

## ORDINATION AND SCRIPTURE — ADDENDUM

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Having attended to my own paper and much of what my colleagues have both written and said, I offer the following as suggestive for shaping our ministries for the care and nurture of congregations. The New Testament vision of ministry in a time of mission among those with both long-held traditions of worship of the God of Israel (Jews) and those whose worship experience had been dedicated to other gods or groups (Gentiles) is helpful. Some of what is clear within its documents are:

- The approval of a person's call to serve by a group
- The active mentoring of new leaders (Paul by Barnabas, Timothy by Paul, Apollos by Prisca and Aquila)
- The importance of acquaintance with Scripture
- The importance of thoughtful theological reflection
- The importance of continuing to develop and work through networks of congregations for mission, for support of leaders within congregations and in far-flung places
- The importance of hospitality
- The importance of connection among leaders to those who had some experience of Jesus, a line that could harken back to eyewitnesses at however great a remove
- The importance of leaders being respected in the congregation, throughout the larger church and having some freedom of mobility based on that respect
- The importance of preaching/teaching by the leaders

As I noted in my original paper, there seems to be great freedom to organize within the New Testament, a freedom that begins to shake out by the second century into a variety of roles and levels of authority in service to congregations. The importance of these roles centers around two sets of activities which are very visible throughout the New Testament and are encapsulated in Acts 2:40-47. These activities are care of the other/neighbor and relationship with God, including a right understanding of God's will.<sup>1</sup> Jews and Christians differed from their pagan neighbors in their commitment to both of these aspects of their faith.

Because the concern about heresy (New Testament) and idolatry (Old and New Testaments) was very great<sup>2</sup> it is crucial that leaders speak the truth about who God truly is and how we are called to certain lives as God's children. In order to do this well, one relies on the gifts of the spirit and information/understanding.<sup>3</sup> This kind of concern is, if anything, more important among us. While in a post-modern age we may be (I hope we are) more humble about knowing The Truth and its fullness of expression, we are called nonetheless to seek truth about God and our Godly or God-ward lives in a variety of contexts. This takes learning, skill, and experience, as well as on-going engagement.

For these reasons I think that churches have a number of options for feeding their congregations with Word and Sacrament, all of which attend to learning and a theologically reflective posture. This is my list:

*Make good use of our full-communion agreements wherever possible.* That is, invite trained pastors from other traditions to carry out a ministry of Word and Sacrament among Lutherans and/or serve as mentors for locally licensed “apprentice” pastors. In such discussion and shared ministry, all stand to learn much.

*Make good use of local pastors (and perhaps other non-ordained, theologically trained persons) as teachers and mentors.* License local lay preachers and celebrants AND make it a condition of their practice of ministry that they engage in study groups that meet weekly and/or at longer monthly meetings for text study, historical study, theological study, learning how to bring popular culture alongside the tradition of the church, the arts of pastoral care. A curriculum of sorts could be developed year-by-year.

*Consider the wisdom of the Episcopal practice of ordination that is surrounded by a team for ministry.* Rather than simply ordaining a local person or simply licensing such a person, let it be our duty to help a congregation find a team of at least three persons who will surround the ordained for the ministry of the congregation. Recall how carefully Paul’s letters clarify that they come from two or more persons, that they go to multiple recipients, and that they usually allude to yet other leaders known to the recipients. Multiple voices are a greater hedge against petty tyranny and also gross error. (They are not insurance, but nothing is!).

I believe that permission can be given for *an untrained elder to celebrate the sacraments with the people*, even as seemed to be the case in biblical times, BUT, because the sacraments are indeed visible words, that is, because they make a case about God and the rest of us, such a celebrant needs to be involved in continuing education.

*There is no single format that I would prescribe for continuing education.* My preference would be weekly text-study groups with monthly full or half-day gatherings to do more intense work, as I mentioned above. Any such work should be formally planned, written down, shared with the synod, and reviewed with the person by a synod staff member. Accountability is very important — biblically and in 2004. Several weeks at a non-parish location in January or the summer would be another way to do education and bring folks together. The Internet might help us here.

*For the ordained and even more for the untrained ordained or licensed, I would recommend a spiritual director for another kind of education.* This would help with the issues that would be either just touched upon or not even touched upon in Clinical Pastoral Education and Internship. For the untrained celebrant/preachers, spiritual direction should not be optional. I realize that in many communities this could be problematic. The Internet might help us here.<sup>4</sup> Loneliness in ministry is a problem for most pastors. It could be very dangerous indeed for folk who have not had a seminary experience to fall back on.

We must attend to different kinds of training needed in different situations. Established and struggling congregations have persons within them who “know” something about the faith, the means of expression of the faith, the ethos of being a congregation. While these persons need to continue to challenge what they “know” as well as to deepen and expand it, persons who engage in new starts are at a different place.

All of these possibilities are biblically sound, pedagogically possible, and would be welcomed in our current world. All of them would require significant administrative work by someone. The alternative of not “feeding” the people or feeding them poorly seems to me dire enough that it is preferable to add staff at some level. I pray for our church and especially for the bishops as they seek solutions to meet these complex needs. We have great freedom to conduct our lives for the good of those sheep that Jesus commanded Peter to feed, including our own sheepish selves. We have the means, the minds, and the hearts available. We can do this.

### **Endnotes**

1. These activities are also of signal importance in the Old Testament as well and may be simplistically imagined to be the primary concern of priests on the one hand and prophets on the other.
2. Both heresy and idolatry are often subsumed under the term *fornication*, as well as appearing in their own right.
3. In Acts 1:22, for example, the replacement for Judas must have known Jesus from the time of “his baptism by John until the time he was taken up from us...” While Paul claims to have had no instruction in some cases, in others he indicates that he passes on what he has received. Furthermore Paul was an experienced theologian and had many opportunities to think about Christian belief with believers as we read his story in Acts and his letters.