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# TOGETHER FOR MINISTRY

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**Final Report and Actions  
on the Study of Ministry  
1988-1993**

**Incorporating the Task Force Final Report and  
Actions of the Board of the Division for Ministry  
and the 1993 Churchwide Assembly of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

# PREFACE

What is the nature of Christian ministry? What forms of ministry will best serve the mission of the Church in the world today? How can this Church in all its expressions work together for ministry? These are the questions before the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America today. They arise out of three contexts: the formation of this church in 1988, the changing world in which the Church serves, and the ecumenical relationships this church has with other churches.

The first context is the uniting of three closely related but not identical Lutheran church bodies—The American Lutheran Church (ALC), the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). All three had identical patterns for ministry by ordained pastors. The other forms of ministry were not identical in the past—ALC commissioned church staff, AELC deaconesses and deacons, ALC and LCA deaconesses, AELC commissioned teachers, and LCA lay professional leaders, together with interim ELCA associates in ministry. Should these be retained, combined, or replaced?

The second context is the world in which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is called to serve today and in the coming years. This context is global in scope and is oriented toward the present and the future. What forms of ministry will this church require to serve its mission from God most faithfully and effectively today and in the years to come?

The third context is the need for shared witness among the Christian churches throughout the world. To what extent can officially recognized forms of ministry structured according to churchwide standards contribute to or detract from that common mission? These questions reflect the challenge and opportunity for renewal in ministry before us.

## The Constitutional Mandate

This report and its recommendations are directed at fulfilling the mandate which this church established in 1988. They are not an attempt to answer every important question about ministry which faces the Church. From its beginning, the Study of Ministry has been charged by continuing resolution 10.11.A87. of the constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

During the same period of 1988-1994, this church shall engage in an intensive study of the nature of ministry, leading to decisions regarding appropriate forms of ministry that will enable this church to fulfill its mission. During the course of such study, special attention shall be given to: 1) the tradition of the Lutheran Church; 2) the possibility of articulating a Lutheran understanding and adaptation of the threefold ministerial office of bishop, pastor, and deacon and its ecumenical implication; and 3) the appropriate forms of lay ministries to be officially recognized and certified by this church, including criteria for certification, relation to synods, and discipline.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the proposal developed by the Division for Ministry and approved by the Church Council of the ELCA (July 1988) added specific consideration of the ministry of all the baptized people of God to the scope of the study.

This study has been broadly consultative. Church wide hearings (1989) and forums (1991) were conducted to give concerned members of this church direct access to task force members. Regular reports from the task force to all rostered persons and others interested in the process have been distributed. Consultations with a wide variety of experts and those most directly affected by the study, persons rostered in previous churches, were held. The preliminary report of the task force (1991) was distributed to more than thirty thousand persons. Each person receiving a copy was invited to share his or her response with the task force. Seminary faculties and other teaching theologians have been invited to contribute and respond to task force work. Preliminary recommendations from the task force have been available to the church within weeks of the time they were made by the task force, beginning in January of 1992. Task force members and the director have been available for presentations and consultation with interested groups throughout the process. (A fuller account of the process employed for the study is found in Appendix A.)

Part I of this report is a study of ministry which provides a context and foundation for Part II which sets forth rationale and specific recommendations on ministry within this church.

# PART ONE: THE STUDY OF MINISTRY

## A. The Nature of Ministry

### 1. Ministry

The words “ministry” and “service” are closely related. “The word ‘ministry’ in its broadest sense denotes the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church. Ministry or ministries can also denote the particular institutional forms which this service can take.”<sup>4</sup>

For Christians this relationship between service and ministry is clearly seen in the life and teaching of Jesus. “So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’” (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus, in giving his life, frees people from bondage and empowers them to serve. Christ’s servant ministry is the model for all Christians. It shapes the relationships between the baptized and the officially recognized ministers of the Church, among those various official ministries and between all Christian ministries and God’s world. Do our ministries reflect Christ, the servant, clearly?

The specific content of ministry is diverse. Lutherans have often identified proclamation, worship, witness, service, and unity as its central concerns and activities.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Mission

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s mission is to “proclaim God’s saving Gospel of justification,” to “carry out the great commission,” and to “serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs.” It is pledged to worship God, nurture its members in the Word of God, and manifest the unity given to the people of God (ELCA 4.02.).

The vision of the ELCA and its constitution inextricably link the mission of the Church and the world. The Church is a people who are created, empowered, and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world (ELCA 4.01.). The

Church, like its Lord, lives not for itself but for the world God loves.

This imperative to express the Gospel and God’s will for the world in terms which are understandable and applicable to needs in an ever-changing world has been a constant one, from the New Testament, through later times, in Luther’s day, and down to the present day. The world today has a desperate need for the Gospel, for proclamation, worship, witness, service, and, like the Church, for unity. This church needs an expanded awareness that all its people are called to ministry to God’s world. Once this call is recognized the opportunities for mission are enormous and exciting.

American society is changing. Population studies make this clear. The balance among various cultures is changing. The shape of family life is changing. The traditional roles assigned to women and men are changing. Forms of communication are changing. The mission question before the ELCA is how to make its witness to the Gospel in that changing society. How should the ELCA organize itself for partnership and ministry among all ethnic and cultural communities? Partnership among African American, Hispanic, Euro-American, Asian, and Native American cultures is an exciting part of our mission.

How can the ELCA witness to the non-Christian religious communities and others that are increasingly present in American society?<sup>6</sup> How can this church make its witness in a culture with religious roots but secular in its outlook? “Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large they do not read it; they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.”<sup>7</sup> Mission must mean more than providing leaders to care for persons who are already a part of this church. Mission compels Christians to organize themselves and their communities for proclamation, service, and witness in the world as well as proclamation, worship, and unity in the Church.

Attention to existing ministries is also a part of the Church’s mission. Our ministries in rural and urban areas where we already have congregations are also places for mission. Many of these congregations are struggling against mounting pressures and costs to maintain their ministries. Many find it difficult to support traditional patterns of pastoral ministry and congregational life. Yet the ELCA has few officially recognized alternatives to offer.

Our congregations are centers of teaching ministry. Day care, grade schools, high schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries sponsored by or related to this church embody its ministry of teaching. This church also ministers to society through its institutions of care and education. Lutheran social service agencies help give credibility to this church's stated commitment to care for those in need.

Beyond its institutions, the ELCA needs to recognize and empower all baptized believers to be servants of the Gospel, ministers in the world, and to train and equip them and expect them to account for their ministries. Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers has remained too much an ideal and too little a reality in Lutheran church life. The need to enlist laity in leadership roles within the Church should not, for all of its benefits, be allowed to overshadow the indispensable need for the ministry of all Christians in the world.

Over the last generations the Church has broadened its understanding of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Pastors have been asked to take on leadership responsibilities in many areas related to critical societal needs. Such developments come from the conviction that the Church should benefit from theologically trained and publicly accountable leaders in areas that communicate the Gospel and God's will for the world. Many of these forms of leadership activities are less explicitly related to Word and Sacrament ministry's traditional center in preaching, teaching, and the administration of holy baptism and holy communion than is pastoral ministry in congregations. The response of the ELCA and its immediate predecessors to this call for specialized leadership in congregations and in other settings has been to stretch its understanding of the ministry of ordained pastors so it can meet these needs for leadership. The church and its pastors have paid a price for this response. When Word and Sacrament becomes an umbrella for all forms of leadership, its unique focus can be diluted or even lost. Unrealistic or confused expectations of pastors can result.

The ELCA and its predecessor churches established certified and commissioned lay ministries to give leadership for mission in areas not requiring an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament. Deaconesses, lay professionals, commissioned church staff, commissioned teachers, deacons, and associates in ministry have all served the church to meet specialized needs for leadership in mission.

### **3. Together for Ministry**

#### **a. Together in the ELCA**

A clear focus on mission draws people together for ministry. This is true for the ministry God exercises as

the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, and enlightens the whole Christian church on earth."<sup>8</sup> It is true in the local congregation, the universal Church, and the world where Christians exercise ministry. It is also true for the ministries of leadership that have particular institutional forms. Ministry to the mission God has given the Church should be the cause which welds together the traditions that formed the ELCA in 1988. Increased size and administrative merger cannot renew the Church; God's Spirit and commitment to mission can.

#### **b. Together as Laity and Clergy**

Ministry should draw persons together across distinctions such as "laity" and "clergy." Claims of personal privilege and status must never cloud the fundamental purpose of ministry which is service. "It is within this context of ministry [of all its baptized members] that this church calls or appoints some of its baptized members for specific ministries in this church" (ELCA 7.11.).

#### **c. Together Ecumenically**

Focus on mission also holds the potential to draw Christians together for ministry across existing denominational barriers. This can be seen where denominations find ways to cooperate in spite of varying forms of officially recognized ministry. It can be seen, too, in the growing consultative process among church leaders working bilaterally (between two churches) or multilaterally (among several churches) through such cooperative structures as the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the World Council of Churches.

It is the very nature of ministry to draw people together. With its eyes fixed on the mission which God has set before us, this church will be a people united and drawn together for ministry.

## **B. The Lutheran Heritage in the Broader Christian Tradition and the World Today**

The canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments together with the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions are the authorities which govern this church's understanding of the nature of ministry. This report affirms these fundamental authorities. It also proposes new emphases in response to the questions raised in its mandate. Within the norms established by these authorities, this church is free to develop under the guidance of the Spirit.

## 1. The Holy Scriptures

The Bible is an authority shared with all Christians. It is normative for Lutherans in light of their confessional tradition, yet is read with awareness of later, often patristic<sup>9</sup> models for Church and ministry and in light of contemporary ecumenical dialogues.

The theme of “all Christians as a priesthood” is an example of a Reformation emphasis now widely affirmed. This is a New Testament assertion (in 1 Peter 2:9-11 and Rev. 1:6; 5:10; and 20:6),<sup>10</sup> based on Exodus 16:5-6. The priesthood of all baptized believers was stressed by Luther. Today most statements on ministry begin with the whole people of God and often point out how each member of this priesthood is called and has a ministry, especially in daily life and vocation.<sup>11</sup>

In the Bible, “ministry” (whether the Hebrew *‘ābad* or Greek *diakonia*) regularly means “service,” carried out in a variety of ways and contexts. It arises out of the divine initiative of a gracious God who accomplishes salvation. Christians respond in faith to God’s initiative through service to one another and to the neighbor in God’s world. “To equip the saints” (including both “laity” and “clergy”) for their ministries, Christ gave gifts which include leaders such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Eph. 4:11-12).<sup>12</sup> How ministerial leadership is to be structured is not a matter which Scripture answers absolutely. Indeed, New Testament ministries are portrayed in great variety.<sup>13</sup>

To fit needs at different times in history and to reflect various understandings of the Church, subsequent Christian traditions have developed these New Testament examples of ministering along different, even divisive lines—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Pentecostal; hierarchical and egalitarian; episcopal, presbyteral, congregational. A Lutheran view, recognizing the variety in Scripture,<sup>14</sup> can set forth its model without expecting others to conform to it and can respect alternative structures for good order in other churches without itself adopting them.

According to the New Testament, all Christians and their leaders in the Church are bound together for ministry. Among the ways of expressing this unity between Christian leaders and community are these three: Word of God, God’s gifts, and apostolicity.

The Word of God nurtures all believers, especially in its sense of Gospel or message from and about God in Christ. “Word and Sacrament” is the traditional Lutheran way of identifying pastoral ministry, and while the New Testament references seldom tell who presided at baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the word of promise does mark each sacrament (Titus 3:5-8; Matt. 26:26-28).<sup>15</sup> “Ministers (or servants) of the

word”<sup>16</sup> appear in Luke 1:2, and “the ministry of the word”<sup>17</sup> at Acts 6:4.<sup>18</sup> But alongside such ministry of the word are set other tasks like the care of widows and of financial accounts by the seven (Acts 6:1-2, 5).<sup>19</sup> Paul stressed his apostolic proclamation of the word (1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:1-2)<sup>20</sup> as well as the need for hearers in each congregation to pass on the Word through evangelism (1 Thess. 1:5-8)<sup>21</sup> and for a variety of assisting ministries (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:6-8).<sup>22</sup> The tasks of proclamation (in Word and Sacrament) and of serving (*diakonia*, including teaching, acts of mercy [Rom. 12:7-8]) have continued as necessities in the Church and world to this day.

The gifts of God come to all Christians in the Gospel as justification and eternal life through “the free gift of God”<sup>23</sup> and in specific gifts of grace<sup>24</sup> or gifts of the Spirit.<sup>25</sup> These gifts build up the Church community, which is founded upon the proclamation of the Word. This proclamation happens in preaching and sacraments but also in the Church’s ongoing life through love, healing, helping, and administration (1 Cor. 12:28-30; 8:1).<sup>26</sup> Paul speaks of a “spiritual gift” that comes when apostle and congregation mutually strengthen one another (Rom. 1:11-12).<sup>24</sup> Spiritual gifts include both natural endowments raised to new heights in Christ’s service and fresh outpourings from God for new tasks. Such gifts are intended to be employed by leaders and all members of Christ’s body, as stewards of God’s grace, for the sake of others, to God’s glory (1 Peter 4:10-11).<sup>25</sup> The Lutheran emphasis has been less on grace-gifts (*charisms*) and more on justification by grace through faith and on the stewardship of life.

Apostles have already been noted as the first group mentioned in two of the lists of leaders in Pauline letters (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11) and as those who, like Paul, proclaimed the Gospel of salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-11). The term “apostle” means “one who is sent (by God)” (Gal. 1:1),<sup>26</sup> and apostleship<sup>27</sup> relates to mission (Gal. 2:8; Rom. 1:5)<sup>28</sup> as well as to a key role in ministry (Acts 1:25; 1 Thess. 2:7).<sup>29</sup> The term was employed by Paul more broadly than in Luke-Acts, and at least once included a woman (Junia, Rom. 16:7, NRSV).<sup>30</sup> Apostles and prophets are the foundation of the Church where Christ is the keystone or cornerstone (Eph. 2:19-20).<sup>31</sup> Lutherans view as normative the Gospel<sup>32</sup> taught by the apostles, its expression in the statements of faith like the Apostles’ Creed, and the deposit of early Christian teaching in the apostolic Scriptures. Ministry is apostolic when it continues in Gospel, mission, Scripture, and creed, whether in any of its several New Testament expressions or in later forms like threefold ministry.

The Word of God, God's gifts, and apostolicity are characteristics of the New Testament Church and ministry. Congregations were founded "from outside" (by the word from apostles and others sent as heralds of Christ to preach). They were built up "from within" through the involvement of the whole community of faith through the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> Community and mission call for leaders and people joined together for ministry.

Within the New Testament churches, leaders regularly appear, locally and sometimes beyond, to minister by proclamation of the Word and by carrying out other supportive functions there required for communal life and mission. Often the term 'presbyter' (or elder) is used for such leaders, an office found first in the synagogue. Presbyters appear in Acts, 1 Timothy, James, 1 Peter, and 2 and 3 John, for example, though never in the earlier or acknowledged letters by Paul. "Pastor" is used occasionally (Eph. 4:11).<sup>34</sup> Bishops<sup>35</sup> and deacons<sup>36</sup> are mentioned together in Phil. 1:1,<sup>37</sup> and presbyters as overseers at Acts 20:17, 28.<sup>38</sup> In the Pastoral Epistles occur the office of bishop (*episkope*, 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9);<sup>39</sup> presbyters (1 Tim. 5:17-19, including "elders who rule";<sup>40</sup> Titus 1:5-6);<sup>41</sup> and *diakonoi* (1 Tim. 3:8-13).<sup>42</sup> Qualifications are listed for such persons but not duties. Teaching the faith is emphasized. The Lutheran Confessions follow the interpretation of Saint Jerome in the early fifth century that presbyter and bishop formed one group of Church leaders and the deacons another, a view widely supported in modern scholarship. In the changing social setting of the Pastoral Epistles, women were still likely serving as deacons<sup>43</sup> and in the important role of "widow," enrolled on a list, for communal life (1 Tim. 5:3-16).

The "laying on of hands" was the characteristic feature of what later came to be called "ordination" (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6; 2:2, here involving presbyters).<sup>44</sup> Sometimes it was related to the gift of the Spirit in general (Acts 8:17-19),<sup>45</sup> healing (Mark 5:23; 6:5),<sup>46</sup> blessing (Mark 10:13-16),<sup>47</sup> or commissioning for a task (Acts 13:2-3).<sup>48</sup> It was employed by Christian presbyters in designating leaders under the Spirit to exhort and teach others. In Acts 6:6 those on whom the apostles, with prayer, laid their hands (a group not called "deacons" in the text though they "serve") subsequently preached (Acts 6:8ff; cf. 11:19-20) and performed other tasks of service (Acts 6:1-3). There is in the New Testament no connection of such "ordination" with presiding at sacraments, but those who receive the laying on of hands are to proclaim the Word, pass on the Gospel teaching, and engage in other ministries for and with the community.

Thus, according to the New Testament, God instituted leaders—apostles and others—to proclaim the

Word, ensure sound transmission of the faith, and minister to all sorts of needs. This occurred within a Church in which all are gifted by God and called to ministry in some sense. From these origins the pastor-teacher or presbyter became a constant feature in subsequent Christianity, as did some sort of oversight, often by a bishop. Supportive diaconal forms of ministry arose but then declined over the following centuries.

## 2. The Lutheran Confessions

The chief emphasis in the Confessions, which sought to be true to the Scriptures, is the Gospel. This Gospel declares the unconditional promise that God justifies sinners by grace alone through faith apart from works. For the Confessions it is above all the Gospel that is the point under dispute, not forms of ministry. Nevertheless there is discussion of ministry. The Confessions teach that to obtain faith "God instituted the office of ministry, that is provided the Gospel and the sacraments." This office of ministry is essential to the Church.

The order and logic of the Augsburg Confession (1530) and its central and controlling doctrine of justification have continuing significance for understanding both the nature of ministry and the development of forms of ministry in the ELCA. This logic can be seen by looking at the progression of its early articles. The first three articles of the Augsburg Confession move from the revelation of the Triune God to human sinfulness to God's redemptive ministry in Jesus Christ. Article four describes justification and the faith that believes that for Christ's sake sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given.

God's own ministry (or loving service to humanity), to declare persons righteous through the justifying work of Christ, is the essential starting place and content of Christian ministry. Article five confesses: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he [God] gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when, and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel." This article is about God's ministry. It is not about officially recognized forms of ministry in the Church, lay or ordained. Although this article has been read to refer to pastors or others in authority, its own clear sense makes such a reading difficult to justify.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, article five is about God establishing preaching, the Latin text says 'teaching,' and the sacraments, not about the establishment of any one particular pattern of the pastoral office, whether threefold, twofold, or unitary.

Why is this point important? It is important because it establishes the degree to which God allows the Church freedom to order or re-order institutional forms of ministry within the office of ministry to communicate the Gospel. If God established pastors as the only legitimate ministers of the Gospel, then the Church would have no right to change that pattern. But if, as this article asserts, God established the means of grace in Word and Sacrament and not a particular ordering of its forms, then the Church does have legitimate freedom, under confessional authority, to adjust the forms of that ministry. Its criteria for doing so must be fidelity to the Gospel and service to God's will for the world.

The freedom to adapt forms of ministry is not a license for thoughtless change which ignores or despises the life and experience of the Church through the centuries. Lutherans have taken a conservative approach to reforming structures of ministry. Article 28 displays the conservative intent of the reformers in trying to balance inherited structures with the imperative to communicate the Gospel.

If God's own office of Gospel and sacraments is to be effective, then there must be persons charged with public leadership in declaring the Word and administering its Sacramental expressions. It is in article 14 that the Augsburg Confession addresses forms of ministry or "Order in the Church." Here the criterion for calling forth particular forms of ministry and particular ministers is that they must be "regularly called" (*rite vocatus*), that is, called in accordance with official Church procedures. This principle prevents the unwarranted assumption of office in the Church by individuals apart from accepted procedure. It also allows for the reforming of Church ministries for the sake of the Gospel. In accord with the Confessions' stress on God's office of Word and Sacrament (article five), the Reformers were able to re-order the ministries of bishop and presbyter better to serve the Gospel.

Following Saint Jerome, they recognized only a difference in jurisdiction between presbyters and bishops. When sixteenth-century bishops failed to serve evangelical congregations as ministers of Word and Sacrament, reform followed several patterns. Pastors legitimately functioned as emergency bishops in their own parishes, exercising ministries such as confirmation which were once reserved to bishops. For ministries affecting larger territories, some regions such as Germany replaced Roman bishops with evangelical superintendents. Others, such as Sweden, reformed the office of bishop along evangelical lines but retained the same persons as bishops in that reformed office.

### 3. The Tradition of the Christian Church

#### a. Early Church

Evidence from ancient sources, such as the Church orders,<sup>50</sup> indicates that variety in the patterns of church organization and leadership continued for some time after the apostolic era. The struggle to find ways of meeting important needs for leaders in diaconal ministry (service and relief to the poor and needy, administration of the increasing property of the Church, roles in worship, and direct service to bishops) made the office of deacon an important part of the history of this period. Eventually, this variety gave way generally to a pattern where three titles—bishop, presbyter, and deacon—appeared with increasing frequency. *BEM* correctly concludes: "During the second and third centuries, a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the Church."<sup>51</sup> But even after this development, this ministry "underwent considerable changes in its practical exercise."<sup>52</sup> Reflecting the orders and structures of the society of the time, these early centuries also gave rise to an increased focus on ordained ministry and its demarcation from "laity." The ministry of the baptized does not disappear during this period, but the evidence which was preserved is found in such places as the stories of martyrs and saints rather than among the treatises on orders and ministry.

#### b. Medieval Church

During subsequent centuries, the three titles—"bishop," "presbyter," and "deacon"—persisted. Significant variations in the understanding of the ministries associated with these titles occurred, especially in Europe. Factors such as the rise of the papacy, the drives for political and ecclesiastical unification in Europe, and the rise of religious orders (monks, friars, and nuns) all influenced the understanding and practice of ministry. Though the title "deacon" persisted in this period, real diaconal ministry which communicated the love of God through the care of the poor, sick, and suffering, and through the work of educating the young, was largely taken over by such monastic orders.

Among the other most noticeable developments was the development of bishops into overseers of large territories with duties as temporal rulers. A second change that occurred gradually during this period was in the presbyterate. This took on more and more responsibility for sacramental ministry as a Christian Priesthood.

Evidence for the contributions of laity to medieval Christianity must be sought among the work of artists,

workers in the crafts, builders, princes and others who helped to make the medieval synthesis of Church and culture work in the West. While traditional ecclesiastical sources do not always record such contributions, the contributions speak for themselves, as do the stories of saintly lives and personal sacrifice preserved from the period.

### c. Reformation

The sixteenth-century Lutheran reformers inherited a particular pattern of ministry from the medieval Western Church. This existing and often corrupt structure colored and shaped many of the practical decisions they made in reforming the institutional Church. Their chief concern for ministry, however, was not its ecclesiastical and institutional side. Rather they were motivated by their attempt to recover the biblical emphasis on God's ministry through the justifying ministry of Jesus Christ. This is their clear priority in the confessional writings. The discussion of the Lutheran Confessions is found on pages 4-5 of this report.

The Lutheran reformers had little acquaintance with any viable form of a ministry of deacon except as a brief transition to the priesthood. In 1528 Luther himself suggested restoring a diaconate on what he took to be a New Testament or early Church model. "There ought to be deacons of the church who ought to serve the bishop and to rule the church in external things according to his counsel."<sup>53</sup> Lutheran reforms did exhibit a renewed commitment to the diaconal content of the Church's ministry in their arrangements for the care and support of the poor and needy and in their emphasis on teaching. This ministry was often made the responsibility of the state rather than the congregation alone or the religious orders which once cared for it. Reforms in Lutheran territories, such as in the city of Nuremberg, became models for the reform of social ministries across Europe. Lutheran church orders—for example, in Braunschweig-Calenburg in the early 1540's—frequently applied the title deacon to persons whose public ministry was the care of the poor and not preparation for the pastorate.<sup>54</sup> Other reformers (e.g., Calvin in Geneva and Bucer in Strasbourg) reclaimed what they took to be an ancient New Testament vision of diaconal ministry and restored it to greater prominence as a particular form of ministry in their programs of church reform.

### d. Lutheranism

Lutheranism came to North America with laity who emigrated from Northern Europe in the seventeenth century. These Lutherans generally assumed that forms of ministry would be like those they had known

in the state churches of their homelands. They often petitioned those European churches to supply ordained ministers to meet the needs of immigrant congregations for leadership in Word and Sacrament ministry. The difficult transition from European patterns to forms that served the American situation is detailed in sources such as the journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787). No longer supported by state structures, pastors and laity developed congregational and synodical structures of Church governance. The ordination and licensure of leaders for Word and Sacrament ministry was overseen by such structures.

Diaconal ministry also has been a part of Lutheran church life in North America since earliest times. Lay persons who were elected to congregational offices of deacon served as stewards of the congregation's property and assisted in spiritual ministry with the pastor. Under the influence of pietism, a renewed emphasis on the active ministry of the laity in the Church and in the world blossomed. Diaconal ministry also experienced a renewal as Lutherans established hospitals, homes, orphanages, schools, and other institutions for the care of the needy and the education of children. The establishment of colleges and seminaries to provide trained leadership both for Church and world was an important part of this revival.

Lutheran deaconesses played an important part in this diaconal revival of the nineteenth century. William Alfred Passavant (1821-1894) brought deaconesses from the Kaiserswerth Motherhouse to Pittsburgh in 1849. Other Kaiserswerth deaconesses came to Philadelphia and established institutions of diaconal service, especially hospitals and orphanages. While this was primarily a movement of women in diaconal ministry, male deacons were not unknown.

Other deaconesses came to North America from Neuendettelsau in Bavaria. These deaconesses enjoyed special relationships with the Iowa Synod through their connections with Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872). Additional deaconesses such as Sister Elizabeth Fedde (1850-1921) came from Norway to establish motherhouses in Brooklyn, Minneapolis, and Chicago. Diaconal work among Swedish Lutherans also benefited from the ministry of deaconesses who founded institutions in Nebraska and Minnesota. A motherhouse affiliated with the General Synod was founded in Baltimore in 1895.

In the nineteenth century new emphasis was placed, in Germany and elsewhere, on *Diakonie*, through the deaconess movement as indicated above and also through the *Diakon*. This term usually referred to "a non-ordained full-time male church

worker, carefully trained to perform a special service" such as teaching, service in hospitals and other institutions of mercy, church music, seamen's missions, and the like.<sup>55</sup> The Inner Mission movement (later "social ministry") has expanded in the past century and a half to include, in Germany and other Lutheran areas, thousands of such persons, church-trained and related, at work, often in public programs and institutions. Male deacons were a part of the Wartburg home in New York.

The views of Lutherans like Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808-81), Amalie Sieveking (1794-1859), and Frederick W. Bodelschwingh (1831-1910), for example, were by no means uniform, any more than those of recent American Lutherans on ministry are in agreement.<sup>56</sup> But Lutheran theology since the sixteenth century and in the face of historical and social development and change has not been silent on ministry issues, including diakonia.

In Lutheran World Federation studies, there has been increasing agreement that the identity of the Lutheran church is shaped both by the past (for example though the confessional heritage) and by contemporary situations and service in the world.<sup>57</sup> Such an approach can reflect both traditional "marks of the Church" (such as "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic") and, encouraged by Luther's seven marks of Christ's "holy people in the world" (the Word of God; baptism; the sacrament of the altar; office of the keys [Matt. 18:15-20, sins forgiven]; ministers; prayer, public praise and thanksgiving to God; and the cross [persecution and suffering]),<sup>58</sup> can emphasize also "responsibility in the world." Such a doctrine of the Church underlies subsequent LWF studies on ministry.<sup>59</sup>

Given the confessional insistence on God's ministry to us, on the office of ministry for the means of grace, and, especially in Luther, on the priesthood of all the baptized, such a view of the Church and its marks implies twin concerns in ministry. Ministerial leadership is expected, on the one hand, to provide Word and Sacrament in congregations and other specialized settings, and, on the other, to stress service to the neighbor and to others in God's world. This study focuses on these dual tasks.

A lasting contribution of this period was the development of seminaries for the training of pastors and the commitment to the ideal of professionally trained full-time pastors. This commitment helped to shape ministerial preparation for generations down to the present time. It finally replaced other models of private study and apprenticeship which had once been used to train pastors. The importance of pastoral leadership was clearly affirmed in this development,

as was the American Lutheran commitment to a close relationship between seminary education and leadership in the Church's ministry.

#### e. Modern Ecumenical Developments

Challenges from society confront all Christian churches today. Divided churches now share these challenges, as well as the quest for unity in Christ for the sake of mission and the renewal of the Church. The result is greater ecumenical convergence across lines of ecclesiastical structure. The question about ministry that *BEM* poses is addressed to all churches today. "A common answer needs to be found to the following question: How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?"<sup>60</sup>

A number of Lutheran church responses to *BEM* cautioned against its assumption that a single common answer must be found to the question of Church order and forms of ministerial leadership. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as experience with other Lutherans and other Christian churches, demonstrate that a range of faithful answers to this question can be given simultaneously. However, cooperation in the mission of the Gospel may well call for a more common understanding or at least a more flexible attitude and ordering of ministry than is now present among the churches. Forms of ordained ministry that do more to separate than to unite churches are a real ecumenical problem. Ecumenical concerns are not limited to those who hold ministerial offices in the Church. Movements to renew ministry of the laity in Church and world are already broadly ecumenical.

Lutherans are participating in the ecumenical renewal of diaconal ministry. During its investigations the task force has seen the remarkable energy and promise which is characteristic of the revival of diaconal ministry. The task force has also seen the great and sometimes confusing variety associated with it. That variety is reflected in programs of diaconal training and service that have arisen in our own church and in its predecessor churches as well as ecumenically. In addition to deaconesses rostered in each of the predecessor churches, the ELCA also inherited rosters of persons who were "consecrated" deacons in the AELC. While not rostered by the ELCA or its predecessor churches there are also programs such as Diakonia; the Deacon Training Program; synodical programs in Upstate New York, West Virginia, and elsewhere; and the Order of St. Stephen, Deacon. Campus ministry and outreach programs

have also sponsored specially recognized forms of ministry which were not on the churchwide roster of ministers.

Certainly important among these diaconal developments is the decision by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in 1991 to affirm that it would have bishops, pastors, and diaconal ministers. Since ministers currently move easily between the ELCA and the ELCIC and because the ELCA Deaconess Community and deaconesses of the Lutheran Deaconess Association serve the ELCIC as well as the ELCA diaconal ministry is a matter in need of considered coordination and cooperation between the churches.

In the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches, the permanent diaconate (in distinction from the diaconate as a stage of preparation for the priesthood) has been restored as an ordained ministry. It has opened new avenues for service for individuals whose vocation is not to Word and Sacrament (presbyteral) ministry. It has also expanded the ability of those churches to provide specialized and trained leadership alongside priests. The United Methodist Church has reclaimed the diaconate as a permanent office which is consecrated, not ordained, together with an ordained diaconate for persons preparing to be ordained as elders.<sup>61</sup> The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other Reformed churches are re-examining their forms of diaconal ministry. Deaconess communities of various churches are involved in advocating for diaconal ministry today in ways that touch both ordained and lay ministries.

The World Assembly of Diaconal Associations (DIAKONIA) and, in this hemisphere, Diakonia of the Americas and the Caribbean, draw together institutions, communities, and churches involved in this diaconal renewal across church divisions. Diaconal ministry is becoming a vital part of young churches in Africa and Asia.

One recent survey categorizes contemporary forms of diaconal ministry in four models which sometimes co-exist in a single church body: 1) deacons elected within individual congregations to serve at the local level only; 2) deacons who are transitional to the priesthood; 3) "permanent" deacons who receive local training and serve as ordained ministers on a non-stipendiary basis or less frequently on a full-time basis; 4) communities of deacons or deaconesses that came out of the Inner Mission movement. There is historical precedent for these and other possible forms of the diaconate to inform and enrich the shape of diaconal ministry in the Church today.<sup>62</sup>

The task force has made no attempt to frame churchwide proposals on 1) "deacons" elected by local congregations to serve only within their own congrega-

tion. No interest was shown in 2) ordination as a transitional deacon, e.g., for a year, as a step to ordination as a pastor. No recommendation was forthcoming to create throughout the ELCA a new kind of 3) "permanent deacon" identical to those of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches, though features of this approach are contained in the proposals that follow. The fourth type calls for further discussion (see pages 9-12).

Inevitably, most of what has been said about the "modern" period has been ecumenical since much of the discussion of ministry according to the Lutheran heritage has been in relation to the broad spectrum of options in ministry throughout Christianity and because of the mandate for this study. "Deacon" has meant many things in Christendom, but seldom has it been the divisive area in ministry among the churches.

#### 4. Society Today

Like most institutions in society, the ELCA is facing dwindling revenues to train and support ordained ministers and associates in ministry. Yet, the need for more such leaders, especially in urban centers with new populations and in many rural areas with shrinking populations, is constantly growing. In anticipation of such needs, the recommendations advocate greater use of non-stipendiary ministers (not paid for ministerial duties but on ELCA rosters) and licensure for persons to serve for a specified period of time in specific settings where pastors are not available.

A strong emphasis on the priesthood and discipleship of every Church member for ministry in daily-life is needed to provide Christian presence and witness in a society ever more complex technologically, vocationally, economically, ideologically, and ethically.

Greater efforts to secure accurate documentation in English which reflects the experience of traditionally under-represented cultures are needed in this society in general and in this church in particular. Studies such as this are handicapped by the lack of such documentation and are forced to rely upon anecdotal information. Readily comparable sources could advance cultural partnership and mission which crosses cultural boundaries.

Trained and committed persons are required for care and advocacy for an aging population, where health resources are often inadequate, especially for children and the poor, and where the disease of AIDS is growing. People cry out for counseling and support in all sorts of crises and problems, including broken homes, drugs, and victimization by injustice. In a church that has long prided itself on education, with schools at every level from nursery through seminary, new emphasis is needed on teaching the faith to inquirers and members of all ages. The Task Force on

Theological Education for Ministry is proposing a broader network in theological education for leaders and the whole Church. This calls for education specialists throughout the Church. In Church music ELCA congregations continue a long Lutheran and ecumenical heritage from the past. They also embrace new songs and patterns of worship from African-American, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic churches and cultures. Yet there is a scarcity of Church musicians to give leadership to the Church in meeting this demand. To meet these and other specialized needs the task force recommends diaconal ministers for the ELCA.

Because of these complex currents in society, this church needs greater flexibility for the future. Its need for expanded and specialized forms of ministry, consonant with its past and open to the challenges of coming years, has helped shape this report and its recommendations.

## C. The Question of Threefold Office within the People of God: A Lutheran Proposal

### 1. The Question of Threefold Office

The mandate of this study asks that it pay special attention to the “possibility of a Lutheran understanding and adaptation of the threefold ministerial office of bishop, pastor, and deacon and its ecumenical implications” (ELCA 10.11.A87. [1987 edition]). This also is the question which *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* has posed to all churches for consideration. In 1991 this task force produced a report with three possible models in answer to this question. That report outlined a reaffirmation of the unitary office of ministry with rosters of lay ministry to supplement it. It outlined a twofold proposal which argued for the establishment of a diaconate (either ordained or consecrated). It also outlined three versions of the threefold office for considerations.<sup>63</sup>

In the course of five years of discussion, and particularly in response to its 1991 proposals, this task force has learned that the question that is so much at the heart of *BEM*—can threefold ministry, in some adapted form, be a path to unity?—is not the way in which most of the people of this church approach the issues either of unity or mission. In two rounds of churchwide hearings and forums, thousands of pages of documentation and correspondence, and scores of presentations, requests for a classic threefold ministry were expressed, but relatively infrequently. The task force discovered that for most people in the ELCA the

natural starting place for serious discussion is not forms or “folds” of ministry. The natural starting place is mission. Answering questions about the overall pattern of officially recognized forms of ministry (threefold, twofold, or unitary) did not answer the questions the people of this church regard as most important. Approaching the question as this part of the mandate and *BEM* suggested repeatedly left many of the questions about mission posed by the task force’s larger mandate unanswered.

The responses of Lutheran churches to *BEM* have been varied, as have reactions to the 1991 ELCA Report on Ministry by seminary faculties and individual theologians.<sup>64</sup> A typical response to the models in the 1991 report from ELCA pastors, bishops, associates in ministry, and laity was to express no strong preference for any of the models as they stood and to wonder why they were being proposed at all. Repeatedly, respondents expressed the sentiments: “I guess I could live with any of these models if I knew that it was really important to the Church’s mission to proclaim the Gospel in the world today.” “What will these forms of ministry allow the Church to do that it cannot do now?” “How will these proposals affect pastors?” “How will they affect the role of all the baptized?” These were the important issues to persons in this church.

### 2. A Lutheran Proposal

Rather than recommending forms of ministry that strictly follow a threefold, twofold, or unitary model, this report proposes a Lutheran adaptation that includes elements of several models. The elements recommended have emerged in response to needs for expanded and more flexible forms of officially recognized leadership which the task force has seen during its work. It is the mission question that must be asked first and only then the question of forms of ministry to serve that mission.

#### a. The Ministry of the Baptized

Commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God is an ecumenical concern. It is expressed in *BEM* and in the mandate of this study. The task force has consistently tried to integrate this issue with discussions of officially recognized forms of ministry to determine whether particular forms have the potential to draw more and more of the baptized into ministry both in the Church and in the world. This report affirms both the ministry of the whole people of God and the ministry of officially recognized, though not ordained, forms of lay ministry. This is a clear affirmation of the ministry which associates in ministry

have provided in the ELCA since 1988 and which other officially recognized ministries contributed to predecessor church bodies.

## **b. Ordained Ministry**

### 1) PASTORS AND BISHOPS

The pastoral ministry of Word and Sacrament is essential to the life of the Church. The proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments are the means of grace through which faith is bestowed by the Holy Spirit (CA 5). Everything should be done to strengthen and affirm this ministry and to encourage those who serve in it.

### 2) DIACONAL MINISTERS

Diaconal ministry as recommended in this report will be a ministry of service and witness, exemplifying the life of Christ-like service to persons in need and leading and equipping the baptized for their life of service within and beyond the congregation. Diaconal ministers will support the ministry of the baptized in the world, work with laity in discerning gifts for ministry, and equip their lives of service.

Diaconal ministers will be ministers of the Word in that they will be spokespersons for the Gospel, the apostolic faith, and the theological emphases of this church to God's world. They will also bear special responsibility to speak for the needs of God's world to the Church. They will, therefore, be trained in knowledge and understanding of the Word of God, in the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel, in personal spiritual formation and in theological reflection on issues of faith and life. This training will equip them to witness to the faith verbally and in action.

Diaconal ministers also will need training in specific areas of Christian service, often at a professional level, not merely to do the service themselves but to inspire, motivate, equip, and provide official leadership for others as well.

#### *a) Basic Standards<sup>65</sup>*

Basic standards for diaconal ministry would be identical to those for pastoral ministers:

Persons admitted to and continued in the ordained ministry of this church shall satisfactorily meet and maintain the following, as defined by this church in its governing documents and in policies developed by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council: a. commitment to Christ; b. acceptance of and adherence to the Confession of Faith of this church; c. willingness and ability to serve in response to the needs of this church;

d. academic and practical qualifications for ministry; e. life consistent with the Gospel and personal qualifications including leadership abilities and competence in interpersonal relationships; f. receipt and acceptance of a letter of call; and g. membership in a congregation of this church (ELCA 7.31.11.).

#### *b) Qualifications and Preparation*

1. Diaconal ministers must have gifts for their chosen area of ministry to be discerned by the person, by the congregation(s) of which they have been a part, by the seminaries or other institutions involved in their preparation, and by synodical candidacy committees.

2. They must receive biblical, theological, and communication training appropriate to all ministers of the Word.

3. Many areas of diaconal ministry will require professional training appropriate to their particular responsibilities (see categories of service below).

4. Commitment to this ministry, as to pastoral ministry, should be for life. Such ministers should be open to serve where needed and called in the Church.

5. Specific criteria and requirements will be established by the Division for Ministry, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council. (See Appendix B, "A Proposed Model for Preparation.")

#### *c) Endorsement and Certification*

The process of candidacy for diaconal candidates will be as thorough as the one for pastoral candidates. It will be carried out by synodical candidacy committees according to standards and guidelines to be established by the Division for Ministry in consultation with the Conference of Bishops.

#### *d) Areas of Service*

Since the particular form of diaconal ministry proposed here would be new to the ELCA, the following are examples, not an exhaustive list. Diaconal ministry should develop in response to emerging needs and, therefore, must be flexible enough to enable diaconal ministers to move into areas of service where the needs of persons and society are pressing the Church for leadership and response.

Diaconal ministers could serve in congregations, clusters, conferences, agencies, institutions, synods, and churchwide expressions of the ELCA. They also could be sent out beyond the institutional Church on its behalf into areas where the Church's presence, leadership, and service are needed.

- Diaconal Ministry of Education: congregational education leadership, parish and Lutheran high

school teaching, possible college and seminary teaching. Child care and day care centers, congregation youth ministries, church camping.

- Diaconal Ministry of Mission and Evangelism: in areas and among, groups usually untouched by the Church's proclamation of the Gospel, involving, e.g., evangelists and catechists.
- Diaconal Ministry of Care: parish nurse, hospital ministries, ministering to the physically challenged, the poor, homeless, addicted, prisoners, immigrants, the aged. Some counseling ministries. This area should include advocacy and justice ministries.
- Diaconal Ministry of Administration: congregation business administrators, administrators of church related institutions and agencies.
- Diaconal Ministry of Music and the Arts: cantors, directors of church music programs, teachers of church musicians in colleges and universities.

*e) Call, Accountability, and Discipline*

Since diaconal ministers will be officially recognized ministers of the church they must be "called" by entities authorized to do so (see ELCA 7.41.A91.). Diaconal ministers must also be accountable for their life and ministry as are pastoral ministers. They must be accountable to the calling entity and to the synod of which they are members. Standards for discipline will be identical (except as specifically related to Word and Sacrament ministry in 20.21.01.c.) to those for pastoral ministers (ELCA 20.21.01.).

**c. The Question of Ordination for Diaconal Ministers**

How is ordination to be understood in relation to the Church's mission? Ordination should have as its prime purpose, as in the "laying on of hands" in the Pastoral Epistles, to assert that those who hold public office in and for the Church are to hold to its Gospel and teachings. Ordination calls upon designated leaders to transmit faithfully that Gospel to others and to the whole Church (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:21).<sup>66</sup> Other terms to designate this responsibility, such as consecration, are no clearer than ordination and have sometimes been used interchangeably with it. This understanding of ordination is also consistent with article 14 of the Augsburg Confession which links public teaching to the call of the Church.

It is clear to most Lutherans that pastors exercising a ministry of preaching and sacramental celebration fit this definition. The definition is often used more broadly than Lutherans in North America are accus-

tomed to. The authority of the ordained ministry is also important for the "mission and caring ministry" of the Church. This ministry is expressed not only in preaching and sacraments but in deeds and service that communicate the Gospel. Historically Christians have used ordination in connection with other forms of ministry as well.

Ordaining diaconal ministers finds precedent in the history of the Church. The New Testament describes a "laying on of hands" to set persons apart for a variety of ministries (see page 4). From the third century there is evidence that persons were ordained to diaconal ministry. Ecumenically, the practice of ordaining deacons is found in churches with episcopal forms of ministry (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox) and in churches with other forms (Presbyterian and Reformed churches). Because they share the public leadership and teaching aspects of the office of ministry, it is appropriate to ordain persons for service as diaconal ministers. The obligations of such ordination require education, training, and discipline commensurate with other ordained ministers.

Ordained diaconal ministers will be clergy of this church who are charged with leadership of this church's diaconal mission of witness and service. Pastors and bishops will continue to exercise the ordained ministry of preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments.

Ordaining diaconal ministers is consistent with the task force's understanding of ordination as it is practiced by this church (see page 15 below).

**d. Officially Recognized Lay Ministries**

The ministry of the Church is never limited to ordained persons. The ELCA and its predecessors have benefitted from a variety of ministries carried out by laity in Church vocations. In its recommendations, this report will support that ministry in this church. Associates in ministry and their predecessors enrich this church's ministry and as laity bring to this church important competencies and a commitment to ministry.

Many persons who have already met demanding educational criteria for certification and who are called to diaconal ministry may find this new form of ordained service a welcome vision for service. However, for those who do not, and for others called to lay service in the Church's vocations, the present program of associates in ministry offers an important alternative.

**e. Church Employees Not Rostered by the ELCA**

Every expression of this church, its congregations, synods, and churchwide organization, should continue

to employ laity who bring special gifts and competencies to its ministry and who serve faithfully. Church employees must be compensated equitably, supported, and encouraged through continuing education and collegial relationships with the officially recognized ministers of this church.

#### **D. Summary**

Throughout its history the Christian Church has organized and reorganized its institutional forms to serve its mission from God. This was true in apostolic times when apostles appointed and laid hands upon others to serve the needs of the whole community so that they might continue preaching. It was true as presbyters and bishops were chosen and set apart for leadership in the Pastoral Epistles. The subsequent history of the Church details changing forms of leadership in service of the Church's mission in a changing world. Even the Reformation of the sixteenth century, whose main focus was on the Gospel message, effected changes in the structures of officially recognized forms of Church leadership to serve that message. Movements of Church renewal within Lutheranism gave rise to new forms of service by deaconesses and deacons in Europe and the United States. The world's needs today also call for reexamination of forms of ministry that will help to organize this church's life for mission and ministry together.

This report urges this church to affirm and embrace a wide variety of forms of ministry. It begins with a call to deepen the Church's commitment to the ministry which is the responsibility of all the baptized people of God. This ministry embraces responsibilities in the Church but is particularly focused on witness, vocation, and stewardship in the world.

Within this ministry of all baptized Christians, ministries of leadership are called for. These officially recognized forms are not at odds with the ministry of the baptized but exist to support and give specific leadership. They can be seen as a continuum of service linking groups long familiar and new possibilities: ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, together with ordained diaconal ministers; officially recognized laity, including associates in ministry and the ELCA deaconess community; and all the baptized in ministry who complete the continuum and extend it into the world. The ELCA has inherited a variety of forms of this ministry. This report affirms the important contribution all the various aspects of this continuum can make to ministry together.

The vision of ministry undergirding this range of ministries is one not of competition but of mutual support. Leaders are set apart for leadership, not personal prestige. This diverse set of forms will enrich this church's ability to respond to God's call to ministry in the world.