

The Pastor's Proper Handling of a Call

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Nothing can be more glorious here on earth than to be co-workers with God, to be laborers in his vineyard, builders of the temple where God himself will dwell, to be shepherds over his flock to feed both his sheep and lambs. Anyone who does not esteem this work to be great must consider Christianity itself as a thing to be despised.

J. Ylvisaker - from his notes on I Timothy

Our ELS Catechism asks: "What provision has the Lord made for the church to carry on His work?" (#209) Answer: "To carry on His work the Lord has given the church the means of grace; He has also given it the authority to call special servants who are to publicly preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments." Two support passages are listed: *God...reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Cor. 5:18). He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-12, NKJV)*

God the Holy Spirit works faith by connecting the hearts of sinners with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Only by these means can faith be initiated and sustained, since only here is the forgiveness of sins- obtained once for all by Christ at the cross-distributed and received. We rejoice that God has provided this simple but powerful method for us poor sinners to be brought into God's family of believers and preserved in this family! For the sake of good order, for proper care in handling Law/Gospel preaching and in administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and for indicating the earnestness and authority with which he desires his means of grace to be used, our God has given us the public ministry. Essential to this public ministry is the doctrine of the call-the authority, privilege and responsibility to administer Word and Sacrament publicly.

The Lutheran Church distinguishes carefully between the call to serve in the public ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11, Tit. 1:5, Rom. 10:14-17) and the responsibility to do the work of the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9, 1 Cor. 7:17). In both cases, however, God alone does the calling. He alone brings sinners to saving faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. He alone gives the necessary gifts and equips Christians with the grace and the ability to carry out the vocation wherein he has placed them. But when speaking of *the* call to do the work of preaching/teaching the Word in a *public* manner (i.e., in the name and stead of Christ and on behalf of the church), Scripture sets this apart as a noble office requiring deepest respect and attentive adherence to Scriptural qualifications (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1-7). There is no command in

Scripture for individuals to be called into artwork, nursing, engineering, farming, etc., although God does guide people into these worthwhile occupations and often does so in rather unique ways. But the Lord has given a *command* to the church to appoint preachers and teachers of the Word of God by means of a call being issued through a group of Christians who gather for the purpose of using Word and Sacrament.

Our Lord Jesus himself is the one who has established the public ministry; that is, he has authorized and instituted it. The public ministry does not come about simply because the church considered it to be the most expedient and orderly way to proclaim the Gospel. Scripture clearly states: *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...* (Eph. 4:11). Our Lutheran Confessions concur: "The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly..." (Ap XIII, 12).

I. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CALL

When a pastor weighs the responsibilities of his office, it is important for him to ascertain whether or not he has an actual call to serve. The first requirement of one qualified for public ministry work is to ascertain that the person has received a regular call to do the Gospel work. The Augsburg Confession teaches: "No one should teach or preach publicly in the Church or administer the Sacraments without a regular call" (AC XIV). The primary passage on which this distinctive teaching of the Lutheran Church is based is Romans 10:14-17. The apostle Paul writes: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.* Not only are these verses a *sedes* for the doctrine of the means of grace; they establish a need for a divine call to be extended for one to publicly administer the means of grace. The point is even stronger if one opts for a more literal translation of verse 17. William Arndt (see *Concordia Theological Monthly*, May 1954), for example, has rendered it: "So, then, faith comes through the proclamation, and the proclamation through the command of Christ [διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ]."

Churches that are not of means of grace stripe but bent on spontaneity or enthusiasm as a cause for faith's inception naturally minimize the significance of obtaining a divine call for public ministry work. Such churches frequently place the emphasis on an "inner call" and not on the prayerful decision of a calling body carrying out the will of the Lord. Luther spoke of zealots in his day "who despise (the mediate call) and boast of another calling, whereby they say the Spirit impels them to teach" (Plass, *What Luther Says*, II, #2970, p. 946). In the early days of our predecessor body, the Norwegian Synod, followers of Elling Eielsen felt that every Christian simply by virtue of membership in the universal priesthood of all believers had the power and authority to preach publicly without any need for an external call. But we maintain it to be a violation of God's Word for any individual to assume the role of *publicly* preaching or teaching the Word without a specific call extended by the church. Speaking to the pastors at Ephesus, St. Paul said: *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood* (Acts 20:28). Hear also Luther again: "It will not be proper that one should of his own accord put himself into the foreground and appropriate to himself what belongs to us all" (Luther on Ex. 3:1; quoted in J. H. C. Fritz' *Pastoral Theology*, p. 35).

Since God himself has instituted that the church call servants to administer publicly Word and Sacrament, our Lutheran Confessions teach: "For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the church to retain the right of calling, electing, and ordaining ministers. This right is a gift given exclusively to the church, and no human authority can take it away from the church... Here the words of Christ apply which testify that the keys were given to the church and not merely to certain individuals: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20)" (Treatise, 67-69).

The theology of the *rite vocatus* is clear. What is not always so clear is the way that the process works in extending calls, in deliberating over the reception or declination of such calls, and in handling aspects associated with the call where the secular, the material and the temporal impinge on the gravity of the divine call's consideration. Questions come to mind: If a man is already serving under the auspices of a divine call, can and should his entertaining another call be considered truly divine? Is it divine only if and when he accepts it? Is God working against himself if a man has a call and then receives another? What are legitimate and illegitimate reasons for accepting or declining a call? Dare one make a trip to the new location when contemplating a call? Men at times have said, "I need to be in an area where my wife also can pursue her own personal endeavors"-what about this? To what extent, if any, can a man show interest in being open to receive a call, especially if he already is shepherding a flock? When-if at all-might a call be regarded as temporary (e.g., a semi-retired man asked to serve for a rather lengthy interim)? What should be the role of the circuit visitor in arranging call meetings and in guiding (influencing?) the congregation in the calling of a pastor? How direct should the CV be in urging a man to accept or decline a call? These are a number of the questions we hope to address in this paper and also on which to receive input in the discussion period that follows.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CALL

A. For the Pastor

It is important, first of all, that a pastor ascertains if a call being extended to him is valid and therefore divine. Without a valid call, there is nothing for the man to consider. J. Fritz in his *Pastoral Theology* speaks of calls that are both valid and legitimate. He lists as determinants respectively: a valid call is one "extended by those whom God has given the right to do so;" a legitimate call is one that "has been procured in the right manner" (p. 39). A. Schuetze and I. Habeck in *The Shepherd Under Christ* state: "A true call (*vocatio rata*) comes into existence when it is extended by those who have the right to call. To call is to commission. Only those can commission another to administer the means of grace for them who themselves possess these means, namely, the believers or saints, who are the church of God. (Apology, VII, VIII, 8-10)" (Schuetze, 1989 edition, p. 24). Entities unable (under ordinary circumstances) to extend a valid call would include government institutions or public schools in the calling of chaplains. Where can it be shown that such a "calling body" possesses the office of the keys? And in respect to legitimacy, Fritz says: "Only such a call is legitimate as has been received without one's own initiative, which one accepts for conscience' sake, because persuaded by others to do so and by one's own obedience to God and one's love to one's neighbor. Luther warns against selfish desires for a change, saying: 'Remain where you are until you are called; do not seek another call, do not impose yourself upon others; for your proficiency is not so great that it will burst

open your belly...If God desires to have you, He will seek you out, yea, even send an angel from heaven to lead you where He desires to have you.” (Fritz, pp. 37, 38)

Here we need to address a concern: If a pastor is currently serving under one call, can another call that he is considering be regarded as *divine*? Is it only divine once he accepts it? While in the past God called prophets and apostles directly (immediately) and in such cases refusal would be a violation of God's holy will (Jonah 1:1-4), this is not the case in the extension of calls *mediately*, i.e., through a congregation. The mediate call, however, is no less divine (Acts 20:28). The man who is elected by a congregation's voters to consider the call to serve as its pastor should not treat this call as being *less divine* in nature than the call of prophets and apostles, even if/when he needs to deliberate between two or more calls at the same time. “God has not promised the church direct illumination in the choice of a person. Hence, not every call, even though it can in the above sense be called divine [in the sense that the congregation has acted on the basis of a right God has given to it], requires acceptance. The Lord may use a vacancy and declined calls in a congregation for salutary training and instruction” (Schuetze, p. 35). Two evident purposes served by the scenario of a pastor of a flock receiving a call to serve another flock are: a) that a man is caused to evaluate his ministry and his God-given abilities; and b) that a congregation is caused to review its own purposes and goals.

The man receiving the call is to trust that *God himself* has moved the congregation to extend to him the right and privilege to serve that parish as its pastor. If he is currently serving as pastor of a congregation, he ought not—when deliberating—assume automatically that the Lord wants him to move on to another flock. In this situation, *both* calls he has at the time—the one in which he presently serves and the one he has just received—have to be weighed with equal seriousness. Once the decision is made, the called pastor and the calling body should trust that the answer (whether accepting or declining) is in accordance with the will of God for the future work of his kingdom.

According to Walther (reflecting Chemnitz in his *Examen*), it is necessary for a pastor to be certain that he has a valid and legitimate divine call for the following reasons:

- Because the office of the Word is the office of God himself.
 - The one who has a legitimate call can call upon God for guidance in the exercise of the office with a peaceful conscience and certainly expect to be heard.
 - God wants to be present in the office with his Spirit and grace and wants to be effective through it.
 - The call is also necessary so that the ministers of the church conduct their office with that much greater diligence, faithfulness and cheerfulness in the fear of the Lord.
- (Drickamer's edition of Walther's *Pastorale*, p. 19)

The doctrine of the call presents the pastor both with a solemn warning and with a tremendous comfort. It is a warning not to take the matter of the public ministry lightly, to be tempted toward laziness or worldly concerns. Remember the words of James, *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly* (James 3:1). We also note how the words of Paul positively pose a serious attitude for one engaged in the work of the public ministry: *So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things [mysteries] of God* (1 Cor. 4:1). At the same time, the pastor takes great comfort in knowing that the divine call assures him that where he serves—even in the midst of dire duress or “alligator alley”—is a result not of human plans nor by chance but by God's own design and direction. When Amaziah told Amos to leave Israel (the northern

kingdom) and go back to Judah, Amos appropriately appealed to his call: *But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel (Amos 7:15).* In his second letter to the Corinthians, at a time when he needed to defend his apostleship from unjust criticism, Paul wrote: *Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:4-6).* The call gives the pastor the confidence that God who did the calling will also provide the competency for the tasks that lie ahead. *I can do everything through him who gives me strength, Phil. 4:13.*

B. For the Congregation

Walther says: "It cannot be expressed how important it is for the listeners to be certain of the divine call of their preacher. If the listeners are convinced of it, they will be satisfied at heart to have even a preacher with lesser gifts if only he is faithful. They will rather in simplicity hold to this: Our preacher is the one whom God has given us, through whom God wants to lead us to heaven. Under his shepherding God will not let us lack anything that is necessary for our salvation" (Drickamer's edition, p. 20).

There are times, of course, when a congregation may painstakingly need to revoke the call of its public servant of the Word. This would be for false doctrine, for immoral living or for ineptitude in performing the duties of the office. The call demands the responsibility of the congregation in assuring scriptural Law/Gospel preaching and the proper administration of the Sacraments. However, a congregation which takes to heart the importance of the divine call, as applied in the words of Walther above, will not hastily seek to remove its called minister without serious regard for the doctrine of the public ministry.

In an excellent essay on the doctrine of the call delivered at a WELS conference in November of 2000, Pastor Paul Janke observes: "The Bible studies that are commonly conducted before call meetings are designed to help the voters understand the biblical doctrine of the call. It would be good, however, if this important Bible teaching were addressed more often and more widely than at the forum that a call meeting provides."

III. THE ISSUANCE OF THE CALL

When a congregation calls, its representative body of voters (or an authorized board/committee) issues the call on behalf of the entire church. In many cases this special meeting of the voters takes place even before the congregation's "outgoing pastor" has had his farewell Sunday. The congregation, in consultation with the circuit visitor, arranges a special meeting where the voters carefully consider a list of candidates. After presenting a list of candidates submitted to him by the synod president, the circuit visitor facilitates the discussion. He helps the congregation focus on matching its needs with the specific abilities and strengths of the men being considered for the call. This may take some time. In some churches the calling process is extensive because of the numerous responsibilities and special circumstances to address. In others, very little discussion may ensue. In either case, the amount of discussion or the length of the meeting should *not* be viewed as indicating that the call, when issued, is *more* divine or *less* divine respectively. All is committed to the Lord in prayer.

What if, after a call meeting, a member (voting or non-voting) feels conscience-bound to object to a call being issued? Arndt answers this well: "The result of the deliberations issuing in (sic) a call are made known to the whole congregation, and every member has a right to protest. To obviate the conceivable necessity for someone to protest *after* the final vote, as a rule all the

candidates for the holy office are announced beforehand so that every member of the church has an opportunity of presenting comments or protests. Is this procedure right? Why not? We live in the blessed era of the New Testament where freedom is our birthright, one of our prized possessions. If that is the way the congregation wishes to do its work, we need not object, on principle" (Arndt, pp. 345, 346). Unanimity in issuing a call is important (not an absolute), so that the one called may prayerfully make his decision with full confidence in the stated desire of the calling body. Usually a motion to make the call unanimous is entertained at each call meeting.

An opening prayer at the meeting, or a prayer offered right before the voting begins, asks the Lord's direction in this mediate process of issuing a call. "In no area is the injunction to go to God in prayer more important than in that of calling a pastor for a congregation" (Arndt, p. 348). A prayer such as the following might be used:

O Lord Jesus, our dear Good Shepherd, you have instituted the holy ministry and therefore desire congregations to call shepherds to lead your redeemed lambs and sheep in the way of righteousness. Be with us this evening as we gather to call a pastor. Guide our discussion and hear our prayers, for you alone know our needs and know who will best serve this church to the glory of your name and for the salvation of many souls. May your blessing rest upon the man whom we are calling tonight to be our spiritual leader. If it is your will, move him to accept this divine call so extended. Hear us for your own sake, for you have commanded us to pray that the Lord of harvest send forth laborers into his harvest. Amen.

IV. THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CIRCUIT VISITOR

One of the duties of circuit visitors, as listed in our ELS Handbook, is to "provide assistance to congregations in calling pastors" (III, D, p. 15-A; see also "Guidelines When There is a Pastor or Teacher Vacancy in a Congregation," p. 19-A). When the visitor becomes aware of a vacancy in his circuit, he is expected to consult with the synod president and obtain a call list for a scheduled meeting with the vacant parish. It is *strongly recommended* that the circuit visitor himself, or his assistant, be present at the meeting. If a congregation wishes to nominate other names of ELS clergy to the list provided by the president, it surely has the right to do so. It is advisable, however, that any additional names be forwarded *in advance* of the meeting date so that proper resumes may be provided and pertinent information shared. When a church desires to call a pastor from a sister synod, this needs to be brought to the attention of the synod president so that he may consult with the president of the sister synod or of the district where the man currently is serving.

The call meeting can serve as a good opportunity for the congregation to review its salary package. The visitor should be prepared to show them what is expected from the synod's code in respect to home missions. He might also share with the church some special concerns that he has observed in regard to the accommodations for their called servant and his family.

Once the congregation has voted on issuing a call, a telephone call by the visitor to the called pastor is in order. This should be done *immediately* so that the man need not hear via the grapevine that he has a call. The visitor may make this call rather brief; extended discussions about the calling congregation and its needs can occur once the call document arrives. The visitor should have on hand blank call documents and be ready to fill in the required information that evening or the next morning before sending it to the called pastor by registered mail.

How much should a visitor say in advising a fellow pastor of his circuit who receives a call? Since the visitor usually is an experienced parish pastor who sees both the needs of the circuit parishes as well as the "big picture" throughout the synod, his advice is welcomed. He should remind the pastor of the importance of the deliberation process. There is a reason why God has permitted the call to come at this time. He should also urge the newly called to do the necessary

consulting with his congregation and with his fellow pastors in the circuit. With less experienced pastors, the visitor may wish to go through the appropriate steps in handling a call.

The visitor is invited to assist the president of the synod in suggesting names for call lists. He may know of fellow pastors in his circuit who should have the chance to move. In this regard, the question could be raised: Is it proper for a pastor to approach his circuit visitor (or synod president) and request his name be on a call list? A man should not seek a *specific* call. The Holy Spirit knows his address, phone number and email. The axiom holds: *The office should seek the man and not the man the office.* However, a man may occasionally feel synod officials should be aware of certain extenuating circumstances (e.g., his or his family's health) as call lists are composed. This is not "seeking the call." It is simply an honest realization that the kingdom of Christ's Gospel may be better served by the opportunity to entertain a call.

V. THE DELIBERATION PROCESS¹

Are men today possibly more reluctant to move, compared to thirty or forty years ago? Do working wives and the ownership of homes make a difference? Is there a danger today of treating calls cavalierly and not giving the full weight of deliberation because of an inordinate amount of personal/family/material concerns?

The deliberation of a call, while at times disrupting and agonizing, is essential and also rewarding. The *mediate* nature of the call makes the deliberation process indispensable. Very sparingly, Lutherans have used the expression "inner call" to mean the God-placed desire (1 Tim. 3:1, ὀρέγεσθαι) to serve in the public ministry. But we do not speak of an inner call (i.e., a direct answer from God) as the way pastors today are guided in reaching call decisions. The method the Lord uses is that of receiving counsel and advice from fellow Christians, while they and the man called continue to commit the matter to the Lord in prayer.

The following questions may be of some help to a pastor when deliberating on a call:

- Where does **God** want me to serve? Am I praying for his guidance and will?
- Are the needs of my present parish less/greater than the needs of the calling congregation?
- Would the use of my gifts be better applied at the place where I'm being called?
- Are there gifts I have which are not being tapped in my present call?
- Am I too comfortable in my present parish that I no longer see the growing needs of my people and the opportunities for outreach?
- Would I personally grow by experiencing a new challenge?
- Is the Lord blessing the work where I am? What might this indicate?
- Are there special objectives still unfulfilled in my current parish?
- Is it best for me to leave when things are going well?
- What if things are not going so well? Am I running from responsibilities?
- What are my family needs? . . . the state of health?
- Since the public ministry calls for selflessness, am I listening to the scriptural warnings against materialism and worldliness? (1 Tim. 6:10, 11) (Phil. 3:19)
- How much should the length of the vacancy play into my thinking?
- Do I trust that God will guide me in making the right decision?

¹ The advice given in this section of the paper should not be construed as the one and only *official* procedure. Pastors of our synod may/will vary in discussing the protocol for the deliberation of a call.

If there is uncertainty about a call, consider the advice attributed to Luther: "If one doubts that God has willed him to do a certain work, he had better not undertake to do it."

Are there illegitimate reasons for accepting or declining a call? Since a pastor looks at the whole picture in reaching his decision, this may not always be easy to determine. While a pastor needs to be fully cognizant of his family's needs/wishes and also the needs of a working wife, these matters in and of themselves should not be allowed to dictate automatically his response to a call. If his own abilities appear better suited for a certain parish and other indicators point him to see the Lord's guiding hand, it would be unfortunate—to say the least—for him to accept or decline in conflict with his own personal convictions.

Only in rare cases should the pastor holding the call make a visit to the calling congregation. Impressions are important, even if a man can resist letting aesthetics and amenities have an influence.

Consultation with fellow pastors is encouraged. They may reveal strengths and weaknesses that the man himself is unable to see. These pastors also (especially in a small synod) may know well the situation and needs of the given parishes.

As soon as possible, the pastor will want to arrange for a meeting with his congregation. He plans to share with his members the pertinent specifics of the call he has received and also to give them a chance to share valuable input. Congregations have rights too. They want to express themselves on the issue. Congregations can become infuriated if they hear—after the fact—that their pastor had a call and declined/accepted it without telling them. One of our synodical guidelines reads: "He should call a voters' meeting of his own congregation to give the congregation the opportunity to consult with him regarding the call he has received."

How should this meeting be structured? Only one item should be on the agenda: the pastor's call. Begin with a devotion on the doctrine of the call. Give them necessary facts, so that no one is confused. Place onto a dry eraser board or into a PowerPoint the needs of both parishes—as you, the pastor, see them. Put them side-by-side. Invite the members to evaluate them. Add to the list. The example below is from a meeting I held in 1984 with my parish in Sioux Falls, SD, while contemplating the call to Lake Havasu City, AZ.

<u>NEEDS AT BETHEL</u>	<u>NEEDS AT OUR SAVIOUR</u>
Congregational growth	Continue mission progress
Assimilating newer members	Work under the ELS Mission Board
Evangelism	Church building project
Relocation/Land purchase	Promote fellowship in circuit
Christian education emphasis	Welcome visitors/tourists
Sunday school attendance	Youth work/Pioneer program
Shut-ins	Difficult region for work

Near the close of the meeting give the voters a chance to express their feelings by way of "advice slips." In this way, even those who do not speak may be heard. In the opinion of this writer three categories work best in preparing these "advice slips": 1. ___ I advise Pastor to stay. 2. ___ I advise Pastor to accept his new call. 3. ___ I prefer not to advise. A portion may be left blank for people to include their personal comments. These "advice slips" serve simply as personal opinion ballots meant to give the pastor counsel. Only he reads them—no one else. They are not to be described or viewed as voting ballots. He alone will prayerfully decide the call. If a congregation gives overwhelming advice for him to accept the call to a new parish, obviously this may have an impact. Yet, the ultimate decision is that of the pastor alone—not the voters, nor the advice slips, nor his wife, nor his kids, nor synod officials.

Most calling congregations would like to know as soon as possible if a man is planning on declining a call. A period of three weeks to a month ought to be long enough for a man to complete his deliberations.

VI. CLOSURE: ACCEPTANCE/DECLINATION

When the pastor has reached his decision, he should telephone the chairman of the calling congregation and inform him of the decision. This is to be followed by a formal letter (see Appendix on who to copy) to the congregation. An email message may be sent, but should not replace the formal letter. If he has decided to decline, the pastor is well advised not to be too wordy in his letter of declination. He need not list reasons for declining. The pastor may show courtesy in returning any accompanying materials that were sent to him with the call, so that the congregation can use them again. If accepting, the pastor will let the congregation know that he will be in touch concerning arrangements for moving, installation, etc. (Again, see the Appendix for the guidelines.)

An email or phone call to the synod president is also in order, as well as to the respective circuit visitors. Other call lists throughout the synod may be affected by the current information provided.

A peaceful release should be secured from the former parish when a man has decided to accept a call. This is a way for the congregation to express itself, if it chooses to do so. In the unusual event that a peaceful release cannot be obtained, the pastor may resign to enable his acceptance of the new call.

In closing, there are still some questions we wish to address:

Does a pastor's resignation mean he ought to be disqualified from considering future calls? There can be numerous reasons why a man feels the need to resign. Resignation is always resigning from a particular call, and therefore the resignation takes one out of the public ministry. The public ministry is defined by the call. A man who has resigned may in certain cases be retained on the synod's clergy roster, with the understanding that he might serve in some other public ministry capacity at a future date.

What about temporary calls, such as one-year missionary stints or retired clergy assisting churches for interim periods? Are these divine calls? Unless there are valid reasons to the contrary, the pastor's call is issued with the clear understanding that it is permanent. Fritz firmly contends: "A congregation is not justified in extending such a call [i.e., temporary], not even if it be specified that the call, after a certain time, may be renewed; nor should any preacher accept such a call, since before God it is neither valid nor legitimate" (Fritz, p. 39). Yet,

we cannot prove from Scripture that a limited call is not divine.² Rev. Richard Lauersdorf explains: "Those who serve and those who call people to serve wait for the Lord to indicate how long that service is to be. The Lord can use changing conditions in a servant's life or in his capabilities to limit the length of service in a specific call. The Lord can also use changing needs in the calling body or weightier needs in another calling body to limit the duration of a specific call" (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Fall 1989, p. 275).

Special circumstances may require a temporal nature for a certain call. When this occurs, great care must be taken not to violate the scriptural purposes for the public ministry. Generally, calls not permanent can at least give the appearance of letting fleshly concerns dictate. It can also lead to a hideous "hire and fire" mentality on the part of the calling body. "Let whatever must be done . . . be carried out in love. Those who serve in the public ministry are God's gifts to the church and are to be treated as such. We do not want to open the door to Satan for the sowing of his poisonous seeds of discord and rancor in anyone's heart. Nor do we in any way want to give the impression that we are undercutting the doctrine of the call" (*WLQ*, Fall 1989, p. 281).

In light of the way God uses pastors to dispense publicly the forgiveness of sins from the cross of Christ through Word and Sacrament, Christians will hold the office of pastor in high esteem. They will realize how important it is to show their appreciation, respect and dedicated assistance to him as he carries out the parameters of his call. In the words of Isaiah and Paul, the fellow believers exult: *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!* (Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15)

² In its recently released report, "Theology and Practice of the Divine Call," the Missouri Synod's CTCR states: "We are reminded that neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions explicitly address the details of the call process, including also this issue. They exhibit less concern about the tenure of a particular call than they do about the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments . . . The integrity of the divine call must always be preserved and nothing done that will cause people to manipulate or pre-ordain the results of the process. In all situations congregations should be encouraged to remember that God's Holy Spirit is at work throughout the process" (CTCR document, pp. 27 & 33).

APPENDIX**GUIDELINES FOR THE
PASTOR'S ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION****ARTICLE I: ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Upon receipt of a call the pastor should promptly send a letter of acknowledgment to the calling congregation and copies to the president of the synod, the circuit visitor of his own circuit, the visitor of the circuit to which he is called, and, if it is a mission call, the Missions Counselor.

ARTICLE II: ANNOUNCEMENT

If a pastor is currently serving a parish, he should announce the receipt of a call to his congregation at once.

ARTICLE III: CONSULTATION

- A. He should call a voters' meeting of his own congregation to give the congregation the opportunity to consult with him regarding the call he has received.
- B. He may also seek counsel from his visitor, from the president of the synod, from a mission board, if it is a mission call, and from other brethren.
- C. He may also seek further information from the calling congregation.

ARTICLE IV: DECISION

- A. He should strive to reach a decision without delay.
- B. If his decision is to return the call, he should inform his congregation and the calling congregation promptly. Copies of the letter should be sent to those listed in Article I above.
- C. If his decision is to accept the call, he should seek a peaceful release from the congregation he is presently serving.
- D. If his decision is to accept the call, then arrangements for installation in the new charge should be made with the congregation, the circuit visitor and the president of the synod.

ARTICLE V: ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION

When a Candidate of Theology receives a call, he shall arrange for his ordination and installation through the office of the president of the synod. This ordination will normally be held in a congregation to which he has been called.