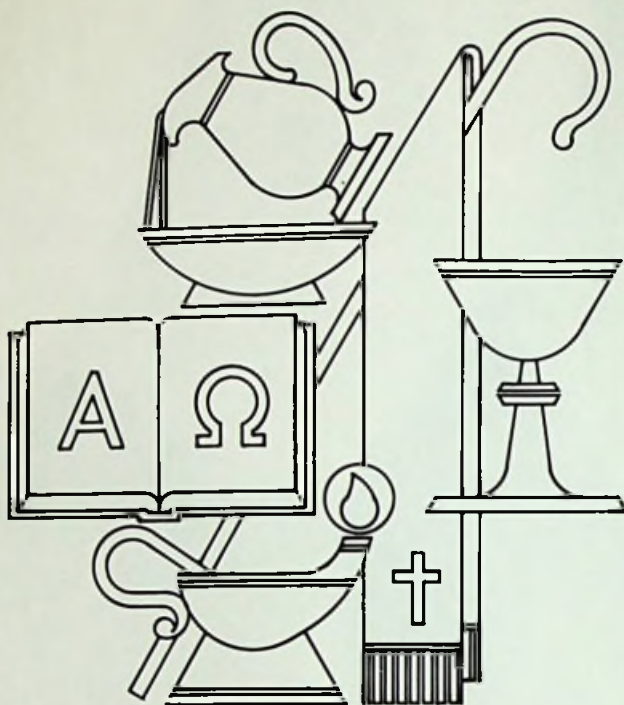


II. DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS



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A. MINISTRY

The word "ministry" can be and frequently is used in more than one sense. Francis Pieper points this out as he begins his discussion of the public ministry:

The term "ministry" is used both in Scripture and by the Church in a general, or wider, and in a special, or narrower, sense. In the wider sense it embraces every form of preaching the Gospel or administering the means of grace, whether by Christians in general, as originally entrusted with the means of grace and commissioned to apply them, or by chosen public servants (*ministri ecclesiae*) in the name and at the command of Christians. In this article we are speaking of the public ministry in the narrower sense, that is, of the office by which the means of grace, given originally to the Christians as their inalienable possession, are administered by order and on behalf of Christians.¹

There are those who would prefer to use the term "ministry" only in the narrower sense. They feel that this avoids confusion. Others feel that to speak of "the ministry of the laity" is not only permissible but even essential, so that the individual witnessing and teaching of Christians in general may be properly stressed and dignified.

The service of all Christians is intimately connected with the public ministry. All Christians are commissioned in 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." In Ephesians 4 special offices are pointed out as given by God to equip the saints for the work of serving (*eis ergon diakonias*).² The absence in this report of a detailed discussion of the privilege and responsibility of all Christians to proclaim the Gospel does not indicate a disregard for that service. Here the focus is on the ministry in the narrower and public sense.

¹Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 3:439.

²Cf. E. W. Janetzki, "The Doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the Lutheran Church of Australia Today," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 13 (November 1979), 73. In this article a distinction between ministry in the abstract and ministry in concrete is attempted by speaking of the ministry of the church and the ministry in the church.

It will be helpful already at this point to note the definitions of the following terms as they will be used in this report:

Ministry—This is a general term when it stands alone. It may be used in the most general sense of the service (*diakonia*) of all Christians. For the sake of clarity it is preferably used to indicate the special service of those who are called to function publicly in the church.

Public Ministry—To be in “public ministry” a person must be formally assigned to labor in the work of the church on behalf of those in the church who are not in public ministry (laity). It refers to offices that have specific duties, responsibilities, and accountability.

The Office of the Public Ministry—It is the divinely established office referred to in Scripture as “shepherd,” “elder,” or “overseer.” This term is equivalent to “the pastoral office.” Within this office are contained all the functions of the ministry of Word and sacrament in the church.

Auxiliary Offices—These are offices established by the church. Those who are called to serve in them are authorized to perform certain of the function(s) of the office of the public ministry. These offices are “ministry” and they are “public,” yet they are not *the* office of the public ministry. Rather, they are auxiliary to that unique pastoral office, and those who hold these offices perform their assigned functions under the supervision of the holders of the pastoral office. Such offices are established by the church as the need arises, and their specific functions are determined by the church. The most common auxiliary office today is the office of the teaching ministry.

Details regarding these definitions are presented below.

B. THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS

The church is not left to itself to decide what it shall preach and teach. God has commanded and empowered the church to proclaim the Law and the Gospel. He has instituted the sacraments and commended them to the church, and He has authorized the forgiving and retaining of sins.

The Law, of course, does an alien work. Through it the Holy Spirit brings people to an awareness of their sinful state and drives them to repentance. The Gospel alone, in Word and sacrament, is the means by which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith. The Office of the Keys is “the peculiar church power which Christ has given to His church on earth.” It belongs to

the whole church. However, its exercise is not left merely to the efforts of individual Christians or to the uncertain ventures of selfstarting, charismatic individuals. The church, as a single congregation or as a group of congregations, must call and authorize certain of its members to function publicly on its behalf.

The public ministry, it is here maintained, is not a mere human arrangement or the product of sociological evolution but a divine arrangement from the beginning of the New Testament church. Already in the Old Testament God arranged for the priesthood and prescribed the manner of the selection of the priests. He also called and sent the prophets. They did not decide to prophesy on their own authority. They were selected and commissioned by God, and in some cases they assumed "the burden" with much reluctance. In the New Testament God chose, trained, and sent the apostles. In the post-apostolic church He continued and continues to choose, call, and send men for the ministry which is an expansion of the apostolic office to succeeding ages (Treatise, 10).

C. THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

The office of the public ministry is not merely a divine suggestion but a divine *mandate*. God has decreed that the church should carry out its functions not only in private, individual actions and speaking but also corporately by selecting men who meet God's criteria and whom He then places into the office of the public ministry.

The office and its functions are called "public" not because the functions are always discharged in public, but because they are performed on behalf of the church. The acts of one who is called to fill the office of the public ministry are "public" even when they are performed privately with one individual. Moreover, the word "public" connotes accountability to those who have placed them into "public" office.

The functions of the divinely established office of the public ministry can best be seen by looking at the nomenclature that Scripture uses to refer to it. In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul uses the word *episkopee*, that is, the "oversight," to refer to the office of bishop. As a father manages his household, so the bishop stands at the head of his congregation as one who is charged with the duty of caring for the church of God. As the apostle Paul's co-worker, Timothy himself is to exercise the duties of this office as he worked among the congregations founded through the preaching of the apostle. As an overseer of the congregation, Timothy is to command and teach pure doctrine. He is to attend to public reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching. He is to oversee the spiritual life of the old men, the young men, the old women, the widows, the children, the slaves, the masters, and "the rich in this world."

The people are to be encouraged and guided to pray for all men. Women are to be guided in modesty of dress and adornment. The members committed to the overseer's care are to be instructed about and warned against those who forbid marriage and enjoy abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving. From all of this it is clear that the oversight is not exercised according to a man's own ideas and standards but according to the revealed will of God through the inspired apostles' God-breathed words. There is a bishop's office (*episkopee*) and oversight is one of its definitive functions.

Another Scriptural term for the office of the public ministry is elder (*presbyteros*). There are different kinds of elders, and 1 Timothy 5:17 indicates that some were specifically engaged in preaching and teaching. The presbyters teach and preach the Word of God, by which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in the hearts of the members of the flock and empowers and guides them for Christian living and service.

Hebrews 13:7 indicates that there were in the church "leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God," and in verse 17 the people in the churches that are addressed are admonished: "Obey your leaders (*heegoumenoi*) and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account."

In Ephesians 4:11-12 St. Paul refers to the various offices that God gave to the church for the building up of the saints for the work of service. Two important observations should be made within the context of this report. In giving the "shepherds and teachers" to the church, God was also appointing them, just as He appointed kings for Israel (1 Kings 1:48; 1 Sam. 12:13; cf. also Eph. 1:22). Moreover, by attaching the definite article "the" to "shepherds and teachers" the apostle indicates that teaching belongs to the essence of the duty of shepherding. Although there are varying interpretations of this passage from Ephesians 4, it is evident that teacher (*didaskalos*) does not refer to the modern office of the parish school teacher. The emphasis here is on how the saints are prepared for service by apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. The pastor does this by teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. Hence the Lutheran Confessions call his office "the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" (AC V).

Of great significance for the nature of the New Testament ministry are expressions like "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6), "the ministry of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8 NIV), "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18), and Paul's reference to himself as "a minister" of the Gospel (Col. 1:23).

In Titus 1:5 Paul writes: "This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective [*ta leiponta*, used intransitively to indicate what is absent, lacking, missing], and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."

Immediately the prerequisites for such elders, who are referred to as bishops, are presented (v. 7).

In Acts 14:23 the example of the apostles is recorded. They appointed (ordained) elders for them in every church.³ In Acts 20:17 and Acts 20:28 the terms elder and bishop are used interchangeably, as in Titus 1:5 and 7. In Acts 20:28 Paul admonishes the elders: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son."

From these references there emerges a picture of an office that was instituted by God, in and with the apostolate, for which very specific qualifications are listed, and the essence of which is properly defined in the Augsburg Confession as "teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" (AC V) on behalf of and with accountability to the church ("publicly") (AC XIV).

No specific "checklist" of functions of the office of the public ministry is presented in the Scriptures. For instance, nowhere are we told specifically that an elder "celebrated communion" or that only the elders spoke the words of institution at the celebration of the sacrament. The supervision of the shepherd-elder-bishop is a supervision of the teaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. In this way they are leaders to be obeyed in their speaking of the Word of God. They are supervisors of the spiritual life, the faith, and the Christian service of the church and its members. This is a heavy responsibility that no man can take upon himself but rather to which he must be legitimately called by the church (*rite vocatus*) (Acts 1:23-26; 13:2-3; 14:23; 2 Cor. 8:19; AC XIV).

On the basis of the Scriptural evidence and the corroborating statements of the Lutheran Confessions, the office of the public ministry, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments in the church, is divinely mandated. It may exist in various forms, that is, the "flocks" to which a man ministers may have various forms, and the office may be designated by a number of names, but it remains an office mandated by God for the good of the church. It is not enough to say that God commands that the Gospel be preached and that the sacraments be administered. God has ordained a specific office. The duty of those who hold the office by God's call through the prayerful summons ("call") of the church is to preach the Gospel and

³The verb used in this passage is *cheirotoneoo*, "elect or choose by a show of hands." Reference to this root meaning of the verb may emphasize the congregation's role in calling men into the pastoral office. However, the word is also used in the simple sense of "choose."

administer the sacraments in the church and to supervise the flock committed to their care.⁴

D. OFFICE AND FUNCTION

A distinction must be made between "office" and "function." Failure to make this distinction results in confusion. For instance, when a congregation is temporarily without a man to fill the office of the public ministry in its midst, it may ask a properly supervised teacher or a lay leader to perform some functions of the office of the public ministry. This is done in an emergency situation and not as a mere convenience. However, performing such functions does not make those who do them holders of the office of the public ministry. Even in such emergency situations a congregation properly requests a man who does hold the office of the public ministry and is serving as pastor in a neighboring congregation to assume that office for them as "vacancy pastor" or "interim overseer." Thus the oversight and accountability remain with one whom the church has called and designated as a pastor and who supervises those who temporarily perform some pastoral functions. Such practices are common and reveal a "folk" understanding of the ministry even if the root of such practices is not consciously analyzed.

E. OTHER OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

The office of the public ministry includes within it all of the functions of the leadership of the church. Early in the history of the church we have an example of the church selecting some of its members to carry out in the stead

⁴Cf. Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 59—62. "In the Confession and in the Apology we have set forth in general terms what we have to say about ecclesiastical power.

"The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent. By the confession of all, even of our adversaries, it is evident that this power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops. Accordingly Jerome teaches clearly that in the apostolic letters all who preside over the churches are both bishops and presbyters."