

# The Unbiblical Removal of Pastors

A Free Conference of the  
Association of Confessing Evangelical Lutheran Congregations

“Addressing Error in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod”

March 1-3, 2011

Trinity Lutheran Church

Kearney, Missouri

Rev. Scott T. Porath

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

Eagle, Nebraska

## The “Divine Call”

Lutherans confess (in Article V of the Augsburg Confession) that the Office of the Holy Ministry was instituted by Christ so that people might obtain justifying faith, through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Therefore, Lutherans confess that the call into the Holy Ministry is “Divine.”

It is the Lord’s office. He institutes this office in order to make disciples of all nations through baptism and teaching (as we hear in Matthew 28:19-20). On the day of His resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples and said:

“Peace be to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:21-23 NKJV alt, emphasis mine)

It is the Lord’s office. It is Jesus who calls the twelve disciples (Matthew 4:18-22). It is Christ who (according to Ephesians 4:11) gives some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.

The Lord does not call just anyone to be a pastor of His church. Not every Christian, or every Christian man, is eligible to serve in this office. Since it is the Lord’s office, He alone sets the standards for those who may be put into the Office of the Holy Ministry, as well as who may remain in that ministry.

(St. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:1-7) The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

It is the Lord's office. He calls a qualified man and places him as a shepherd over His flock. For the purposes of this paper, I will limit the scope of my discussion to the Lord placing a man as the pastor of a local congregation. To such a man, the Lord gives this charge:

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28 NKJV, emphasis mine)<sup>1</sup>

It is the Lord's office. In days of old He called His servants the prophets and apostles directly (sometimes referred to as an "immediate call"). In our day, He calls pastors indirectly (sometimes referred to as a "mediate" call). In our current context, we confess that the Lord uses instruments to put His man into the Office of the Holy Ministry.

For example, our seminaries are instruments for the training and certification of future pastors. Placement committees and district presidents are also His instruments in assigning a candidate to a congregation. On the local level, the Lord may use surrounding pastors, circuit counselors and the district president as His instruments. And last, but not least, the Lord uses the congregation as His instrument to call His servant to be the pastor of His flock.

### Is the Call "Divine"?

Now, up to this point you have not heard anything new. What you have heard has been confessed in Lutheranism from the days of Luther, Chemnitz and Gerhard. It is found in the pastoral theologies and dogmatics of Walther, Gerberding, Fritz, Pieper, Mueller & Kraus. It is confessed in this decade in the 2003 CTCR report entitled "The Divine Call."

However, in our day, there are errors in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod related to the "Divine Call." The ACELC has noted, and seeks to address these errors. There are errors related to placing a man into the office – and – there are errors when we fail to actually place the man into the office, and yet "certify" him to do Word and Sacrament

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28 and John 20 are the passages cited in the Rite of Ordination in the Lutheran Service Book-Agenda, under the section: "The Institution and the Office of the Holy Ministry." The Acts 20 passage is from the section: "The Responsibilities of the Office of the Holy Ministry."

ministry. This is contrary to our Lutheran Confession which states: “Concerning church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless properly called (*Rite vocatus*).”<sup>2</sup>

If we have erred in putting the man into the office, then it should not surprise us to find errors when a man is removed from the office, or from his “Divine Call.” And that begs the question: Do we in the LCMS truly believe and confess the divinity of the call?

To confess the “Divine Call” is to confess that it is the Lord ALONE who puts a man into the office, and it is the Lord ALONE who removes the man. All who serve as the Lord’s instruments must be careful not to take this matter into their own hands. To act independently, apart from the Lord, in removing a pastor from his call, is to sin against the Lord.

### Certainty and the “Divine Call”

How can the Lord’s instruments (whether they be the pastor, congregation, or district president) know whether they are being faithful to the Lord? How can they be certain that it is the Lord who has put this man into the office? How can they be certain that the Lord desires to remove this man? Such certainty comes only from a clear Word of God, and not from human statutes or the decrees of councils, commissions, or conventions.

Luther points this out in his 1523 treatise, aptly titled: “That a Christian assembly or congregation has the right and power to judge all teaching and to call, appoint, and dismiss teachers, established and proven by Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> While stressing that the Scriptures clearly teach that all Christians may judge doctrine, and that a congregation may depose a false teacher, Luther also gives this warning and insight:

---

<sup>2</sup> Kolb, Robert and Wengert, Timothy J.: *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Confession XIV: Concerning Church Order*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Luther, Martin: (Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan; Oswald, Hilton C.; Lehmann, Helmut T.: Ed.). *Luther’s Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999. p. 305.

In this matter of judging teachings and appointing or dismissing teachers or pastors, one should not care at all about human statutes, law, old precedent, usage, custom, etc., even if they were instituted by the pope or emperor, prince or bishop, if one half of the whole world accepted them, or if they lasted one year or a thousand years. For the soul of man is something eternal, and more important than every temporal thing. That is why it must be ruled and seized only by the eternal word; for it is very disgraceful to rule consciences before God with human law and old custom. That is why this matter must be dealt with according to Scripture and God's word; for God's word and human teaching inevitably oppose each other when the latter tries to rule the soul.

Martin Chemnitz also stresses this need for certainty in his *Loci* on "The Church."<sup>4</sup>

Chemnitz writes:

For just as God calls, so also does He remove through means. But just as a call in keeping with the instruction of the Lord of the harvest, so also, when someone must be removed from the ministry, it is necessary that the church can show with certainty that this is the judgment and this is the will of God. And just as the call, so also does the deposition pertain to the whole church in a certain orderly way. Hence the ancient church with diligent inquiry and accurate judgment in its councils deal with the reasons for deposition

Though great caution must be used when considering the removal of a pastor, the Lord can and does remove the unfaithful servant. Once again, Chemnitz states:

Just as the one God properly claims for Himself the right to call even when the call takes place mediately, so also is it properly of God to remove a person from the ministry. Therefore, as long as God endures in the ministry His minister who teaches correctly and lives blamelessly, the church does not have the authority to remove someone else's servant. But when he no longer edifies the church by doctrine or life, but destroys [it], then God Himself removes him. Hos. 4:6; 1 Sam. 2:30. Therefore there are two reasons for which God removes unfaithful ministers from their office: (1) because of doctrine, when they teach error. For Mal. 2:7 [says], "The lips of the priest should guard knowledge, and they should require the Law from his mouth." When he rejects this, then he in turn is rejected by God. (2) Because of life, when they act in such a way that the name of the Lord is blasphemed. Thus the life of the sons of Eli was shameful and scandalous and they caused the people to abhor the sacrifices of God. And although the church may tolerate such a one for

---

<sup>4</sup> Chemnitz, Martin: Preus, J.A.O.: *Loci Theologici, Vol. II*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989. p. 703.

some time, yet God finally removes [him], for He says, “They that honor Me I will honor,” 1 Sam. 2:30. And then also the church not only can but also should remove such a one from the ministry (emphasis mine).<sup>5</sup>

### Scriptural Causes” for the Removal of a Pastor

A pastor is removed from the ministry because of unfaithfulness in doctrine or in life. The persistent adherence to false doctrine is contrary to God’s requirement that the pastor be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2), and that he rightly handles “the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Living a scandalous life is also contrary to the Lord’s will for His servant, as He clearly states in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. As Chemnitz states, “he no longer edifies the church by doctrine or life but destroys [it].”

Since the Lord has instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry, and places His servants in that office so that people might receive justifying faith – the Lord must remove the unfaithful servant for the sake of His people.

A third cause for the removal of a pastor is often cited, that being, the inability, or the willful neglect of duties given to the Office of the Holy Ministry. When a pastor refuses to preach and teach God’s Word, administer the sacraments, hear confession and absolve sins, provide pastoral care to all the flock and especially to the sick and dying – then the Lord declares that he is no longer qualified to serve in the office, and the Lord removes him.

In this there must be certainty. All involved must take heed to the apostolic directive: “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19).

### Is there Another Option?

In addition to these three Scriptural causes for the removal of a pastor, a fourth option has increasingly been offered, and that is the resignation of the pastor. In G. H.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 703.

Gerberding's, "The Lutheran Pastor," the question is asked: "Is the congregation ever justified in asking the pastor to resign?" Gerberding answers:

If the proper officers agree with the congregation that the welfare of the church demands a change, the pastor ought to be so informed, and ought to resign. The welfare of the congregation ought always to be above the comfort and preference of the pastor. A church should not be sacrificed for a man. We do not believe that God calls men to kill congregations, unless it be as a judgment. The right to ask a pastor to resign cannot be absolutely forbidden a congregation.<sup>6</sup>

While I agree with Gerberding that "the welfare of the congregation ought always to be above the comfort and preference of the pastor," the welfare of the congregation is never above the Word of God, but is determined by that Word. Just as "a church should not be sacrificed for a man" – so also the "Divine Call" should not be sacrificed for the church.

This language of asking a pastor to resign can also be found in the thesis on "The Call into the Holy Ministry" by P. F. Koehneke, in volume one of "The Abiding Word."<sup>7</sup> This language becomes even more prevalent, and much bolder, in a November 15, 2005 document entitled: "The Divine Deposal/Dismissal of Ministers of Word and Sacrament," by Will Sohns.<sup>8</sup> This document is a revision of a study prepared for the Council of Presidents on March 23, 1990.

Before I became aware of this "Divine Deposal/Dismissal" document, I saw its influence as I worked both formally (as a district reconciler) and informally (as a brother pastor) with pastors and congregations in conflict. From my experience in the Nebraska District, it appears that this "Divine Deposal/Dismissal" document is being used as a playbook when dealing with pastor-congregation conflicts.

---

<sup>6</sup> Gerberding, G. H.: *The Lutheran Pastor*. Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1902. p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Laetsch, Theodore: *The Abiding Word, Volume One*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946. p. 382-385.

<sup>8</sup> Sohns, Will: *The Divine Deposal/Dismissal of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments*. Self published, November 15, 2005.

## “Deposal” or “Dismissal”?

In this document Sohns distinguishes between a “DISMISSAL” From a Position, and the Divine DEPOSAL of a Pastor From Office.<sup>9</sup> In his treatment of “DISMISSAL” From a Position, he states the following:

This means that the Pastor for just reasons should not continue to serve in his present field though he is eligible for service in some other field. Any actions toward “dismissal” should follow evangelical, lawful and orderly means. Reasons for “Dismissal” can include the following: Loss of confidence of people (AW, Vol. I; Fritz, pg. 59), Inefficiency (Fritz, pg. 62), Ability to serve in a certain field has ceased (Fritz, pg. 62; AW, Vol. I, pg. 384), Loss of good reputation (AW, Vol. I, pg. 383), Loss of required qualifications (Pieper, Vol. III pg. 457), No longer apt to teach or perform necessary duties (Pieper; Fritz, pg. 62).

Forms of “Dismissal” can be

1. Mutual agreement that the Pastor should accept a Call to another field.
2. Mutual agreement that the Pastor retire.
3. Mutual agreement that the Pastor resign with the Pastor taking the initiative.
4. The Congregation asking for a resignation (Consideration of).
5. A formal action of dismissal.<sup>10</sup>

The language that Sohns uses, and does not use, is interesting. When talking about dismissing a man from his call to a congregation, he calls it a “Dismissal” From a Position. But when he speaks of removing a man from the Office of the Holy Ministry, he calls it a “**DIVINE** Deposal of a Pastor From Office” and cites 1 Samuel 2:30 and Hosea 4:6.<sup>11</sup>

In his treatment of Divine DEPOSAL, Sohns lists the three “Scriptural causes” as 1. Doctrine, (that is, persistent adherence to false doctrine), 2. Life, (that is, offensive conduct or scandalous life), and 3. Administration of The Office, (which he subdivides into three categories), a. [Willful] Neglect of duties, b. No longer able to execute the

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9-12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9-10 (bold emphasis is mine).

functions of the Office, c. No longer possessing the required qualifications. Under each of these three causes, he cites a number of Scriptural references.<sup>12</sup>

I said earlier that it appears that this Sohns document is being used as a playbook by district presidents when dealing with pastor-congregation conflicts. Let me explain why I believe this to be true.

In the Nebraska District, when a congregation and her pastor find themselves in conflict, the District President often shares with them a document entitled: “Biblical and Ecclesiastical Counsel.” This “Counsel” follows the same pattern and language of the “Forms of Dismissal” proposed by Sohns in his “Divine Deposal/Dismissal” document. Such counsel, as I will show, does not faithfully confess the “Divine Call” in doctrine and practice.

The first comment I must take issue with is when Sohns says that “the Pastor for just reasons should not continue to serve in his present field though he is eligible for service in some other field.” What constitutes “just reasons” for dismissing a pastor, or asking a pastor to resign his call to a particular congregation? While Sohns gives ample Scriptural evidence for the REMOVAL of a man from the Office of the Holy Ministry, he cites no Scriptural basis for a “DISMISSAL” of a man from his call to the congregation.<sup>13</sup>

Later in his paper, in the section entitled “Guidelines for a Congregation’s Evangelical Discipline of a Pastor,” Sohns says that an “investigation” is to be carried out evangelically and “in the light of day.” Such an investigation shall determine “if there are grounds (just cause) for Removal/Deposal from the Office or if what are being suggested are grounds for “Dismissal” from ones current position.” He adds, “It shall be determined whether it can be shown with certainty that a judgment of REMOVAL from office or DISMISSAL is the will of God and that it will benefit the church.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25-26 (emphasis mine).

Once again I ask, where is the Scriptural basis for a “DISMISSAL”? How can one determine whether it is “the will of God” to DISMISS a pastor from his call if there is not a clear Word of God?

There seems to be confusion between the “REMOVAL” of a pastor and the “DISMISSAL” of a pastor. Sohns does a great job of showing how the Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions (and Lutheran fathers) clearly state that the Lord may remove a pastor from the Office of the Holy Ministry, and the causes for such a removal. The problem is that this idea of dismissing a pastor from his call to a congregation bleeds into the discussion.

All the Scripture passages, Confessional statements, and counsel of our Lutheran fathers that Sohns cites, speak of the REMOVAL of a pastor from office. He supplies no Scriptural or Confessional basis for the DISMISSAL of a man from his call to a congregation. To DISMISS a man by asking him to resign his call, is to REMOVE him from the “Divine Call.” For this there must be Scriptural cause and the evidence of two or three witnesses (as the Apostle Paul states in 1 Timothy 5:19).

This option of asking a pastor to resign his call does not originate with Sohns, but his use of it, and the confusion between “DISMISSAL” and “DEPOSAL” that he adds to it, has had a detrimental impact on the church. Simply put, there is no Scriptural basis for the DISMISSAL of a man from his call to a congregation.

This false practice of dismissing a man from his call to a certain congregation, lends itself to the idea that he may be “eligible for service in some other field.” There is no dismissal. Either the Lord removes the man from office, or not. If the Lord removes a man from the office, then he is not “eligible for service in some other field.” If he is an unfaithful servant, let that be documented by the evidence of two or three witnesses (as the Apostle Paul states in 1 Timothy 5:19), and then remove the man from the Office of the Holy Ministry. To simply move him around to some other field of service only allows the ravenous wolf to attack other saints of God.

A comment often heard in defense of moving the pastor to another field of service is this: “that this man is not a good fit for this congregation.” This fits hand-in-glove with Sohns suggestion that one form of “Dismissal” can be a “Mutual agreement that the Pastor should accept a call to another field.”

But wait a minute, how does that square with the “Divine Call”? Who is responsible in the first place, for placing this man as the overseer of this flock? If the Lord has called this man to be pastor for this flock, you cannot blame the congregation for calling an “unfit” man to be their pastor, for they are only the Lord’s instrument. Did the Holy Spirit not know this man was not a “good fit”? Did the Holy Spirit make a mistake? You cannot come to that conclusion if you believe in the “Divine Call.”

So, without Scriptural cause, and without the evidence of two or three witnesses as the Scriptures prescribe, the congregation is told that they may ask the pastor to resign. And, he is to do this willingly, or as Sohns states, “with the Pastor taking the initiative.”<sup>15</sup>

#### Vocational Crisis and the Conscience

Next, as I address Sohns’ suggestion that the pastor may willingly resign his call – let me begin by painting a picture of the pressures that often come to bear upon the pastor in these conflicted situations.

In addition to the stress that typically comes with conflict, often times members of the congregation begin staying away from church, or attending church elsewhere. With the decreased attendance comes decreased offerings, adding a financial crisis to the pot of conflict. Those that are in conflict with the pastor (usually a small, vocal number of members) often attribute the decreased attendance and the lack of offerings to the pastor, because they accuse him of “scattering the flock.”

When the conflict between pastor and congregation comes to the attention of the district president, he normally comes to visit the congregation. One of the things that usually

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

happens is that the district president tells the congregation that he will circulate the pastor's name on call lists. Many in the congregation then see the pastor taking another call as the solution to their problems. Rather than addressing the issues and seeking reconciliation, the path of least resistance is to wait for the problem to go away. When months pass by, and no call is received, the frustration level rises even higher.

Once again, it must be pointed out that this is a "Divine Call." The Holy Spirit is well aware of the situation. He does not need to be alerted to the issues in the congregation and to be told that this man needs a call to another place.

As the turmoil stretches into months, and even years, this begins to take a toll on all the members of the congregation. The level of frustration rises to the point where some of the people just want the pastor to go."<sup>16</sup> Even those who have been supportive of the pastor become exhausted by the conflict. Seeing no hope, the supportive members begin coming to the pastor and saying things like, "Pastor, it would be better for all involved if you would resign."

I have heard it said, "pastors come and go, but congregations remain." There is some truth in that statement, but we must never forget that it is "the Word of the Lord [that] endures forever" (1 Peter 1:25).

In isolation, the pastor now cries out with Elijah: "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:14).

As all these pressures mount, the pastor often finds himself in a vocational crisis. Many times he is husband and father as well as pastor. Therefore, he does not bear the pressure alone. He sees the impact it makes upon his family, and hence the vocational

---

<sup>16</sup> Other comments I've heard are, "I'm growing tired of all this Matthew 18 talk ...", and, "I don't want to forgive pastor, I just want him gone."

crisis. On the one hand, he knows that the Lord has called him to serve this congregation, and that to simply walk away would be to sin against the Lord. On the other hand, he sees his family suffering (or his own health may suffer), and so for their sake, he takes “the least destructive way”<sup>17</sup> and resigns his call.

At this point it would be good for us to be reminded of what Luther said when he was faced with a crisis of conscience. At the Diet of Worms in 1521, standing before the Emperor Charles, when called upon to retract his writings and teachings, Luther boldly confessed:

Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.<sup>18</sup>

As Luther points out, the pastor is “bound by the Scriptures.” His conscience is “captive to the Word of God.” A Word which says, without a doubt, that the Lord has placed him as overseer and has given him the charge to keep watch over the flock (Acts 20:28). To ask him to resign his call is to ask him to go against the Word of God which binds his conscience. To ask him to do so is “neither safe nor right.”

Anyone (whether a wife, a congregation, or a district president) who asks him to go against his conscience and God’s Word, and to do so willingly, not only causes him to sin against the Lord – but in so doing, they sin against the pastor. Our Lord has something to say about that. He says: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it

---

<sup>17</sup> This was the counsel given by a district president in a meeting with a congregation and pastor in conflict.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, Martin: (Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan; Oswald, Hilton C.; Lehmann, Helmut T.; Ed.). *Luther’s Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999. p. 111.

would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5-6). May God help them.

### Aligning Practice to Doctrine

We cannot confess the “Divine Call” in doctrine, and then deny it with our practice. Doctrine and practice go together, with both being normed by the Word of God. When there is conflict between a pastor and the congregation, all practices that deny or avoid a clear confession of the “Divine Call” only bring additional harm to the body of Christ.

In an attempt to unite our doctrine and practice regarding the “Divine Call,” I humbly submit the following suggestions.

1. The district presidents provide ecclesiastical supervision by visiting the congregations and pastors of their district, in order to observe their doctrine and practice. Where there is confusion, conflict or error, that he provide Scriptural counsel towards a clear confession of all God’s truths (including, but not limited to, the “Divine Call”).
2. When congregational members come to the district president with accusations against their pastor, that his first response be to inquire if they have followed our Lord’s will in Matthew 18. If they have not properly brought these accusations to their pastor, the district president will inform them that he will not discuss these matters until they have been addressed in accordance with the Lord’s will. The district presidents should have a zero tolerance policy toward the circumventing of Matthew 18.
3. If members of a congregation in conflict with their pastor begin to regularly attend worship at neighboring congregations, the neighboring pastor will inquire why they are not worshipping with their own congregation. If he is made aware of conflicts with their own pastor, he will also direct them to follow Matthew 18. The neighboring pastor will not agree to any request for transfer in such situations, until they have

been reconciled with their pastor, and he is able to transfer them in good conscience.

4. When invited by the pastor and people of a conflicted congregation, the district president will not tell the congregation that he will actively seek a call for their pastor. To do so may give the impression that the call is dependent on human instruments, rather than on the working of the Holy Spirit. To do so also gives room for the false hope that the problems in the congregation will be solved when the pastor takes another call. That, in turn, impedes the efforts towards true reconciliation.
5. If, in the following of Matthew 18, a congregation and pastor have not been reconciled, they may invite the district president to come and investigate. In this investigation, the district president must determine if there is any Scriptural basis for the charges being brought against the pastor, and whether there is Scriptural cause for removal of the pastor. In carrying out this investigation, he must exercise great care to see that there is due process, which includes the apostolic mandate that no charge be allowed to be brought against a pastor without the evidence of two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19).
6. If the investigation of the district president finds such cause and evidence, he will assist the congregation in removing the pastor from the Office of the Holy Ministry. If no such cause and evidence is found, he will instruct the congregation that it would be a sin for them to ask this man to resign, or in any other way to remove this man from his call as their pastor.
7. I ask the laity to simply love your pastor. What does this mean? If he is in error, go and show him his fault that he might repent. If he is faithful, support him. In your conversations with your brothers and sisters in Christ, protect the reputation of all, and be careful to follow Matthew 18. Confess the divinity of the call by reminding one another that the Lord has given this man to be your pastor.

8. If it is found that members of the congregation have sinned against their pastor (or others), and they have been dealt with according to Matthew 18, the pastor will carry out his duty to exercise church discipline (as necessary). To exercise church discipline is most difficult for the pastor who is involved in such conflicts. To do so opens him up to the accusation that he is “lording it over the church.” It would be most beneficial (to the pastor and the congregation) for the district president to publicly support the pastor’s exercise of such discipline.
  
9. If a pastor is being asked to resign, brother pastors should band together to help support the pastor and his family. They will also encourage the pastor not to resign, reminding him that the Lord has called him to serve these people, and that he is bound to God’s Word. To be bound by God’s Word is to be free – free from all fear – including the fear of what might happen to him and/or his family. Pastoral care for the pastor and his family might include the accounts of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Daniel, and Luther. All were faced with death, and yet – bound by God’s Word – they faced death without fear. To be bound to God’s Word is to be bound to God whose “steadfast love” is great, and whose “faithfulness endures forever.”<sup>19</sup>
  
10. If a congregation proceeds to remove their pastor from his call without Scriptural cause, the district president should follow the direction of C.F.W. Walther who says:

On the other hand, the congregation must be sure that it proceeds in the right way. The Synod cannot sit idly by, if the congregation proceeds in an improper manner. Then the Synod has the right to say, “if you insist on mistreating your pastor, then you can no longer be a member of Synod.” For example, if a congregation were to dismiss its pastor because he had proclaimed to them the truth, Synod would then admonish the congregation, and if that wouldn’t produce the proper results, it would have to say, “You can no longer be a member.” But that is all the Synod could do. That would be the end of the matter.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Taken from the Gradual for the Season of Epiphany (Psalm 117:2).

<sup>20</sup> Walther, C.F.W., *The Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, 1879 Convention Essay, quoted from the Sohns document, p. 34.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but hopefully these suggestions will lead us to fraternal discussions, and to a unity in doctrine and practice that is faithful to our Lord and the people He has given us to serve.

*Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*

## Bibliography

- Chemnitz, Martin, Preus, J.A.O. (trans.), Loci Theologici, Vol. II. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.
- Fritz, John H. C., Pastoral Theology. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003.
- Gerberding, G. H., The Lutheran Pastor. Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1902.
- Kolb, R. and Wengert, T., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.
- Laetsch, Theodore, The Abiding Word, Volume One. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946.
- Luther, Martin, (Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan; Oswald, Hilton C.; Lehmann, Helmut T.; Ed.). Luther's Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Luther, Martin, (Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan; Oswald, Hilton C.; Lehmann, Helmut T.: Ed.). Luther's Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999.
- Mueller, Norbert H. and Kraus, George, Pastoral Theology, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990.
- Pieper, Francis, Christian Dogmatics: Volume III. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953.
- Schuetze, Armin W., and Habeck, Irwin J., The Shepherd under Christ. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989.
- Sohns, Will, The Divine Deposal/Dismissal of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments. Self published, November 15, 2005.
- The Divine Call, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. February 2003.
- Walther, C.F.W., Pastoral Theology. New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, Inc., 1995.
- Walther, C.F.W., The Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1879 Convention Essay.