

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

A FOUNDATION FOR PLANTING AND GROWING A CHURCH

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I have been asked the question, “How can I proceed in planting and growing a new mission LCMC congregation?” This is not an easy question to answer. Lighthouse Lutheran Church, of which I am the called and ordained pastor, started on Palm Sunday of 2011. Over past several months, we have grown to worshipping 50 people each Sunday morning, on the average. What started out small has indeed been blessed by the Lord to take root and grow. However, was there a reproducible blue-print involved or did the Holy Spirit simply “use us” and take off from there. I believe a little of both were involved with the planting and growing of Lighthouse Lutheran Church. What I am prepared to do is to share with you my thoughts on planting and growing a church.

Early on, as I began to consider my plans for planting a new congregation, I realized how closely related one’s “philosophy of ministry” envelops their plan for planting and growing the church of Jesus Christ. After all, when one is called into the ministry, are we not caretakers and shepherds of the Lord’s sheep? Thus, I feel I must explain my philosophy of ministry first and then follow-up with a plan on implementing that philosophy.

WHAT IS MINISTRY?

What is ministry? The English word “ministry” is usually translated from the Greek root word *διακονία*. This word is a noun that is defined as “service; especially of those who execute the commands of others” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). Our English word “deacon” comes from this Greek root word and is defined as “one who serves” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). Other Greek lexicons define *διακονία* as “the role or position of one serving God in a special way” (Friberg Lexicon). Coupling

this understanding with the previous definitions, I conclude that “ministry” is serving God in a special way by executing His commands in serving others. This certainly makes sense to me. After the Transfiguration, the disciples began to argue about who was the greatest among them. Jesus sat down and called his disciples together and said, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and a servant (διδάκωνος) of all” (Mark 9:35). Serving God should not be an attempt to focus attention on ourselves. The focus of our service is on glorifying God Himself. In the Gospel of Matthew, the mother of the sons of Zebedee had a desire to see her sons sit at the right and left hand of Christ. Jesus’ reply was, “...whoever would be great among you must be your servant (διδάκωνος)” (Matthew 20:26). To be in ministry is to be a servant of God.

In biblical times, readers would understand what servitude meant. I am not certain that all Americans can fully grasp the depth of the meaning behind servitude. For instance, in the workforce, an employee can rightly say that they are a servant of their employer. Ministry is different in that the calling does not have a specific begin time or end time. An employee can leave the office after providing 8 to 10 hours of “company time.” However, ministry is not an occupation. Ministry is a calling and a complete submission to the master, Jesus Christ. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the writers of the New Testament books claim the status of slave in many of their writings. Paul, James, Peter, and Jude state in their epistles that they are slaves (δοῦλος) of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1, Titus 1:1, James 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1, Jude 1:1). Paul further identifies Epaphras, one who is of the people in Colossae, as a slave of Christ Jesus (Colossians 4:12). Concluding a previously stated Scripture reference from above, Jesus’ reply to the request from the mother of the sons of Zebedee is, “...whoever would be great among

you must be your servant (διδάκονος) and whoever is first among you must be your slave (δοῦλος)” (Matthew 20:26-28). Christ tells the disciples that they must be servants, and not only servants, but also slaves.

This is the fundamental understanding of ministry; servitude – 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Ministry is the giving all of oneself all the time. Ministry is becoming a slave to our Master and focusing on fulfilling the Master’s plans versus our own. We no longer come first, but desire to work for the benefit of our Master. This goes against everything the world stands for. We live in an age that puts our own self and desires higher than everyone else. This understanding of ministry is a direct slap in the face against the world we live in.

IF MINISTRY IS BEING SERVANTS AND SLAVES, THEN TO WHOM ARE WE SUBJECT TO?

The calling to be a servant and slave is of serious business, but to who are we a servant and slave to? Who is our Master? If we incorrectly understand our calling and become “...slaves (δοῦλα) to impurity” (Romans 6:19) we stand condemned and fall deeper into sin. Instead, we are called to become “...slaves (δοῦλα) to righteousness” (Romans 6:19) and “...servants (δοῦλοι) of Christ” (Philippians 1:1). As such, we are subject to Christ Himself and we must take care to never “...deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

In Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians and Ephesians, he underscores the husband’s relationship to his wife just as “...Christ is head of the church” (Ephesians 4:15; 5:23)

and also that the “head of every man is Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:3). The head (κεφαλή) indicates one who is of superior rank. This Greek word is also used to describe the chief corner stone (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7) that was rejected by the builders. It is essential that we have a clear understanding exactly who our Master is. It is none other than Jesus Christ, our Lord.

IF WE ARE SUBJECTING OURSELVES TO JESUS CHRIST, THEN WHAT ARE THE COMMANDS OF OUR LORD AND MASTER?

In order to please our Lord and Master, we must know what duties he calls to those who are his servants (διακονία) and slaves (δοῦλος). Understanding the commands of our Lord and Master are very important because these commands will drive the vision and mission of the Church.

We are commanded to make disciples. The Great Commission is a fine example of a duty that is to be performed by the servants and slaves of Christ in ministry. After the resurrection and before Christ ascended into heaven, Jesus called to his disciples and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). This is a direct command from Christ, “make disciples.” How are we to make disciples? We are to make disciples through baptism and teaching. The Holy Spirit will stir people’s hearts and convict them of their sins.

We are also commanded by Christ to remember Him as we observe Holy Communion. “He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19). And again, “In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:25). We are to gather together and eat the broken bread and drink the wine to remember the sacrifice Jesus Christ offered up to forgive our sins. Every time we gather together in this manner, we “...proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26), our sins are cleansed and we commune in a very special way with the body and blood of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

We are commanded to preach the Word of God. Paul writes in his epistle to the Romans that the Word of God needs to be heard by the heathen. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14). Although this verse seems to be tied directly to the Great Commission, I believe Paul is focused more intently on the public announcement and declaration of the Gospel versus the focus within the Great Commission to evangelize to the heathen of the nations. Paul continues, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7) The command here is the public preaching of the Word.

We are commanded to repent. Repentance is a command that is sometimes overlooked. It is a foundational building block of the Christian that is present the

moment the Holy Spirit convicts one of their fallen ways and need for a Savior.

Repentance is also a building block in salvation that takes the Christian back to the cross to seek forgiveness for their sins. In the book of Acts, Peter spoke to the men of Israel and told them of their sins. The Holy Spirit convicted them and they asked Peter and the rest of the apostles what should they do? Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized...” (Acts 2:38). As mature Christians, we sometimes think of repentance as something we did the moment we came to know our Lord and Savior. Repentance, however, is something we must live with, and die to, daily. Repentance brings about confession in which we acknowledge that sin has overtaken our lives and that we desire to change. John writes that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). When we confess our sins to Christ, He will cleanse us.

We are also commanded to pray for each other. God answers prayer and Paul appeals to Christians to pray for his safe return from Judea and also that his service may be acceptable in Jerusalem (Romans 15: 30-33). Prayer is our way of talking to God. The Holy Spirit enables us to pray through the Son to the Father for His will to be done in us. Our prayers can be of praise for all that the Father has done for us, or we may come to the Father, as Paul suggests, on the behalf of another who needs blessings from above.

Although there are other commands our Lord and Master has given to us, the last one I desire to write about is the gathering together corporately for the public worship of God. As Christians in ministry we are all called to “...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:25). The author of Hebrews

is encouraging Christians to meet together. Meeting together for the corporate worship of God is healthy and beneficial to Christians and we are called to gather on the first day of the week, Sunday, the Christian Sabbath.

NOW THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE COMMANDS OF OUR LORD AND MASTER, WHO THEN IS TO PERFORM THESE DUTIES?

Christians that have subjected themselves to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master are called to obey all of His commands. We are commanded to make disciples, receive Holy Communion, proclaim the Good News, pray for ourselves and each other, and gather together in worship. We are all a part of “one body in Christ” (Romans 12:5). In addition, we are “...baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This “body” is the servitude of Christ where “...the peace of Christ rules in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15). This explanation of “ministry” is what God intends for the church and helps to identify and explain the true nature and character of the church.

Although every person that is part of this ministry is called to obey these commands from our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, the Lord has blessed some in the ministry with certain gifts. Everyone within ministry is not exactly the same, although we are of one body. The Lord gave some, “...to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). Different people have been blessed with different gifts within ministry. The Holy Scriptures make clear the purpose the Lord has in providing gifts to His people, “...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). Therefore, within ministry, although we are all called to obey our Lord and Master, some have been

blessed with special gifts to assist in building up the rest of the saints as well as extending the Kingdom.

One of these special vocational callings identified in the Word of God is that of “elder”. The Scriptures call for “elders” that rule and teach the people of God. Paul outlines the qualifications for this calling in 1 Timothy and Titus. In summary, an elder must be a man, the husband of one wife, self-controlled and gentle, hospitable who manages his household well. His children are respectful and obedient. He loves what is good and holy and holds firmly to the Word as taught. He is able to instruct and rebuke according to sound doctrine. Paul also lists qualifications to avoid in an elder. An elder is not a drunkard, violent, quarrelsome, a lover of money or greedy for gain. He is not a recent convert or arrogant, nor is he quick tempered. These are the traits that an elder must possess. The office of elder should not be viewed as a calling holier than the rest of the people of God; however, they are called to the special office of preaching and teaching to the rest of the assembly. For the purposes of good order, elders also protect the communion table and assist in the distribution of the bread and wine to the people of God. A called and ordained minister of Word and Sacrament is considered an elder in the church along with other called and devoted, godly men within the congregation.

The Holy Scriptures also identify another role within ministry; the office of deacon. Luke writes in the book of Acts that the disciples were increasing in numbers, yet the widows were being neglected daily. The twelve apostles summoned the other disciples to discuss this problem. The apostles said that it would not be right for them to neglect the preaching of God to serve tables (and, thus, take care of the widows) therefore, men

were selected whose office in ministry was to take care of the widows and the helpless (Acts 6:1-7). The office of deacon also has qualifications outlined in the Holy Scriptures that are similar, but not exact to those in the office of elder (1 Timothy 3:12).

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF UNDERSTANDING AND PERFORMING THESE DUTIES WHICH WE ARE COMMANDED TO OBEY IN MINISTRY?

The understanding of these roles is to assist in the unity of every Christian in the body of Christ. This understanding also helps to explain my comprehensive “Philosophy of Ministry.” The “church” is not a building, but a living, organic organism made up of the disciples of Jesus Christ, each one a member of a larger body. The head of the “church” is not the pastor, but Jesus Christ himself (Colossians 1:18) and the “church” is governed by the Word of God, the authority of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Ministry is not something confined in a building, but continually exists all the time (24 hours per day and 7 days per week and 52 weeks per year) and in all places by the people of God. The objective of this ministry is to equip the saints for the work of building up the body of Christ by making disciples.

In addition, the understanding and performing of these duties encourages the people of God to gather together to praise Him and give Him glory. Although they gather in buildings and halls, these are not the church. The church is made up of the gathering together of the people of God. The Greek word for the gathered people of God is *ἐκκλησία*. They gather to encourage one another and pray together and they gather to sing to the Lord and listen to the Word preached. In addition, they gather together to read the Word of God and strive to understand what has been revealed in the Holy

Scriptures. Finally, they gather to be baptized and receive Holy Communion, a special communing with together Christ, for the forgiveness of sins. In addition to all of these, they gather to collect offerings for the poor and needy. The people gather together and their participation in ministry make up the church, of which Christ is the head.

HOW WILL A SHEPHERD FULLFILL THIS CALLING OF PASTORAL MINISTRY?

Paul writes in his epistle to the Colossians, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:24-29).

If I had to select one verse from Scripture that I would suggest pastor’s turn to again and again, this would be that verse. The call to the office of pastor will be filled with many hardships. The hours are long, the salary is subpar, and the earthly rewards are few. Yet, Paul rejoiced in his sufferings (and his sufferings were much worse than that which I may endure). A pastor must hold tight to this verse and remember that the

“sufferings” are only temporary. A pastor must remember that although times seem tough, Paul and the apostles suffered through persecutions and martyrdom.

To be called into the office of pastor is indeed a calling from God. Although the translation cited above uses the word “minister”, the Greek word is servant (διάκονος). A pastor must remember that he is a servant to the Lord, Jesus Christ. As a pastor, remember you are called to study the Holy Scriptures and preach and teach His Word to all that will listen. You must follow His commands to make disciples by baptizing and teaching. You must protect the bread and wine against those who may eat and drink to their condemnation, but also teach them the Word of the Lord so that they may commune with Jesus Christ and find forgiveness of sins and life in our Savior and Lord. You must remember to make disciples and fishers of men so that instead of one fisherman there will be many. These are the ways in which you will serve the Lord.

Pastors are servants called according to the “stewardship” from God (1 Corinthians 9:17, Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 1:25). What an interesting word translated “stewardship”. The Greek word is οἰκονομία and can be defined in a variety of ways. “Management and organization” (Louw-Nida Lexicon) is one understanding of this word. Another is “the apostolic office in God’s redemptive work; part of God’s arrangements for mankind’s redemption.” (Friberg Lexicon) As a pastor, you must remember that not only is the call of pastor from God to manage and organize the people of God here on Earth, but also that there is also a much larger picture than simply one of management. The call of pastor is a calling to be a part of God’s divine plan of redemption. The

preaching of the Word is used by the Holy Spirit as an effective means of grace; convicting sinners and also preparing saints for heaven.

Why have you been called to this office? Was it a benefit for you? Paul writes, and I acknowledge, that this call is not for you alone, but it was given to you by God “for you, to make the Word of God fully known” (Colossians 1:25). This not only includes the unsaved, but I believe this is more poignantly meant to “warn everyone and teach everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). Everyone has a limited amount of time on Earth. The office of pastor assists in preparing the saints for heaven. This preparation is so that they will be “mature in Christ.” What an undertaking! Please remember that this office of pastor is called to feed the sheep and help them grow in their understanding of the Scriptures.

Paul writes, “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:29) You will not have the energy on your own to fulfill this calling. However, you must remember that Christ will provide you with all the energy needed in order to successfully fulfill the office of pastor.