

SOME THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT THE AUGSBURG CONFESSIONS SAYS

*Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.*¹ All Christians are called to the ministry of serving God and neighbor, but for the sake of good order in the church certain Christians are specially called to the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament.

*.....God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, and those who hear the Gospel.*²

THE CALL TO ORDAINED MINISTRY AND THE CALL TO A SPECIFIC MINISTRY

It is through the church that God calls certain Christians to ordained ministry. Once that call is discerned, the candidate devotes years to study, training and preparation under the guidance of the whole church through the Bishop and the Candidacy Committee.

In a similar way, it is through the church that God calls ordained ministers to a specific pastorate. Not only does the local congregation participate in the call process, but so does the whole church through the office of the Bishop. Just as the whole church took an active role in the call to ordination, so now the whole church takes an active role in the call to a specific ministry.

This is shown in the fact that once a person is approved for ordination, the candidate must receive and accept a call to a specific ministry in order to be ordained. Ordination may occur in a local church, but it is always ordination by the whole church as shown in the presence of the Bishop at the ordination service.

THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE WHOLE CHURCH AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

The local church is fully the church, but the local church is not all the church there is. The local church calls a person to be its pastor, but the whole church everywhere has a stake in who is called and how the call process is handled.

The Call Committee, the Congregational Council, and eventually the entire congregation all participate fully in the process. But so does the Bishop, who represents both the interest and the commitment of the whole church in seeing that the pastor called is suited to ministry under the call that is extended.

The Bishop has deep concern for the well being of the congregation's life and ministry, having reviewed its profile carefully. The Bishop also has deep concern about the person and gifts of the prospective pastor. In the call process the Bishop, the congregation and the prospective pastor work together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring about a new partnership that is faithful to the Gospel, empowers the local church in its ministry, and strengthens the whole church as people of God.

THE CALL PROCESS IS UNIQUE

On the basis of our Lutheran theology, a pastor is *called* to serve a congregation, *not hired*. The call process is not the same as the hiring process in other parts of society. Any pattern that includes head hunting, résumé shuffling, or high anxiety interviews is highly inappropriate in the calling of a pastor.

Neither is the call process like a beauty contest in which hosts of candidates present themselves to their best advantage so the Call Committee can select one as the winner.

¹ Article XIV, *The Augsburg Confession*, Fortress Press, 1959

² Article V, *The Augsburg Confession*, Fortress Press, 1959

The Lutheran call process is unique because it is an effort to discern what God wants for this local church and for the whole church, in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the sacraments administered in accordance with the Gospel.

THE RIGHT QUESTION

Therefore it is not appropriate for a Call Committee to be guided chiefly by such questions as these: Will the congregation like this pastor? Will it approve of the Call Committee's choice of candidates? Will people feel good having this pastor around on Sunday morning? Will this person do for now until a better pastor comes along?

The foremost question for the Call Committee is always whether this is the person God requires this congregation to have as its pastor. Human preferences and personalities never come before the mission to which God calls his church. That is why every meeting of the Call Committee will include prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the work that is being done.