited over these things and sees them as marks of success. Actually they are nothing more than marks of servanthood. Commitment in the parish means the willingness to be "everlastingly at it," as the sainted Dr. Rudolph S. Rössmeyer so often reminded his brethren.

Commitment also grows out of the understanding that I am what I am because God has made me that. While I may have come to the seminary to meet the standards that men at this moment in history have set for ordination, I did not come to the seminary in order to become a Christian. I was that before I came. As I view my calling, I am not preserved from the terrors of life and death by a handsome pension system or a responsible salary or piles of perquisites. Like all God's people of every age I awake in the morning in wide-eyed expectation of God's mercies for that day, knowing that if the fountain of His mercies, His goodness, His forgiveness, and His grace ever dries up, I am finished — regardless of how affluent I may be. That means I look forward to the only legitimate retirement program God has ever blessed — death — and I lean on the absolute assurance of His pension system — eternal life.

In the meantime I live largely untouched by the ebb and flow of the events of life. I am a pastor whose life purpose it is to serve whatever people in whatever place with whatever service God puts before me. Joseph fussed with Pharaoh; Moses reckoned daily with the sun of Sinai; David faced Philistines; that was their role. All those moments came and went. But God did not come and go, nor did His purpose of salvation. I face 20th-century Pharaohs, sun, and Philistines, realizing that they are simply forms in which

the opportunities for ministry come, without letting them overwhelm me and without the fear that if this particular moment slips by unattended or unanswered, all the history of God's purpose for man is foiled. Keep it clear: after the last bit of discrimination is resolved, and the last man is out of Viet Nam, and the last speck of pollution is milked from the universe, and the last smidgeon of economic or social injustice is erased, we still have the full burden of our calling to face. Do not confuse concern for a passing cause with commitment to ministry, and do not confuse the difference between the form of a concern and the concern itself.

This might sound to some ears like 20th-century Do-Nothingism. Milked of its flesh and blood, it might be. But it also has the ring of Christian commitment. Discrimination between the two depends on the basis of one's ministry. We are always following our God into the wilderness, and daily we depend on His manna. Without that commitment to walk after Him the fire is stolen from our preaching, the truth from our words and action, the genuineness from our ministry, and the excitement from our Christian life. You will know if your ministry lacks commitment. Worse yet, so will your people. And that's another place where commitment and preaching join hands. I care not how carefully outlined or how theologically sound a man's sermon structure; I care not how clearly he enunciates or plans his gestures; I care not how contemporary his illustrations or how apt his phrasing. Without commitment to the call of the ministry and acceptance of this call, "warts and all," a man's words will have the smoothness of Madison Avenue patter and his relationships with people will remain destructively superficial.

It is out of this kind of commitment with its dependence on God that prayer takes on meaning, that worship becomes real, and that theology gains purpose. All the significant aspects of ministry — teaching and counsel-

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ing, administration and promotion in the parish — are flavored by commitment and, in turn, taste so very different. Instead of making a wry face when confronted with preparing a statistical report, a man finds the task palatable. It may taste a little like turnips, but it's edible.

There is a danger that all this may be interpreted as "enthusiasm," whether in an ecclesiastical or a social sense of that word. Nonetheless, commitment is not intended to take the place of preparation — either preparation for an individual sermon or preparation for the life of ministry. I study more today and harder than I ever did in the seminary. Obviously, I don't study for a grade or even for knowledge alone. I study so that I may increase the effectiveness of my service to the people of the parish where I have been placed. For instance, I try to read at least three books a week. My tastes in reading are catholic because my people and their needs are catholic. This means that while I probably have a heavier theological diet interspersed through my reading than would an average man, it is by no means exclusively theological. Nor is it of even quality. I read a certain amount of what I feel is "trash" because that's what a lot of other people are reading, too. Book reviews in various journals also help keep me informed about current publications. Furthermore, acquaintance with certain reviewers assists me to develop my own rating system in comparison to theirs. There must be a disciplined approach to reading and study, and one's study must be very broad. Otherwise there will be only a narrow band of common ground between the pastor and those whom he addresses. When that happens, the number of his possibilities for communication diminishes, and he soon becomes regularly irrelevant.

Professional competence as well as a certain pride in that competence is part of the expression of commitment. A sense of com-

mitment urges me to develop as many skills as God has given me. If I don't have an ability, that's one thing. If I am lazy, that's quite another thing. There are certain minimum skills that any concerned and committed professional will hone to a high degree of effectiveness. In the same way that the carpenter learns how to drive a nail, saw a straight line, and care for his tools, I, too, need to oil the tools of my trade and develop the skills needed for it. There's no guarantee that a carpenter who is professionally adequate will build a good house, but it is rather certain that he will not build one if he lets his skills grow rusty through disuse.

Because I am committed, I try to keep my skills alive and to improve them. I take time to master elementary skills especially. For instance, I work each week at trying to read the Scripture lessons with greater clarity. I experiment with how to use my voice, how to use pauses, how to modulate, how to express, how to emphasize. Nothing shocks me more than a man who has all the equipment and 10 or more years of experience in the parish, but still reads the Scripture lessons or preaches as if he were reading the phone book. There is no need for that. Listen to the records of Bible reading by Charles Laughton or some other professional actor. They were not born with that skill, but developed it. They recognized that articulation, delivery, and style of presentation are very important, and they trained with this in mind. We who preach must develop competence not only in constructing sermons and in filling them with substantial content, but also in presenting them well. We should be concerned not only with methodologies and matters of content, but also with certain concepts of preaching. For instance, we should realize that when we say, "I have written a sermon," there is a contradiction in that statement. Writing is a distinct form of communication. Speaking is another. Writing can and ought to be logical, sequential, pro-

gressive, and balanced in form. Speaking is not quite so delicate a business, for speaking is directed to the reader's ear and has to do with sound. Sounds disappear long before a printed page returns to dust. Speaking takes into consideration things like attention spans, noise levels, comfortableness of surroundings, age and interest differentiation. Reading is more orderly business. The reader sets his own stage for reception — and if it is not comfortable, he folds up the book for another time or goes to another place. In speaking one always faces a "now or never" situation, at least for the particular message he has prepared. Our tendency, interestingly enough, is to confuse these two methods of communication. We tend to write as we would speak and speak as we would write. Read ecclesiastical literature with an eye to that concern and you will see what I mean. Our written materials have a tendency to float around and move from point to point like syrup following its erratic pattern over pancakes. Listen to some of the sermons delivered in our circles. Some of our speakers move with the precision of a master fencer pinking a young opponent with expertise and mild abandon — interesting to watch but hard to follow. One reason why reading aloud has fallen into disuse is that books today are too well written for speech. One exception is the work of Dr. Seuss, who writes outrageous books for children. They are intended to be heard and are filled with all kinds of auditory surprises in alliteration and onomatopoeia.

Almost a hundred years ago Tennyson wrote "Northern Farmer." The farmer reports his experience at listening to a sermon:

"I 'eard 'im a-bummin' away like a buzzard
cock ower my head,
And I niver knawed what he meant, but
I thought 'e 'ad summat to say,
And I thowt 'e said what 'e owt to 'a said,
And I coom'd away."

It is a quiet tragedy that this bit of verse

can be taken over, almost intact, some 100 years later and used as a commentary on the relevancy of some preaching today. Had the preacher been committed to his ministry, technically proficient, and aware of his role, I doubt whether he would have been "a-bummin' . . . like a buzzard cock ower my head," as the farmer describes. Pastoral preaching to people in the parish requires both a sense of commitment and a proficiency that will help us communicate what we mean when we have something to say.

Washington, D. C.

MY TIMES ARE IN THY HANDS

(Psalm 31:14-15 a)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

To all of God's people who are gathered here this afternoon, to the parents and relatives of the ordained, to his friends and classmates, to his teachers and fathers in God, and to you, David, I salute you all with the apostolic greeting: Grace be to you and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the midst of our common joy and thanksgiving, what should be the burden of the message to you today — a message that cannot but be shaped by our relationship to each other? It is not frequent that in the course of four years a relationship between two people moves from that of student and teacher to that of student assistant and teacher to that of co-workers and finally to that of faculty colleagues and, in the case of the staff for CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, you are my boss. The dynamics at work in such relationships are naturally rich and myriad. I cannot begin to count the hours we have spent together this past year discussing the meaning of the ministry and the significance of ordination both for our own instruction and for the assumptions we prepared for the report of the Theological Education Research Committee. And in a few moments the

rite itself will establish again both the meaning and the significance of this occasion, so I do not think I need say much more to you on the subject.

Of course, you realize that you come to the church seeking ordination to the ministry at a very eventful moment in your life, in the life of the synod you will serve, in the journal you will help manage, and in the world which serves as the larger context for your ministry. These are times that try some men's souls, and you, both by the makeup of your own nature and the nature of your task, will be caught up in all the drama of the times. What shall we say to you, then, on this occasion?

Perhaps our words to you in this hour will best be guided by the church's own inspired hymnal. Normally it is our mutual custom, after you have run your mile and I have driven mine, to come together in chapel and join the community in praying matins. During the weekly and monthly rhythm of praying the Psalms we have discovered and rediscovered that the Psalter is a great mirror of the realities of our human experience. Sometimes we find the psalmists elevated to moments of ecstatic celebration of life, and sometimes they are downcast and troubled, threatened and discouraged, only later celebrating their rescue by the mercy of God.

In Psalm 31 we have just such a situation and such a man. He has had his share of frustration and trouble. He is not without his doubts and apprehensions. Indeed, he tells us that the sources of them are still all about him. But he also has a rich experience of deliverance and consolation, and this is actually the dominant theme. The climactic point seems to be in verses 14 and 15, in the middle of the psalm. He is shattered like a broken vessel. They are whispering about his fate. They plot to take his life. Yet his voice is calm and strong: "But I trusted in Thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God. My times are in Thy hands." On this day of your

ordination I commend this man who lived so long ago and so far away to you as your model and exemplar.

"In the hand of God." This is a very meaningful phrase and, I think, a very helpful word to carry with you into the ministry you are about to assume. The writers in both the Old and New Testaments employ it frequently. It was from Psalm 31 that our Lord drew His word from the cross, "Into Thy hands I commit My spirit," a word we continue to utter each night in compline. And St. Paul echoes this thought in the New Testament language of Romans: "Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord."

The psalmist is unshakably convinced that the changes and chances of life cannot remove him from the care of God. Through all of life's anxious turning points and menacing crises, indeed, through its frustrations and deepest disappointments, he knows he can take shelter in the goodness of God. It is a very personal reflection on the psalmist's part, this reference to "my times," and it calls forth a response from every one of us. We cannot avoid feeling poignantly the hazards of these crucial points in our lives, when significant decisions are made affecting all that follows. If we can enter into the writer's frame of mind, we recognize each of these times of decision as a gateway to a new experience of God. We can then contemplate such events as this one which takes place today and the task you are about to assume without fretful anxiety as to the outcome; rather, you do what you do today with spiritual delight.

And this is certainly something greater than any confidence in what the world calls a happy outcome. It is a joyful realization of the sufficiency of God. The plural form "times" indicates clearly that no abstract consideration of "time" is involved. The writer thinks of the stages of a personal life, its new emergencies and points of departure, the

commitments we make to God, the vows we take.

Our times are in His hands. We have to live with our own past, and that also we must place in God's hands. As we commit our past to God, it is with no assumption that the record is all that commendable. As we view it honestly in the presence of God, it is often a wasteland of failure and error, of lost opportunities, of wounds given and received, brightened only by His love. Apart from God our past is not an agreeable companion. But if we yield to the seeking and forgiving love of God in Christ, we find sanctuary in Him, saying, "You are my God in Jesus Christ; my past times are in Your hands." Then life becomes whole again.

When we could not forgive ourselves, He forgave us and made it possible for us to forgive ourselves and to forgive those who, sharing our faults, have injured us. This is the great divine adventure of the new life of trust in the saving action of God. God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love He bore for us made us alive together with Him; by grace you have been saved . . . for He is our peace who hath made us both one . . . that He might create in us one new man . . . and reconcile us both to God in one body on the cross.

So, too, we commit this present time to God. They say that one of the chief problems a counselor often faces with his counselee is to get him to accept himself. He has to come to terms with his personality and life situation, his physical appearance, his mental capacity, his gifts, if you will. To a degree this is true of all of us. On this day of your ordination it is necessary, if you are to work at maximum capacity at the tasks of the ministry, that you recognize the sometimes smallness of your strength, that you properly evaluate the handicaps you face. But if you cultivate the habit of taking shelter in God's love, you will at least have a wholesome perspective on any handicaps. Lutherans are

especially afflicted with a form of pride—that mother of sins and breeder of griefs—that falsely urges us to reject ourselves. I recently ran across a statement that expresses the problem in a Paschal-like paradox: "There are two stages of pride, one when we approve ourselves, and a second when we reject ourselves."

Perfection is not in man, but in God. "When the perfect is come, the imperfect will pass away." We cannot make our little service seem great, but we can commit it prayerfully to God, who embraces it in His infinite completeness and takes away our shame that it is so little. St. Augustine has put it so well: "Lord, I have not what I ought to have and cannot do what I ought to do. Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt."

Not that you should ever accept yourself now as the best you can ever be. Rather you should accept what now you are, the you on September 5, 1970, a candidate for a life of richer fruitfulness and fuller service to the Lord whose Spirit has brought you to this day and to this hour. So your future times are also entrusted to God. Here you are trusting where you cannot see. Yet you are not anxious for tomorrow. "I trusted in Thee, O Lord, I said Thou art my God, my times are in Thy hand: . . . Save me in Thy steadfast love." Here the psalmist looks upon his life as an adventure caught up in the salvific plan of God. Your future time, the future of your ministry, you confidently entrust to God. Having been buried with Christ by Baptism into His death, the new man daily comes forth to walk in newness of life.

And that is your baptismal face toward the future. In talking about placing your future times in God's hands, I am not in the least suggesting some form of unwholesome quietism. Your ministry knows no resignation that means the acceptance of low attainment, of defeat, of a way of life that never challenges both the empirical church and the

world. You know that with the experience of forgiveness comes newness of life. To rest in God's hand, paradoxically, is to be endowed with resources of power.

Nowadays people are often surprised to discover that men of devout life who practice spiritual discipline are also men of resolute action. There should be no reason for surprise. A good minister of Christ has access to the source of spiritual energy. He has strength for the day. His inner peace with God in Christ is totally consistent with intense activity. His moments of withdrawal and reflection are wellsprings in which energy is renewed and unified and consecrated. I like the exhilaration of that other psalmist who exclaims: "Yea, by Thee I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall."

We are all intensely aware of the historic crises through which we are passing—with our fellow churchmen and with our fellow human beings throughout the world. The public utterances even of the more optimistic interpreters are guarded. We are alert for trouble. As churchmen we sense that the freedom of the very Gospel itself may well be taken from us. As human beings we realize that we have wrested from nature many of her long-hidden secrets and taken to ourselves power so great that it may either destroy us or enrich us beyond our dreams. Today you enter a profession whose task it is to set men free by the proclamation of the good news of God's saving love in Jesus Christ so that they may serve each other in love and continue the task of restoring all things in Christ.

Your immediate assignment to the CTM puts you in a particularly influential position. Because you are a man of faith, I know you will not shrink from the effort to meet the crises of our time with all the wisdom and insight God affords, and you will continue to take comfort from the assurance that these times, too, are in God's hands, with all the

years that follow. You know your times are in good hands, for, nail-pierced though they may be, they are raised in blessing.

In a few moments I shall remind you that the ministry to which you are being ordained today has only one purpose and one justification. It is to be a channel through which God works His own purposes among men, as He imparts His forgiveness, His power, and His peace. As you accept this office may I share with you what was told to me on the day of my ordination to the ministry. If your ministry is to be effective in these critical times you will need more than the good will you bring to this day. For good will is not enough. Personal faith is not enough. Mental acumen and intelligence is not enough. Sound scholarship is not enough. All these you have.

But for your task you need something more. It is the unanimous mind of the historic church that a minister must be rightly called, as the Augsburg Confession puts it. God must give you the gift of the ministry. That He does through the sacrament of ordination, as the Apology of the Augsburg Confession expressly calls today's procedure. You must receive the gift of holy orders, rightly and effectively imparted through the laying on of the hands of the presbyters, to use St. Paul's phrase.

This is your abiding possession from this day forward. Academic distinctions and secular honors will probably come to you in abundance in the days ahead, but the gift of God the Holy Spirit, the gift which places upon you the necessity to serve—to minister—this gift excels them all.

We have no greater gift to give you. And we have no other counsel to accompany the gift than the advice which God inspired Saint Paul to give his young co-worker, St. Timothy: "Always stir into flame the gift of God which is within you through the laying on of my hands."

St. Louis, Mo.