

“The Ministry”

When you hear the words “ministry” and “minister” what thoughts come to your mind? Do you think of people who serve in “full-time church work?” Do you think of a particular service which focuses on a specific way of serving people? We hear of “ministries” in many areas of life based on the activity being performed (i.e. music ministry; Bible distribution ministry; medical ministry; etc.) . . . or we hear it defined by the group of people amongst whom it is performed (i.e. youth ministry; young adult ministry; children’s ministry; senior ministry; etc.)

Maybe these words conjure up thoughts focused specifically on the pastoral ministry, a person who serves as a “minister” of a church. Do you think immediately about yourself as a minister of Jesus in your daily life **and** your life together with a group of believers called a congregation? What is meant by the words “ministry” and “minister” in a congregation?

Turning to the accepted confessions of our congregation, The Augsburg Confession, Article 5 says: “To obtain such faith [which justifies us before God based on the work of Jesus alone] God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the

Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.” (Tappert, T. G. (1959). *The Augsburg Confession: Translated from the Latin* (p. 31). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.)

Properly speaking, “the office of the ministry” is “the Gospel and the sacraments,” which are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It may seem natural for us to think of the pastoral office when we speak about preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments because it is usually pastors who are doing these tasks **publicly** on behalf of the congregation in the worship setting. However, it is important to recognize that this ministry has been given by Christ **to His Church which is made up of all who believe in Jesus alone for salvation.**

Listen to some ways that the Scriptures describe us as the Church of Jesus Christ:

1 Peter 2:9 → **You** (i.e. you as the congregation of believers in Jesus) *are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

Ephesians 2:19-20 → **You** are . . . **fellow citizens** with the saints and **members** of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ

Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 → *Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit **we were all** baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and **all** were made to drink of one Spirit.*

A royal priesthood . . . members of the household of God . . . fellow citizens with the saints and the body of Christ. These are all pictures which speak about our working together as Christ's people to do His ministry in the world—**to dispense and receive the forgiveness of sins by bringing the Gospel and the sacraments to people!** The primary place where this happens is on the corner of 5th avenue and 9th street in Fargo every Sunday at 10 am and Wednesdays at 7 pm. At those times in this place the believers have chosen to dispense and receive these means of grace publicly. In fact, it is the one thing which the Church gives that you will not find out in the world!

1 Peter 4:10 says: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.* We administer God's grace in its various forms when we bring people into contact with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His sacraments. There are many different

ways that this happens in our personal vocations of life as mother, father, son, daughter, worker, team member, citizen, husband, wife and so forth, and collectively as a group of believers called a Christian congregation. No matter what methods we chose to administer God's grace in the forms of the Gospel and the sacraments, it always remains the whole Church's ministry. It is incumbent on every Christian congregation to preach the pure Gospel and administer the sacraments according to Christ's institution.

Let's apply these concepts to our congregation. Jesus instructs the Church to baptize in the name of the Triune God and teach the baptized to observe all that He has commanded. It's referred to as "the Great Commission." (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) Let's say that the body of believers wants to carry out His instructions and teach His Word to the children of our congregation. They establish a way in which to do this within the system of the congregation. They chose various people to oversee and implement this area of their ministry together. They may even refer to it as Sunday School ministry, confirmation ministry, Vacation Bible School ministry, children's ministry or Christian education ministry. Many would look at it more as "administration" rather than "ministry" and view it as an extension of the parents' responsibilities who should make the decisions concerning it's implementation.

However, all these various ways of teaching children in the

congregation is **our ministry**, not the parents' ministry, even though it serves as an extension of their ministry. The mercy ministry conducted with quilts for missions is **our ministry**, not simply the quilting ladies' ministry. The mercy ministry of alms-giving administered by the Board of Human Care, the ministry conducted at Grace Lutheran School, our financial support of missionaries through our synod—all **our ministry**, not simply the ministry the individual people involved.

If the congregation views ways of administering God's grace in its various forms as governed only by those who benefit by it then the congregation has re-defined their concept of carrying out their ministry **together as a congregation**. Ministry becomes based on special interest areas or groups rather than on the Gospel and the sacraments. This way of doing ministry is very dangerous to proper functioning as the body of Christ because it can foster division rather than a unified purpose. We are instructed in Scripture to live a life *worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . standing firm in **one spirit**, with **one mind** striving side by side for the faith of the gospel* (cf. Philippians 1:27). We are instructed to be *of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in full accord and of **one mind*** (cf. Philippians 2:2), having *no divisions among us*, but being ***united in the same mind and the same judgment***. (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10).

Special interest ministry can be the devil's way of taking the focus

off of a submission to the Jesus Christ as Lord in humble faith. It can produce a self-centered understanding of the Christian faith which cares only about “what’s in it for me.” It can lead to a lack of commitment to our purpose of dispensing and receiving the forgiveness of sins in **our ministry together**. It can even leave those who lead feeling frustrated because they receive no intentional direction and commitment from the congregation as a whole. It can even lead into the sin of self-righteous judgment, harboring contempt toward all those people who “aren’t on board” with “our ministry.”

Brothers and sisters, we as a congregation have been given the fullness of God’s grace in Jesus Christ! Colossians 2:10 says: *You have been filled in Him, Who is the head of all rule and authority.* When the focus is on the ministry of the Gospel and the sacraments then we see each other as sinners **who need** what is dispensed and received in this place during Divine Service—God’s means of grace. We receive His complete and total forgiveness of sins through the Gospel and the sacraments administered in this place. We also dispense God’s complete and total forgiveness of sins through the Gospel and the sacraments administered in this place to repentant sinners. Therefore, we are committed to and care about every aspect of this ministry in our congregation, whether or not we are directly involved in it. We are involved by virtue of being Christ’s Church in this place.

So, when we think of the terms “ministry” or “minister” it should bring thoughts of the Gospel and the sacraments which have their complete focus in Christ. It should not be used to simply describe stuff that the pastor of the congregation does. If it is used in connection with the pastor it should properly refer to the Gospel he preaches and the sacraments which he administers . . . which brings us to looking at where the pastor fits into this picture of the congregational ministry. How does Scripture describe his office in the congregation? What is the special relationship between the congregation and the office of the Public Ministry through the Divine Call. This we will take up next week. Till then . . .

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

and the love of God

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

(2 Corinthians 13:14)

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.