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Leadership and Power in the Ministry of the Church

A resource for discussion

The Lutheran World Federation
– A Communion of Churches
Geneva, 2007

Leadership and Power in the Ministry of the Church

A resource for discussion

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on behalf of
The Lutheran World Federation
– A Communion of Churches

Department for Theology and Studies

Geneva, 2007

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Lutheran World Federation

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Introduction

The Message adopted by the Tenth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Winnipeg, Canada, 2003, repeatedly refers to the issues of leadership, ministry and power and their abuse within the member churches.

> Because communion involves a commitment to the sharing of power, we must ask, as did the Curitiba Assembly, "How various groups within the church exercise power over others to exclude them from full participation in the Body of Christ:" Misuse of institutional power is evident in our churches … Many churches still do not ordain women and/or keep women from participating fully in decision-making processes … [and] youth often are marginalized in and excluded from the life of our churches.[1]

> […] Therefore we commit ourselves and call on member churches to:
>
> … facilitate cross-cultural communication that enables us to listen sensitively and to respond authentically and gracefully, with an awareness of unequal power dynamics; …
>
> … facilitate dialog within the communion on areas of disagreement, such as understandings and practices of the ministry, involving both men and women, both ordained and lay, in a spirit of mutual respect and in quest of common understandings
>
> … make the church's institutional power more transparent and accountable, with a deepened commitment to sharing resources and developing inclusive styles of leadership.[2]

> […] The church must also be aware of the possibility that it may misuse its power, especially through traditions and practices that exclude and oppress.[3]

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[1] *For the Healing of the World. Official Report. LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, Canada, 21–31 July 2003* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004), p. 51.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 52.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

> […] The gospel of liberation must be applied in practical contexts of oppression and marginalization, within the church as well as in society. [4]

Following repeated discussions, the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD) eventually developed a set of guidelines for dealing with different kinds of conflict within and between member churches. Much time and energy are devoted to settling conflicts that are often related to the issues of leadership and power.

Issues pertaining to leadership and power in the ministry of the church arise throughout the whole Lutheran communion, sometimes simmering just beneath the surface, other times surfacing openly. The Tenth Assembly expressly called member churches to face up to these issues and to seek constructive solutions. Numerous efforts are underway in order to respond to this commitment. The following is an attempt to contribute to these efforts.

What is involved is multifaceted and needs to be examined from various perspectives, using a variety of tools and resources. Sociological approaches are helpful for analyzing the structures of and dynamics within the church. Psychological approaches can help get at factors such as self-esteem, trust and fear. Management approaches deal with administering, planning, organizing, supervising, accounting, evaluating, etc.

This paper focuses on the theological aspects and seeks to encourage reflection and discussion in the churches on how leadership and power are exercised in light of central biblical and theological understandings. How can power and leadership be exercised in ways that are consistent with what the church preaches and teaches? Particular emphasis will be given to biblical references as well as to Lutheran teachings related to ministry.

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[4] *Ibid.,* p. 60.

Biblical perspectives

Mark 10:35-45: Servanthood

This passage might be considered as a Magna Carta for leadership in Jesus' terms. The two disciples who ask for places of honor and power in the Kingdom of God (vs. 37) prove themselves to be "of the world." Jesus seems quite aware that leadership patterns operating in the world can easily lead to authoritarian or oppressive outcomes. While in this text Jesus' disciples want honor and power, Jesus insists that quite a different pattern of leadership ought to prevail among those who are empowered by the Spirit of God to be his disciples. The direction is clear (vs. 43ff.): service instead of domination, humility instead of striving for superiority, healing instead of dividing, setting an example instead of subjugation. This is so because Jesus exercised his lordship in a very specific way: in terms of servanthood and deaconhood (vs. 45). The implication is that either leadership in the church conforms to this or it is not Christian leadership.

Because of the way in which power structures sometimes operate in our churches, leadership is exercised, symbols and rites of power are employed (even some liturgical vestments), and distinctions are made between "clergy" and "laity," between church leaders (usually male) and ordinary members, etc., we need to ask critically, Are leadership and power being exercised in conformity with Jesus' model of diaconal servanthood?

At the same time, we need to be aware that dominating power can sometimes hide in the guise of "servant" language. Such language can be used to keep women or other dominated groups submissive. It is important to check with such persons as to whether they experience particular structures, patterns and behaviors to be in line with Jesus' example. Or, are they mostly serving the interests of those in power in order to maintain their own positions and status?

We find an interesting commentary on this in the passage about Jesus washing his disciples' feet (Jn 13:1–17). There is a similar tension between a dominating power and status oriented approach on Peter's part on the one

hand and, on the other, Jesus' own practice and the theological rationale he provides for it (vs. 12–17). It is no coincidence that this passage is frequently referred to in diaconal contexts. It applies to all Christians alike, whatever their involvement in the church. We might say that, in principle, if the church as a whole is not diaconal, then it is not the church of Jesus Christ.

How does your church operate in light of this criterion? Where do you see hopeful structures and patterns at work? In contrast, in what ways do Jesus' practice and teaching critically challenge your church?

For church leaders: Which model of leadership guides you in your daily work? In how far do you exercise your leadership in ways compatible with Jesus' model?

Luke 12:35–48: Stewardship

This passage brings to light another feature of Christ centered leadership, namely accountability. It does not refer directly to the relationship between leader and community, but rather to the relation between master, manager and slave. The slaves and the manager are not free to do what they want; they are bound by their master's will and judgment. Similarly, the church is bound up with Christ as its Savior and Lord. Hence, accountability is one of the links between the story and the reality of the church: the church as a whole is bound up with Christ and accountable to him.

Leadership in terms of stewardship means that people and/or material resources are entrusted to our care. We are called to use them with care, for the common good, rather than our private gain. Church leaders as stewards are called to work with church members, colleagues and fellow ministers in such a way that the mission of the church is being furthered and supported. All members should be able to contribute their gifts to the mission of the church and cooperate in this common endeavor.

The church as an institution cannot function without material resources: workers need to be paid, buildings maintained, people fed and accommodated, educational institutions supported, and various kinds of resources obtained. Managing all of this requires sound financial administration.

Leaders who are entrusted with money are called to use it in ways that support church activities. They are accountable not only to Christ, the head of the church, but also to the wider church bodies such as synods/dioceses, boards, committees, etc.

How is stewardship of personal and material resources exercised in your church? Are there structures and mechanisms in place to ensure accountability in how they are used?

For leaders: To what extent do you carry out your leadership functions with the awareness that you are accountable to God? How does this consciousness shape the way in which you exercise leadership? Are you transparent to church members? Do you account for how you use the power and material resources entrusted to your care?

Matthew 18:1–20: Pastoral care

The theme of this text is care in humility: those who are weak and vulnerable need special attention; those who are lost need to be sought, pursued and brought back; and those who have sinned are to be confronted with what God desires in such a way that their dignity is preserved and they are not publicly disgraced.

Although "shepherd" is often used as a designation for leaders, its meaning varies considerably. In Ezekiel 34, it refers to the political leaders of Israel, in Psalm 23 it is used as a metaphor for God. The New Testament makes use of it only sparingly, although John 10 elaborates on Jesus as the good shepherd. Ephesians 4:11 is one of the few passages where "shepherd" is used to denote church leaders, along with apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers.

Take note of the ambiguity of the shepherd metaphor: the sheep are utterly dependent on the shepherd. This implies an hierarchy between the two: one leads and the other is led. This metaphor tends to reduce the sheep to being recipients of that which the shepherd gives. This clearly limited metaphor has also led to widespread misunderstandings. Even

though leaders in the church carry special responsibility, they are a part of a common mission to which everyone is called to contribute.

In how far does the shepherd model guide and shape pastoral care as it is exercised in your community? How can it be used in ways that are not dominating but protect the vulnerable, seek the lost and reconcile those whose relationships are broken?

For leaders: When you deal with the weak and vulnerable, how do you take seriously their dignity and personal resources? In shepherding others, how do you maintain an awareness of your own weaknesses, failures and sins? Do you also consider yourself as a sheep that needs to be shepherded?

> Jesus demonstrated to the disciples that it was possible to live an abundant life without being corrupt and materialistic. He showed them the need to seek to know God's will and live in it, the need for responsibility. The need for faith in God's providence and for involvement in building God's kingdom was His model to the end. His love for His Father and for the disciples He had given him extended to giving His life for them. *In this way Jesus overturned the value system inherent in the disciples and passed on to them the real purpose for living, working, and serving*. Jesus, who never struggled for anything material or even kept anything for himself, became the most influential leader that has ever lived. His life remains an unparalleled model.[5]

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12:14: One body—many members. What edifies the church?

The "one body—many members" metaphor in Romans 12:3–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–30 points to another relevant aspect of leadership and power in the

[5] George Mark Dz.D. Fihavango, *Jesus and Leadership. Analysis of rank, status, power and authority as reflected in the Synoptic Gospels from a perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)*, Inaugural Dissertation, Neuendettelsau 2004, p. 191, author's own emphasis. I owe valuable insights to Fihavango. He not only analyzes in detail the three biblical sections referred to above, but also places them into the context of his own church.

church. For Paul, the fundamental truth is that all baptized believers depend on one another and are intimately bound to one another. They are appreciative of one another, valuing what each one contributes to the church, just as members of a human body need each other if the body is to function properly. We should not disregard one another's contributions, claim superiority, or monopolize the Spirit's wisdom. Doing so leads to ecclesial disability. We are to relate to one another in complementary ways, making our respective contributions; what one lacks, the other brings, and vice versa.

Significantly, the giver of all of these different gifts is God the Holy Spirit. Thus, within this framework, we are reminded that our abilities are not the result of our human efforts, but gifts that we can only receive with open hands. We are to develop them further and put them to use, continually aware that we are not in control but that the church is a creation of the Holy Spirit. Given the close interplay between Word and Spirit, we can also call the church a creation of God's Word.

This Pauline insight has certain implications for understanding and using leadership and power in the church. Interestingly, this converges with what we learned from Jesus: power is given by God the Holy Spirit for the purpose of furthering the mission of the church. It is poured out on all baptized believers, recognizing the different ways in which they serve. Different gifts and ministries are on a par with each other: they are bound together in mutual service.

Bringing the God-given gifts to bear in this Spirit-driven community is not an end in itself. Everything is to be done for the edification of the church. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul applies this principle when he assesses the advantages of speaking in tongues versus prophesying during worship. While he does not denounce the gift of speaking in tongues, he gives clear preference to prophesy because it edifies the whole church rather than just the individual. "Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church" (1 Cor 14:4).

Christian leadership edifies the church, encourages the active participation of all, opens up space for doing so, supports the gifts that people bring, removes

barriers that prevent others from making their contribution and helps solve tensions and conflicts so that the gifts can again flow freely. In short, leadership must be conducive to the witness and the mission of the church.

This implies a preference for what today we might call collegial structures of leadership. Leadership is not only a matter between an individual and a community but concerns the way in which leaders relate to one another. Parish or congregational councils are established not only for the pragmatic purpose of assuring that the parish or congregation is run smoothly, but also because the Holy Spirit is upon the parish/congregation as a whole, rather than only with one person. Regular meetings between ministers of a larger region reflect the basic need for mutual advice and support.

Many LWF member churches have established bishop councils. This indicates that these leaders, too, need their colleagues for the sake of mutually nurturing and challenging one another. In many churches, they are also part of synodical bodies with leadership responsibilities for carrying out the mission of the church.

Some lament the lack of a strong central authority vested in one person who tells the church what is right or wrong. Lutheran churches have deliberately refrained from establishing such, trusting and convinced that Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in all those who are baptized, who believe and who are called to participate in the mission of the church.

Numbers 11 and Acts 6

Other biblical passages emphasize the importance of leaders sharing responsibility and power. Moses complains about a burden that is evidently too heavy for him to carry alone. God proposes a remedy: "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel … I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself" (Num 11:16–17).

Acts 6:1–7 suggests that the Early Church in Jerusalem decided to appoint a new group of leaders beyond the apostles, who would be responsible for the

distribution of food. The decisive point here is that the leadership responsibility became so complex that it needed to be shared and extended beyond the previous leaders. Note that this shift was made in close collaboration with and with the explicit inclusion of the entire community.

The Old Testament prophets

Jesus was and is an Israelite, a Jew, standing firmly in the tradition of his people. As far as leadership and power are concerned, there is a tradition that dates back to the Old Testament. Jesus' leadership concept and vision were in a way prepared and prefigured by the prophets (but here not in ways that foretell the future).

Before the fall of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Babylonian exile in 587 BC, the prophets' message mainly referred to their particular situation. At times, they would launch a scathing critique against the prevailing economic, social and political conditions, denouncing injustice and oppression. Consequently, these prophets were not leaders who exercised dominant power in their community.

Their authority was challenged and denied frequently, in particular by those in positions of power. Often they were lonely and vulnerable figures. Amos, for example, was thrown out of the sanctuary in Bethel by the chief priest because he had critiqued the way in which the cult was celebrated there.

To a large extent, the prophets understood their mission as taking the official leaders to task, confronting them with God's will which they had violated, and calling them to repent and change their ways. The prophets expected the leaders to protect the weak and vulnerable, to make sure the rights of widows, orphans and strangers were preserved and heeded, to defend the poor and marginalized, to promote justice, etc. (e.g., Isa 3:13–15; Ezek 34:1–10). Leadership means serving the people, bearing their interests in mind and pursuing them faithfully.

An important model for this is the "Servant of God," who figures prominently in parts of the Book of Isaiah (see the Servant of God songs in

chapters 42, 49, 50 and 52f). Most striking is the first of these songs in Isaiah 42:1–9. This passage epitomizes all the features of leadership identified above in the three Gospel texts: the Servant of God is installed by, dependent on and accountable to God. He exists for the sake of others, and cares in particular for those whose life is at risk. He identifies with those "below" rather than enjoying a position of prestige, superior status and dominating power. His leadership is service committed to justice, healing and protecting the bruised.

In the context of the Old Testament, justice refers to the relationship between God and God's people (the covenant), as well as to relations among God's people. This indicates that the Servant of God's leadership relates not only to individuals, but also embraces social structures and the conditions that shape and determine them. In this wider sense, there is a "political" dimension implied in this leadership concept encompassing care, service and commitment to liberation, justice and reconciliation. This can be thought of as "prophetic diaconia."[6] Evidently Jesus continues this tradition.

It is hardly a coincidence that, from the beginning, the Early Church saw Jesus prefigured in the Servant of God and, vice versa, recognized Jesus as fulfilling the promises made in Isaiah. This deep connection underscores once again that exercising leadership and power through service is a basic concern that unites both parts of the Bible thus undergirding both the church's mission and ministry.

Leadership as ministry from a Lutheran perspective

Leadership as ministry means two complementary things. While being a mode of ministry, ministry is also the framework in which leadership is located. "Ministry" is an ambiguous term. We often think of ministry as the ordained, pastoral ministry. From a Lutheran perspective, however,

[6] Reinhard Boettcher (ed.), *Prophetic Diakonia*: *For the Healing of the World* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003).

ministry is much broader and includes all baptized believers. Hence, we need to reevaluate the distinctions we make between, for example, church leaders, women, youth and those "in the pews." Furthermore, ministry (*ministerium*) means "service." Let us now look at some aspects of leadership within a Lutheran understanding of ministry.

Priesthood of all believers

From a Lutheran perspective, ministry must begin with paying attention to the priesthood of all believers. Who is a priest and who is not? Contrary to general wisdom, according to Luther, a pastor or bishop is not a "priest." In a strict sense, the only priest is Jesus Christ. In the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is portrayed as the great high priest who atoned for our sins through his death on the cross, and who intercedes with us before God the Father (Heb 8–10). If we take seriously that God has saved us solely through God's grace in Christ and in faith, then no other human being can claim this title. Therefore a "priest" celebrating the Mass in the sense of it being a sacrifice is, from a Lutheran perspective, a contradiction in terms. We can only receive Christ's self-sacrifice, celebrate and proclaim it.

This does not mean that human beings can no longer be called priests. Referring to a famous New Testament passage, and taking into account Christ's intimate relationship with his followers, Luther says:

> Now just as Christ by his birthright obtained these two prerogatives, so he imparts them to and shares them with everyone who believes in him according to the law of the above-mentioned marriage, according to which the wife owns whatever belongs to the husband. Hence all of us who believe in Christ are priests and kings in Christ, as 1 Pet 2: [9] says: "You are a chosen race, God's own people, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."[7]

[7] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works,* vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 354.

> As far as that goes, we are all consecrated as priests through baptism ...[8]

This priestly responsibility is lived out in two ways: first, in teaching others what God has done for us in Christ; second, in bringing the concerns of others before God, especially in prayer. This concept of the priesthood of all believers is a living reality, in particular in those churches in which the number of members is growing largely due to evangelistic activities and prayer fellowship.

Since the priesthood is founded in baptism and faith, all are equal before God. There is no gradation between a believing peasant woman and a bishop in terms of their sanctity or closeness to God. Both of them are priests. As Luther wrote, "All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, except that of office."[9] The concept of the priesthood of all believers has basically removed the distinction between "laity" and clergy. The former do not lack the spiritual dignity and sanctity of the latter. Therefore, if at all, we should use the term laity only in the Lutheran sense of the universal priesthood.

How is the priesthood of all believers lived out in your church?

For (ordained) church leaders: How do you explicitly encourage the members of our church to live out their priesthood?

Ordained ministry

The ordained ministry exists for the sake of the gospel and the universal priesthood. First, sharing the gospel message with others requires a keen understanding of the gospel itself, so that we bear witness to it rather than to a different message. Faith that dares proclaim and teach

[8] Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, 1520," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works,* vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 127.

[9] *Ibid.*

the gospel to others needs itself to be nurtured constantly. Likewise, the practice of bringing other people's concerns, needs and plights before God in prayer needs to be strengthened and nurtured. Contributing to this is a major purpose of the ordained ministry.

Second, publicly sharing the gospel and interceding on behalf of others for God's help, and publicly celebrating the sacraments need to be done in an orderly manner. Luther was adamant about this. No one is allowed to storm into the pulpit or to the altar and claim for themselves the authority to carry out this ministry. This can only be done in such a way that the church "ordains" a person, i.e., appoints those persons considered suitable, prepared and capable and sets them apart for these tasks through prayer and the laying on of hands. This is done for the sake and on behalf of the whole church.

In many LWF member churches, this kind of ministry is carried out not only by pastors but also by evangelists who are not ordained but usually commissioned or called. Distinctions made in the sixteenth century may have to be reexamined today.

To set apart an ordained pastor is to delegate: what belongs to all is assigned to a specific person, the ordained pastor. At the same time, Luther taught that the ordained ministry is instituted by God: "I want to speak only of the ministry which God has instituted, the responsibility of which is to minister word and sacrament to a congregation, among whom they reside."[10] And in the Apology, one of the Lutheran Confessional Writings, we read, "For the ministry of the Word has the command of God and has magnificent promises…."[11]

In your church, how do the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry relate? Do they complement and support each other or are they in tension?

For ordained church leaders: How can you exercise the ordained ministry in ways that encourage and support the priesthood of all believers?

[10] *Ibid.,* p. 176.

[11] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 220.

The relationship between the universal priesthood and the ordained ministry

Even though the ordained ministry does not owe its existence to the will of the congregation, the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry are nevertheless closely interrelated. In an article written in 1523, Luther teaches "That a Christian assembly or congregation has the right and power to judge all teaching and to call, appoint, and dismiss teachers."[12] Hence, pastors should be very sensitive to how parishioners receive their preaching and teaching, trusting that the Holy Spirit illuminates the whole congregation. Likewise, the bishop's preaching and teaching should be in conformity with the gospel. In other words, the work of the ordained ministers is to be "checked" by the church members as part of their universal ministry. To do so, church members need to be equipped by pastors and teachers with a solid understanding of the Bible and Christian faith.

What the 2002 draft LWF document states with regard to the office of the bishop applies to the ordained ministry in general:

> In the church there is no absolute distinction between the directed and the directing, between the teaching and the taught, between those who decide and those who are the objects of decision. All stand under Scripture; all are anointed by the Spirit; all are fallible sinners. Mutual accountability binds together episcopal and other ministries with all baptized believers.

Within this framework the text continues:

> It is through the communio of charisms, the total interplay of ministries within which Episcopal ministry plays a leading role, that the church trusts that it will be led into the truth.[13]

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[12] Helmut T. Lehman (ed.), *Luther's Works,* vol. 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 301ff.

[13] *The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. A Lutheran Statement 2002* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003), p. 18 (no 34). This document is currently under revision.

Ordination is a case in point. Luther suggested it is usually the bishop who ordains, but he continues:

> Therefore, when a bishop consecrates it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others. It is like ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, choosing one of themselves to rule the inheritance in the interests of all. In one sense they are all kings and of equal power, and yet one of them is charged with the responsibility of ruling.[14]

For church leaders: How can you further express and facilitate this interplay between ordinary church members and ordained ministers? Between pastors and bishops/church presidents? How can the concept of "communio" (living, working, witnessing together) be implemented in different areas of the church?

Episcopé variant of ordained ministry

In a larger region, the ministry of oversight makes an important contribution to the church's mission by ensuring that the gospel is properly preached and the sacraments administered in such a way that they communicate the gospel. But sometimes this, like any leadership position, becomes entangled with very worldly interests. For example, some LWF member churches, which previously did not have "bishops," decided to introduce this term, perhaps because of the power and prestige associated with such in the church and wider society. This can contribute to power struggles within the church. From a Lutheran perspective, the stakes are high since such developments tend to remove power from the priesthood of all believers, which lies at the heart of Luther's concept of ministry.

The Bible and history provide helpful orientation. In the New Testament, the early writings do not refer to bishops at all (with the exception of Phil 1:1). The later writings use the titles "bishop" and "elder/pastor" (*episcopos* and *presbyteros*) interchangeably (e.g., 1 Tim 3:1–7). As it expanded, the

[14] Luther, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 128.

Early Church chose from among themselves one whom they appointed as bishop to maintain their unity and cohesion in the face of heresies.

In the sixteenth century, Philipp Melanchthon also reflected this when he wrote:

> The unity of the church consists therefore in this association under one head through the same gospel and the same office ... But so that everything in the church happens in an orderly manner according to the rule of Paul, and so that the shepherds would yield to one another and be concerned for each other and avoid differences of opinion and divisions, a useful order was added, namely, that out of many presbyters (pastors) one was chosen as bishop to guide the church by teaching the gospel, taking care for discipline ... These orders are useful in preserving the unity of the church, if those who are heads fulfill their office.[15]

Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession refers to the bishop's office as a kind of extension of the ordained pastoral office, reaching beyond a local congregation into a larger region:

> According to the gospel the power of the keys or of the bishops is a power and command of God to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sin, and to administer and distribute the sacraments ... Not bodily but eternal things and benefits are given in this way, such as eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.[16]

Then follows an important qualification:

> Consequently, according to divine right it is the office of the bishop to preach the gospel, to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine

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[15] Philipp Melanchthon, "De unitate Ecclesiae et ordine ministrorum Evangelii," in *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 4, at **http://books.google.com/books?vid=0Nk01EGOTPT95Zn_Y2&id=QQ8RAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=%22corpus+reformatorum%22#PPA367,M1**

[16] Book of Concord, *op. cit.* (note 11), p. 92.

that is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest--not with human power but with God?s Word alone.[17]

This caring purpose is quite consistent with the calling of every baptized believer.

If your church has bishops, how do they exercise their ministry?

For bishops: What "message" do you communicate to church members through the way in which you exercise your ministry of oversight? How do you relate to pastors and those in other specific ministries with their respective responsibilities? Is your decision making consultative and inclusive? How could this be enhanced?

Teaching ministry

Leadership in the church is also exercised through teaching. In this sense, Lutheran churches do not invest a particular institution or person with binding authority. Teaching most commonly occurs through the preaching of the gospel, as carried out by ordained ministers, bishops, and through the priesthood of all believers, especially teachers in local settings. In many churches, it is not only bishops but, as a regional expression of the priesthood of all believers, also the synods that are involved in preserving the integrity and unity of the preaching and teaching of the gospel. Theologians teaching at schools, universities and seminaries participate in this responsibility in their own specific ways.

According to Lutheran understanding, a consensus is to be sought among all teachers as to how the gospel should be preached and taught in a given situation. The criterion for the right preaching and teaching is the Holy Scripture, which the Lutheran Confessional Writings help us to read and interpret. Yet the Bible leaves space for a wide range of interpretations, in

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 94.

particular when it is applied to concrete issues of faith and ethos.[18] Thus, the whole church needs to be engaged in processes of listening to the Bible, to one another and wrestling with what are adequate, faithful and creative ways of understanding the Word. According to Lutheran tradition, there is no way of appealing to a superior institution other than praying for God's guidance through the power of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of teaching power is to empower all in the power of the Holy Spirit.

How is the teaching ministry exercised in your church? On the basis of what qualifications?

For church leaders: How do you balance your primary responsibilities for overseeing preaching and teaching in your church with the many administrative details you have to tend to? How might some of the latter be delegated?

Diaconal ministry

The focus on the ordained ministry has often overshadowed the diaconal ministry of deacons and deaconesses, which is rooted in the Bible and the Early Church and was revived in the nineteenth century.

A recent LWF consultation called for considering the diaconal ministry as an integral part of the ordained ministry as a way of bearing witness to the gospel.

> Testifying to the Triune God's unconditional love for the broken world, which is what the diaconal ministry is basically all about, is as valid a way of bearing witness to God's grace and mercy in Christ as is proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments.[19]

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[18] Reinhard Boettcher (ed.), *Witnessing to God's Faithfulness. Issues of Biblical Authority. LWF Studies 2/2006* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2006), p. 86.

[19] Reinhard Boettcher (ed.), *The Diaconal Ministry in the Mission of the Church. LWF Studies 1/2006* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2006), p. 8.

The diaconal ministry epitomizes the meaning of leadership in a very distinct way. *Diaconos* was perhaps the only title that Jesus attributed to himself, at least indirectly (Mk 10:45). The diaconal ministry has never had a triumphalistic profile; instead it has been humble, unpretentious and seeking to protect and preserve life (*cf.* Isa 42:1–4). Strengthening the diaconal ministry could provide the church with an opportunity to rediscover and affirm leadership patterns that are in conformity with the gospel.

> Does your church recognize diaconal ministers, deacons and/or deaconesses? If so, how do such persons relate to ordained pastors? How are they and their role valued?

God's sovereign Word and Spirit and the freedom of the church

Freedom is an important theme in Lutheran theology, echoing Luther's 1520 tract on Christian freedom. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Lutherans are free to follow their own instincts without any authority to guide and correct them. This would constitute a serious misunderstanding of Christian freedom.

The Reformation emphasis on freedom was polemically directed against a tendency in Roman Catholic theology, spirituality and an hierarchically ordered ministry, which endangered the freedom and sovereignty of God's Word. Some of the doctrine taught and spirituality promoted went against the grain of the gospel of God's free grace. The Reformers recognized that under the doctrinal and institutional claims of the pope and bishops, the Word of God was being domesticated and held captive. Thus, the Reformers sought to rediscover, preach and teach God's Word as liberating people from the bondage of sin as well as from the captivity of the church. They regarded the church as being utterly dependent on God, living out of God's grace, and constantly needing to be renewed, corrected and transformed by God. From a Lutheran perspective, Christian freedom includes freedom from ecclesial bonds that prevent us from enjoying this freedom in and through God.

This understanding has far reaching implications for the use of power and the exercise of leadership in the church. No human being is in control of God's Word and Spirit. Pastors and bishops who are charged to proclaim the gospel publicly can only receive and share it in humility. They are to put their own creativity and skills at the service of God's Word, praying for the Holy Spirit to guide and direct their fallible attempts to communicate the gospel. Luther was confident that the human word in the preacher's mouth is really God's sovereign and living Word. It is exclusively God's gracious work in Christ that we can only receive, celebrate and proclaim in humility.

Thus, any differences of proximity to God and any gradations of sanctity between members of the church are radically relativized. What remains is an inclusive sense of participation in the mission of the church, as it bears witness to God's grace. The grandmother who teaches her children the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, the parish elder, the pastor, the women's leader, the bishop, the youth representative, the deacon, etc.—all are united in this mission and contribute their specific gifts to it.

Is this consciousness of Christian freedom alive in your church? How is it expressed and lived out?

God's "two rules" within the one church

The Lutheran tradition understands that God rules creation in two distinct ways: the church with the gospel, the secular world with the law. Nevertheless, this distinction becomes blurry when we realize that much of what occurs in and through the institutional church requires expertise, standards and practices that are governed not by the gospel but by the law. Church institutions such as schools, seminaries or diaconal institutions need constitutions, regulations, funding and accounting procedures. A worker who violates such procedures might be dismissed, even if in theological terms he or she is viewed as a justified sinner. The orderly functioning of the church and its institutions requires professional competence and this competence may sometimes be measured by standards which, at some points, differ from those of the church.

In your church, what is the relationship between the authority of those with secular expertise and the spiritual authority of those who are ordained? How are differences negotiated? How can this distinction help to prevent pastors from overextending their authority into arenas where they lack expertise?

Leadership as ministry in communion

What might the above understandings of leadership and power in ministry mean in a communion of Lutheran churches? On whatever level, five implications are key: inclusiveness, diversity, dialogue, accountability and transparency.

Inclusiveness

Since all baptized believers participate in the mission of the church, it is the prime responsibility of church leaders at all levels to enable and encourage them to contribute their God given charismata to this mission (Rom 12:3–8). In contexts where power continues to lie in the hands of older men, women and youth need particular advocacy and encouragement, as do those who are from different ethnic groups than the leadership. Where leaders exclude members of the church, they cut off parts of the body of Christ. If baptism and faith are what constitute church membership, then there is no basis for excluding fellow sisters and brothers from full participation in the mission of the church, unless they flagrantly deny the gospel and damage the church's mission.

Diversity

Inclusiveness urges us to embrace that which is different, in the expectation that differences complement one another. Often differences do not contradict what is known but shed new light on it. While older men might have great wisdom, they might sometimes find it difficult to cope with contemporary challenges. Young women and men may bring fresh insights in order to face these challenges. The way in which people read and understand the Bible differs, and different perspectives may enrich and challenge one another in productive ways. The critical limits to diversity

are checked by the gospel. Leaders should promote the appreciation of diversity as expressing the richness of responses to the gospel.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a fundamental way of communicating. Since no one possesses the truth—it remains God's truth—we are bound to struggle together, to listen to the gospel and to one another, and assume that everyone has something to contribute. Dialogue transcends borders between men and women, young and old, "ordinary people" and "leaders," different ethnic groups and cultures. Dialogue fosters relationships, promotes communion and, *vice versa*, removes suspicion and fear. In sum, it enriches all.

Accountability

In the community of the church, no one is on their own. Much of what each of us does affects others. Thus, we need to give account, stand up to the critical scrutiny of others, and respond honestly and sincerely. This applies in particular to leaders. They are called to account for the power they wield and the money they administer. Unless leaders do so, patterns of corruption or abuse of power, resentment, suspicion and distrust are likely to develop, given the sinful propensities we all have. The stability, image and mission of the church can then be severely affected.

Transparency

Lutheran tradition has always held that God's Word is clear in itself and promotes an insightful faith. As an expression of this, communication and interaction in the church should be transparent. In particular, pastors and bishops, as public preachers and teachers of God's Word, should be transparent in what they say and do. People will always realize if they resort to half-truths and lies because they have something to hide. They will in turn become cynical, and the leaders will lose their authority.

Leadership and power in the Lutheran communion

Finally, we need to acknowledge the considerable disparities in power and leadership among churches of the Lutheran communion, which deeply affect how they relate to one another and to the Geneva secretariat. As a communion, we reflect the economic, political, cultural and other asymmetries of our globalized world. These realities are often more determinative of how we relate to one another than are the spiritual realities of what it means to be a communion.

For example, a small elite in a church may exercise control over the resources, coming from elsewhere in the communion, in ways that effectively cut others off from legitimate access to such. These leaders and their "favorites" are the ones who travel to international meetings and have access to information and resources that are channeled through the leaders.

Dynamics such as these highlight the urgent need to work tirelessly for leadership patterns and practices that are subject to checks and balances, and that raise up the visions and needs of ordinary church members, particularly women and youth. Leadership is needed that emanates from a spirituality and theology of communion. Facing up to this challenge should be high on the agenda of the communion as we move into the future.

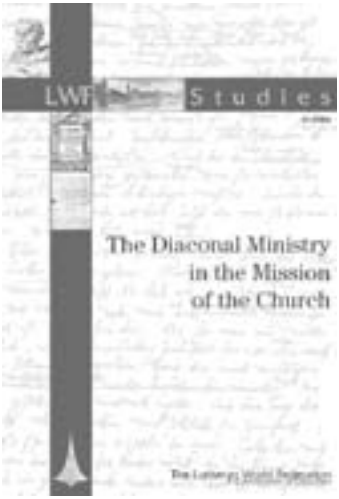
Conclusion

When we consider power in the exercise of leadership, we must ask the decisive question, *cui bono* (to whose benefit)? What purpose is it used for? What are the results? Who benefits, who has to pay the price? Who is in, who is out? Does it hinder or further people's resourcefulness?

Is power being used to dominate people? Is it authoritarian in character, repressing dissent and alternatives? Or is it liberating and creating solidarity? Are those exercising power willing to account for its legitimacy transparently and responsibly? Is it intended to serve a few, or is it a shared source of life?

Jesus healed the sick and wounded and raised up those who were bent over (Lk 13:10–17). He forgave those who were weighed down by sin and called those to repentance who ignored their own sin and threw stones at others (Jn 8:2–11) “a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;” (Isa 42:3). If the church and its leaders follow in the footsteps of their Servant Lord, the church’s mission and its credibility will be enhanced and people outside will be willing to respond to the invitation to “Come and see”(Jn 1:46).

The Diaconal Ministry in the Mission of the Church

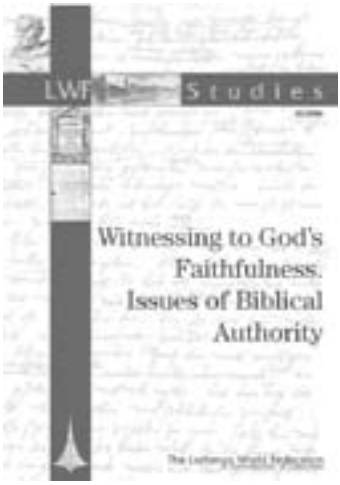


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The main presentations and final statement of a global consultation on the diaconal ministry are brought together in this publication. Churches are challenged to reexamine how they understand and order the diaconal ministry as an expression of diakonia as a core component of the church's mission in society.

Witnessing to God's Faithfulness.

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