



On Keeping the List Short

In his 1530 “Exhortation to All Clergy Assembled at Augsburg,” Martin Luther made two lists: one short, enumerating the essential topics to be dealt with “in the true Christian church”; one long—and deliciously sarcastic—reporting the actual concerns of “the pretended church.”

Those involved in ecclesiastical studies of ministry can take heart: included in the essentials list are issues like “What a bishop is” and “What a deacon is” (*Luther’s Works* 34.53). The non-essentials list includes such things as albs and altar cloths, cowls and candlesticks (54-58).

The point here (mine and, I think, Luther’s) is not to reject things liturgical or the valid contributions of folks like acolytes and lectors (who also make the second list), but to get the questions in the proper context. The essentials list begins with “What the law is” and “What the gospel is”; it ends with “Providing for the poor and hospitals” and “Ministering to the dying.” The list of non-essentials begins with “Indulgences” and ends with “St. Blasius’ lights” (check the footnote if you’re plagued by throat infections!).

Significantly, in the short list the questions about bishops and deacons come between “What the keys are” and “What the preaching office is.” As we study ministry together, within and among Christian traditions, Luther helps us get the context right and keep the list short. Ministry is about law and gospel, sin and grace, confession and forgiveness, faith and hope, prayer and good works, visiting the sick and providing for the poor (all make Luther’s list). It is not about a thousand other things. Yes, somewhere along the line we will need to put labels on those who minister, to speak of issues of governance, and to figure out who gets to be in which pension plan; but unless it is clear that those conversations are essential to the proclamation of the gospel, they will belong on the second list.

The thematic articles in this issue do not claim to be comprehensive. They mean only to contribute to the discussion; they hope to help us keep the lists straight.

Is ministry a matter of service or of power? Through a careful institutional and theological examination *Martha Ellen Stortz* avoids a simplistic either/or; she points to a power which serves as it is transformed by the cross of Christ.

Richard Nysse recognizes that ministry is and should be difficult. The difficulty is inherent in ministry’s relationship to the gospel; but it is exacerbated by certain

realities in American culture. Nysse’s work reminds us that truly Christian ministry is *always* both cultural and cross-cultural.

Péri Rasolondraibe, a Malagasy Lutheran theologian, analyzes and describes the healing ministry in his home church—with the observation of a scholar and the witness of a participant. He wants to shed light on biblical practice and to challenge the Western church to see new

possibilities for ministry today.

Daniel Simundson examines models of ministry in the Old Testament. Simply, but provocatively, he considers the value and limitations of three leadership functions in ancient Israel (priest, prophet, wisdom teacher) for the ministry of the contemporary church.

The evolution of the pastoral office in the early church is described by patristics scholar *Carl Volz*. His work makes clear the contextual realities that affected the church's early understanding of its ministry—realities which will continue to have their significance in the present discussion.

Marc Kolden revives the Reformation's traditional language of vocation. Christians who understand the broad and dynamic view of their calling which Kolden presents will know who they are and what they are about; they will know that mission is what they are called to do all the time, not merely when they are engaged in some special tasks called ministry.

Larry Bouchard's examination of the role of the priest in several examples of contemporary drama argues that personal integrity involves not only knowing oneself but also giving oneself. Bouchard's examples lead to a view of human integrity which is profoundly vocational—a view which will help integrate the person and the office of the pastor.

The Resources section begins with Face to Face. Is it still possible to baptize simply in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Yes, says *Norene Smith*, calling us to hear anew the good news of the traditional language. No, says *Barbara Lundblad*, calling us to move beyond the traditional language to a new vision. In her examination of the Matthean texts for Christmas and Epiphany (Texts in Context), Carol Mork discovers a pattern of revelation and response which lends itself directly to powerful proclamation. Finally, *Marva Dawn* offers a review essay which very nicely introduces us to the work of French Reformed theologian Jacques Ellul.

We begin this issue outside the theme with a special contribution by Claus Westermann.

F.J.G.