

[The Teacher as Minister to Children and Parents Forum]

## **THE SHARED MINISTRY**

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[Theses on ministry which address issues, obstacles, and solutions to parent, pastor, teacher interplay.]

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### **Forward**

The following series of these address issues which are critical to the effective development of a shared ministry. They assume ministry is a shared activity. They assume “shared ministry” is an accurate description of the work of pastor, teacher, parent and congregation.

Due to severe time restrictions, the exploration of each thesis has been directed to clarification of the issue rather than to the marshalling of support for or an in depth analysis of the contention.

May the Lord place his blessing upon our discussions, set our directions, and enable us to be all we can be for the benefit of His Kingdom in these rapidly changing closing hours.

1. “Shared” is both God’s description of ministry and our Synod’s most critically needed change in approach to ministry.

The biblical text provides an interesting view of ministry. From the very beginning when God set leadership over his creation he found it necessary to have teamwork. As the pages of history unfolded, this design became a very real part of the biblical record. Moses had to learn the hard way the impossible rigors of one-man ministry. God interceded and provided networks. In Luke 10 we see Jesus sending out his 70 disciples two by two. When God sets up witnesses as he did in Deuteronomy 19:15, it takes two or three. When God selects his spokesmen, we consistently see multiples: Moses and Aaron, Paul and Barnabas, Jesus and his disciples.

The New Testament ministry is revealed on the pages of scripture as a joint project, a new community carrying out God’s saving function. When Jesus commissioned the New Testament church, it was a commission to all believers. When Paul chooses to describe the kingdom of Christ and how it works, he uses the picture of the human body, a body in which each part belongs to all the others, a body in which each part is important to all the others, a body which only works well when all parts are working.

When we wander into the early Church, we find in Acts 6 seven men are chosen to become functional staff. While their initial position description dealt with the distribution of food, we find in the biblical text Philip acting as an evangelist and Stephen being stoned—not for feeding the poor, but for his preaching and teaching. When Paul set up the congregation at Ephesus, he left the elders in charge. When the world was to be reached with the Gospel, missionaries went out in teams: Paul and John Mark, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, Barnabas and John Mark, and all of these perhaps with more than two, cf. Acts 13:13.

“Shared” seems to be the best word for the ministry described in the New Testament. Leaders, people, helpers, joined in a single minded effort to bring the Gospel to people and to sustain each other.

It was not until the second and third century that we see the first development of the moniscopacy. With this and the subsequent development of regional bishops, there came a growing sense of differentiation within the family of God. When monasticism in the third century became an accepted form, the laymen clergy distinction which we define so carefully today emerged and with it a hierarchical church.

Luther's position in his "Babylonian Captivity" became the first shift back to a more biblical perspective of ministry. He wrote "ministers are called to serve, not to rule, and it is their duty to serve in such a way that eventually God may rule in all the world. All Christians, ministers and laity, stand together as servants of God's purpose. Christ imparted no special power to any select company of His followers." All are servants of God's purposes. With this call to universal servanthood for the purpose of sustaining and extending Christ's kingdom began a return to a biblical ministry design which is only now beginning to emerge again as an operational style for the Church.

There should be no doubt in the minds of God's people that ministry is shared by design. All ministry is staff ministry. Each part needed and necessary for the functioning of the whole. Each working together with the other, submitting itself to the other for the sake of a common God-given purpose.

Over the course of time our Synod, together with many other churches, has successfully, if unintentionally, divided ministry into segments, oftentimes operationally exclusive one from the other. The Lutheran Church in specific has struggled with a concept of the pastorate that believes all ministries within the local congregation are to be derived from the pastoral position. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has rightly rejected this position, finding it a concept not rooted in the biblical text. Nevertheless, it is the practice of many congregations frequently engrained within their constitutions to have the pastorate be the position from which all else is derived. This is reflected in the positions pastors hold administratively, i.e. chairman of the church council, chairman of the nominating committee, ex-officio and advisory to all boards and committees. It is found in the way we operate our schools. School handbooks frequently indicate the pastor as superintendent of the school and the principal as its administrator. An overly strong, if not misguided, sense of headship has led to many a conflict between pastor and principal, oftentimes creating a climate of territorialism. Much of the negative aspects of these types of structures are rooted in a concept of ministry which places the pastoral position as that from which all other ministries obtain their legitimacy. We have rejected this as a doctrine within our church, and we should now cease to use it as a mode of operation within our congregations.

The team approach to ministry in both the narrow and the broad sense would facilitate the work of God in our midst. In the narrow sense if our called public servants would see themselves as a team, each needing the other, each supporting the other, called together for the leadership of the congregation much would be gained. In the broad sense, if all our people saw themselves as ministers of Christ, called and gathered around the cross by the Spirit for the sake of serving each other and the lost world, much of what disturbs us would be diminished. Territorialism within the Church has no place among God's chosen leaders. The school is not the principal's, and the church is not the pastor's. We are first called to be ministers and only secondly to our specific tasks and roles. What's true for our called workers is true for our parents. Partnership in service is a key need. Our servanthood must reign supreme over our tasks. Developing operational team models and mindsets is the key change needed in our Synod.

2. The effectiveness of our schools could be significantly enhanced by a working partnership of pastor/parent/teacher/congregation.

This thesis is a derivative of the first. Its assumption is that partnership is not currently the dominant view of these four interrelationships.

In the course of the last eight years there has, both in the secular school systems and within our congregation's elementary schools, grown a realization that these four relationships have become too tightly categorized and independent of each other in practical operation.

Parents have been told repetitively from pulpit and in written material to see themselves as God's instrument for the spiritual training of their children. When children reach school age, however, our church in its systems tends to say with its policies and procedures "OK, we'll take over from here." In fact, as homes have deteriorated over the past 20 years school programs have proliferated attempting, in some cases consciously, to compensate for the lack of parental activity. We have reached a point where most have now realized the error of this separation.

If our schools are to be effective in carrying out their mission, the primary role of parents in the spiritual development of children must again be reasserted. Neither pastor nor teacher nor congregation should allow systems or policies to stand which undermine the primary responsibility of parents. To the contrary, every effort should be made by congregations to underline this biblical truth with their policy.

One of the ways which this partnership should be restated is in the involvement of parents in our schools. Since education within our congregations is a partnership of church and home, our policy should reflect that partnership. Schools should ask of our parents a 25 to 30 percent support of the financial cost of educating their children. Parents should be asked and have expected of them a participation of time and energy in the maintaining and conducting of the school's affairs and in meeting the school's needs. Teachers' assistants, library helpers, painters, correctors of tests, assisting in organizing science fairs, art programs and any other curricular matter should be eagerly and automatically sought from the gifts God has given to our parents. Parents should be asked to be active participants in the teaching process in their homes. To allow parents to place their children into our schools and have minimal obligations of partnership monetarily, timewise, or talentwise, as an expectation is divisive of the partnership. Congregations are to assist parents, not replace them. Our teachings and our practice need to be brought together.

A growing involvement of our parents in the training of their children is the key to the improvement of educational and spiritual effectiveness of our educational institutions.

### 3. Family spiritual and interpersonal health is the key to a vigorous mission effort in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The struggle of homes and the inability of our congregations to generate sufficient economic foundations to carry out expanded ministry needs has placed the Church into crisis. The whole tenor of our increasingly pagan culture cries out for intensified spiritual effort. Congregations need to address and work vigorously to counter the destructive family patterns currently on the road to acceptance. To permit these patterns to continue without serious challenge and assistance is to ignore the hurricane warning.

On the other hand, the very moral decline which necessitates this intensified ministry is also one of the drivers pushing for an expanded worldwide mission effort. These two needs increasingly have been put in juxtaposition to each other. The Church has begun to feel the approaching steps of the end of Christ's work on earth. The money is short. The time is brief. The task is large. Voices sound the worry, "We cannot afford to do both." Mission outreach must come first. This position reminds me of the farmer who decided to cut his costs by eliminating herbicides and fertilizers while disconnecting his irrigation system.

Actually, we need to do both. As every classroom teacher knows, his ability to effectively carry out his mission in the lives of the children in front of him is directly related to the spiritual welfare and health of the family out of which that child comes. So the ability of our Synod to carry out its mission is directly limited to the spiritual strength of our homes. To ignore the personal and spiritual lives of our adults is to consign the Church to ongoing diminished capability to execute its mission outreach.

A commonly held view that confines the work of a teacher to his or her classroom obviates both the biblical and the experientially known interrelationships between the functions of the home and the development of a child. If teachers are to carry out their mission, their concept of ministry will need to increasingly become a helping ministry to homes and be committed to adult spiritual growth. Neither the sanctified life desired nor the resource fruits needed will ever become a part of the life of the Church if our adults never get beyond an eighth grade spiritual development.

Adult spiritual growth is a significant key to a meaningful shared ministry. Only when all partners are spiritually strong and growing can ministry be shared as it was designed to be.

## SPECIFIC ISSUES

4. Teachers should be enabled, allowed, and involved in evangelism, counseling, and elder's efforts, having full access to member files.

In many of our congregations, teachers, by congregational practice and personal desire, have restricted their ministry to youth. This focus on the youth of our congregations is a healthy focus. It is for this they have been trained. It is the contention of this thesis, however, that in order to successfully carry out their ministry to youth, they need to set it within the context of a ministry to the whole.

This thesis contends that God has distributed a diversity of gifts among our teachers and that those gifts should be developed to their ultimate capability. This thesis contends teachers need to be a part of the information pipeline within a congregation's life if they are to be effective in their peculiar ministry. Common experience indicates that problems developing within a home are most easily and quickly spotted through the children of our schools. This identification of a problem in many instances is not forwarded to the rest of the servants attempting to support and serve that family. Likewise, a pastor dealing in his counseling capacities seldom shares with teachers the struggles of the home whose children they are trying to teach. This particular division of labor may have worked in times past, but the times are different now.

The new era in which we are currently living needs to see a different and more overlapping interplay of ministries. This would allow not only for the development of gifts, but also for a more direct meeting of needs and meaningful information. Teachers should probably become the first line counselors of the families of their children. Teachers should be active in administering to the spiritually dying or struggling. Without such insights, effectively teaching the children in front of them will become more and more difficult and lacking in perspective.

This thesis envisions a free-flowing communication of needs, cases, and insights between all staff.

5. The issue of time as an obstacle to "shared" ministry is far more an issue of failure to set priorities and recognize and use others in ministry than of not enough time.

The question of time to do all that needs to be done is a valid question. The whole subject of shared ministry very quickly begins to sound like expanded ministry. Faced with days already too long, the harried teacher and pastor can often only groan at such dimensionally changed activities.

This thesis suggests there is a solution. It suggests the problem is one of failure to set priorities rather than not enough time. Jesus himself found that within three short years of ministry he was able to complete the task for which He was sent. A careful examination of His life reveals many things left undone, many things done by others. Jesus had his purpose and his primary mission clearly in mind and divided his time in accord with His purpose.

To simply imply an expanded role without a changed role would be to needlessly and cruelly lay upon all churchworkers a guilt trip which is all too familiar already. This thesis, however, suggests that our guilt-driven activity flows out of a misconstrued or nonprioritized work schedule. The teacher who currently corrects every single paper, straightens his room, washes the chalkboards, runs off every test himself, types every test himself, will need to think "shared" when he looks at his ministry.

The need for a changed role of the teacher is not a need for an expanded role in the sense of expanded time. Our oft-times warped sense of faithfulness has us spending our time on those things which do not advance the cause of Christ significantly and which can easily be done by others with different gifts and lesser or different training. If we are to be effective servants as pastors and teachers preparing people for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will need to set more careful priorities for the use of our time in view of our mission and gifts and fill in all the rest with the other people in our lives and their gifts. They too have a ministry. To retain so many functions within the Kingdom to ourselves is to limit the breadth, depth, and ministries of others.

6. The development of agreed-to and written purposes and goals for the congregation and its agencies as they seek to carry out mission enables sharing.

A choir which does not agree as to which song it is singing, how fast it will be sung, or when it will be begun is a choir not worth listening to. The most frequent cause of conflict within the Church is the failure of God's people to arrive at agreed-to purposes and goals. It is almost impossible to have a shared ministry when those who are ministering together do not know what it is they are to be accomplishing together. If we change the way we do business so that everyone arrives at a consensus on what they are trying to do as a congregation, and on what each of the congregation's agencies are doing to accomplish these goals, then we can work creatively and to our full capacity without the worry of conflict or the necessity of constant cross checking with others.

This thesis contends it will be extremely difficult in many congregations to achieve a shared concept of ministry if there is no ongoing concerted effort to maintain a clear sense of agreed-to purpose and direction for the congregation and its work.

7. Frequent, regular staff meetings to access and develop strategies, handle issues, discuss cases, and pray together enable a "shared" ministry.

This thesis underlines the need for ongoing, direct, and specific planning and communication by the called staff of a congregation. Too frequently within our parishes little is done consistently in this area. Regular and frequent staff meetings involving all full time personnel attempting to lead and serve the congregation provide an excellent opportunity for building teammanship. Such meetings when used properly can provide the framework for ongoing planning and strategizing for common purposes. They provide the framework for working out differences before they become walls. They provide the framework for surfacing irritations and the ability to apologize quickly.

Such regular ongoing staff meetings allow the personnel of a congregation to work out behind the scenes differences which they may have as they seek together to lead God's Church, thus reducing to a minimum the dividing of a congregation between its servants.

Regular staff work sessions enable everyone to be constantly reminded that the needs of the kingdom have to be kept uppermost in the work of the Church, and that forgiveness is the source of all our lives as we live and work together for Christ's purposes. Without meeting regularly, it is very difficult for the various members of the team to grow in trust for each other, to encourage one another regularly, and to deal amicably and constructively with the issues and lives entrusted to our care. It has been my personal experience that the greatest strains in staff relations occur during times when access to each other has been reduced.

The change envisioned here is one of teachers and pastors working together on the overall as well as specific strategies of a congregation. It envisions teachers and pastors discussing specific cases they are working with. It envisions teachers and pastors regularly praying together for the individuals in their care as well as the ministry entrusted to them.

8. In shared ministry the failure to submit to each other in love is the chief cause of conflict and the failure to create frameworks for communication is conflict's vehicle.

This thesis is the flip side of the previous one. To develop a shared ministry requires conscious effort at communication with each other. It requires a real honest-to-goodness submitting to each other in love. It requires a sacrifice of opinion. It requires staffs to work together for the sake of others, sacrificing themselves for the good of the whole. This means we need to practice patience with each other. It means we need to guard our hearts against envy about each other's schedules, salaries, or positions. It means we are not going to grab every stage nor seek every credit for ourselves. It means we're not going to keep a record of wrongs, nor delight

when a coworker stumbles and drowns in his own stew. It means we fill in for each other, cover for each other, make each other look good for the sake of the kingdom. Having been freed by Christ from service to self all called workers are now able to lead all workers in ministry one to another and to our communities.

This thesis calls for a much more concerted effort on the part of all workers to so discipline themselves and each other to develop systems such as weekly staff meetings, time together for prayer, time getting to know each other personally. It envisions constant conscious effort to set up frameworks of life which will enhance our ability to submit to one another in love and frustrate the efforts of Satan to divide us.

9. Not only pastors and teachers but also congregations will need to see ministry as the first priority of their staff and specific tasks and roles as the second.

One of the difficulties in changing the nature of ministry both for a pastor and for a teacher is the concept of ministry held by the majority of our memberships. If our congregations assume the only role of a teacher is in a classroom, or the only role of a pastor is in his pulpit or Bible class, both will have difficulty in developing team mindsets in their ministry. It is not only our leaders who need to grow in their vision of their role within Christ's kingdom, it is also God's people. Their vision of themselves shapes their vision of their called servants. All of us need to return to the scriptures and learn anew the privilege of servitude. All of us need to allow the Spirit to mold us into Christ's likeness, to create in us a willingness to wash the feet of our far-from-perfect group of coworkers and servants.

All of us need to grow in our sense that we are ministers first and foremost. Specific tasks and roles come next. Ministry shapes tasks, not vice versa. Without such a concept we will not be able as a family of God to freely reach out to those around us whomever they may be. Without such a concept we will continue to bear the guilt of the undone. Without such a concept the Church will ignore the trauma of the family and die a slow death of physical and spiritual strangulation. Without it, our joy will die, our pain will grow. Without it, we will all be less than what God intended us to be.

This means pastors will honor the ministers who serve with and around them, lay, called, volunteers, hired, coworkers all. It means no matter what our position we will seek to build each other up. Most of all it means that the work Christ has given us, the work of ministry, the work of service one to another will shape and mold our relations as we go about our various tasks and roles.

10. To meet the needs of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both teachers and pastors will need enhanced interpersonal, evaluative, and adaptive skills.

Curriculum needs to be adjusted in order to prepare churchworkers for the world in which they serve. Two basic areas need to be developed, interpersonal skills, and evaluative and adaptive skills.

It would be beneficial for both pastors and teachers to receive basic training in the area of personal counseling, conflict management, and small group dynamics. Learning how to constructively deal and work with their fellow human beings in an increasingly complex and struggling environment are skills needed for every adult church leader.

The evaluative/adaptive area is an area critically necessary to develop a strong shared ministry. This would not require added curriculum to meet its objective but would require a change in current methods of teaching. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will see an even more rapid change of morals, values, ethics, and technologies impacting our lives, churches, and society. If those who lead our churches are not trained in diagnostic [analytical and adaptive skills] the church will find itself applying the Word of God in ways and means that interfere with its reception and deny its comfort to those most desperately in need. While the gospel of our Lord Jesus will never change, nor will any jot or tittle of His word, the framework within which it will operate will be an ever more rapidly changing kaleidoscope of tactics by our arch enemy. The biblical text enforces what the futurists of today are saying. The intensity of our struggles will deepen as our world grows to a close. To meet this need without having to resign our ministry or to retire with a sense of no longer being able to cope, today's

workers will need to be trained with analytical and adaptive skills to facilitate their personal and professional life.

Implied in this thesis is a change in the concept of education. Up until very recent years the dominant concept in training and equipping our workers has been one of providing all they need to take care of their task in their college years. Unknown to most of us, the educational concept which compresses most learning into the first 25 years is a concept rooted in an educational theory which believed adults could not significantly learn or change. Only since the late 60's and the intensive study of learning curves has our educational world, both by necessity and by insight, come to see the need and ability of adults to continue to learn. If our pastors and teachers are going to be effective in the future, we need to intensify, if not formalize, an ongoing training and expansion of skills for every worker throughout the course of his or her professional life. This would mean that the curriculum of our colleges would be viewed as initial studies which would be added to and expanded upon in subsequent curriculum on an ongoing basis throughout one's professional life. This would mean that the present haphazard or specialized approach unique to some, nonexistent for others, would be in some way, manner or form be formalized for all. This would mean every worker and congregation would have both resources and time set aside each year for growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

Shared ministry is biblical ministry. It is all of God's people working together, enhancing each other's abilities and skills, supporting each other in our tasks, endeavors, struggles and victories. It is the people of God with His work and His goals first in their lives. It is freed saints exercising their freedom. Freed saints demonstrating their freedom by their shared ministry. Our Synod, Christ's Church, can no longer, if they ever could, afford the separatistic, hierarchical, and territorial approach to ministry which has all too often marked the lives of our workers and our people.

In these last days "teamwork," "shared," "togetherness" need to be the touchstone words which mark our ministries. To be complete, we need each other. To complete Christ's tasks, we need each other. He needs to be the head of His Church, and we His servants. This means we organize ourselves to minimize our separateness and the conflicts that come with it. It means we actively work to be peacemakers within and without, team builders more than team leaders, sacrificers of self for the sake of the whole. It means the weak will be strengthened, not mocked and complained about. It means that misfits will be refitted for tasks more in line with their gifts. It means the problems will be prevented rather than permitted. It does not mean there will be no called head to a congregation. God found it necessary to set up headship, so do we. The ministry, however, is to be shared, not hoarded. Ministry is the work, the privilege, of all God's people.