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**TEAM MINISTRY: THE PASTOR AND THE PEOPLE** - Pastor Lassman  
Paper for the Puget Sound Pastor's Conference at Harrison Hot Springs

Our Lord has established a very special relationship between the pastor and the people in a congregation. Outside of the family there is no other relationship, which is capable of such warmth and meaning. Not even family doctors have the close ties that exist between the pastor and the people. This is especially true of longer pastorates. A pastor is involved in the most meaningful parts of people's lives: births, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, hospital calls, counseling, and funerals. All of these activities are in addition to the weekly contact of worship, Bible studies, meetings and social events. Our Lord has intended a special and close relationship between the pastor and the people as the pastor is his representative to care for his people. And so it is for these reasons that it is especially painful when the relationship between the pastor and the people is harmed in any way. In August of 1997 a group of Missouri Synod theologians met in St. Louis to discuss issues related to the doctrines of Church and ministry. The President of the LCMS, A.L. Barry, said in his keynote address: "Recently, we in the Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod have become more and more aware of tensions among many of our pastors and congregations concerning Church and ministry, especially when it comes to the relationship between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the public pastoral ministry." [1] Concerning conflicts between pastor and the people he said, "It can even raise questions in the minds of people concerning their basic understanding of the gospel....There is no doubt in my mind, then, that our convocation is devoted to a timely and important topic." [2] Sometimes we hear of autocratic pastors or pastors who hurt the people and the ministry with adultery or theft or alcoholism. At other times we hear of the people constantly nit-picking the pastor, trying to manage the pastor like an employee and thus making his life miserable, robbing him of the joy of ministry. My point is simple: the ministry of the congregation is aided or harmed by the relationship between the pastor and the people as the author of Hebrews says: "They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (13:17). [3] Our subject then is about pastors and people working together in the ministry that Jesus Christ has given to his Church. Our presentation will have two major parts. The first part will be about the relationship between the pastor and the people as members of the "team". The second part will discuss the ministry that has been given to the "team", the pastor and the people.

## I. TEAM = RELATIONSHIPS

A team is the opposite of an individual. Golf is not a team sport. Golf is a game, which involves an individual competing against other individuals. Rather, a team involves a group of individuals associated together in a common activity. Team sports include baseball, football, and basketball. No individual is the team, but a part of the team.

In the Bible this team concept is described as the Body of Christ, the Church (ekklesia--assembly). No one individual is the Body of Christ, the Church. Rather, individual believers together make up the Body of Christ, the Church. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians: "The Body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though all its parts are many, they form one body.

So it is with Christ" (12:12). Perhaps the idea of "partnership" comes closest to the concept of team. In Philippians Paul writes: "I always pray with joy because of your partnership (KOINONOS) in the Gospel...."

A team consists of different positions, roles and functions all working together in harmony. A team by its very nature involves relationships. This nature is illustrated by sports teams. Baseball has 9 different playing positions that must work together in harmony as, for example, in a double play. Football has 11 positions, which work together in harmony such as the line protecting the quarterback as he throws to a speedy receiver. Basketball has five that work in harmony as seen in a fast break that ends in an easy lay-up. In addition, there are other distinctions on team sports. There are starters and there are substitutes. There are also non-playing personnel such as administrators, coaches, and trainers. All of these positions are important for the team to function at its best. Indeed, the performance of the team can be harmed by jealousy, strife, and controversy. In recent years Seattle sports teams have experienced such turmoil. During the 1996-97 basketball season the Seattle Sonics were distracted all year by a controversy with one of their major stars: Shawn Kemp. This player was unhappy that a player of lesser stature had a more generous salary package. Controversy surrounded the team throughout the season and at its conclusion Shawn Kemp expressed his desire to be traded. This controversy contributed to the Sonics failure to win the championship that they wanted. Ignoring the problem made it worse by affecting the whole team. If the problem had been dealt with the team could have reestablished its harmony and perhaps done better in the playoffs. The Sonics still haven't recovered. To a lesser extent the Mariners experienced the same problem with a disgruntled Randy Johnson, and then Ken Griffey, Jr.

And so it is with the Body of Christ. It too consists of different positions, roles and functions designed to work together in harmony. Two classic passages show this relationship. In Romans Paul says: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function" (12:4). Again he states in 1 Corinthians: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (12:4-6).

This is specifically true in the relationship between the pastor and the people. This is the scriptural and historic distinction between the office of the public ministry and the priesthood of all believers. All Christians are priests (including the pastor!), but not all Christians are pastors. A Christian priest is born in Baptism, but a pastor is called and ordained.

As a priest, every Christian offers sacrifices to God as Paul teaches in Romans 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship." The status and duties of the priesthood are stated by Peter in his first letter: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Here we must distinguish between standing or status, and function. As pastors we remember the high status of the people that we serve. Peter reminds us pastors that the people we serve are chosen by God, are royal priests, are holy, and belong to God. As God's people his priests have the privilege and responsibility of preaching the Word to others, to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light". James Pragman summarizes Luther's teaching on the priesthood by saying: "Such priests have the right and duty to preach the Word, to teach, instruct, admonish, comfort, and rebuke the neighbor at every opportunity and whenever necessary." [4]

The point to be emphasized is that of equality. In describing this equality Pragman refers to the

writing of Wilhelm Brunotte: "In his book *Das Geistliche Amt bei Luther* Wilhelm Brunotte concluded that Luther's teaching on the universal priesthood consisted essentially of these facets: (1) Each Christian has the same spiritual power and worth; (2) Each Christian is a co-worker and brother of Christ; (3) Each Christian is a priest who can offer his sacrifice to God without the need of an intermediary; and (4) Each Christian has the divine mandate to extend the gospel whenever and wherever he can. Brunotte also cautioned against any attempt to see these four elements as rigid and inflexible." [5]

On the other hand, the pastor is called by the rest of the priesthood to specific responsibilities of service. It is not by human design or simply a matter of good order, but it is Christ's will that a congregation consist of pastor(s) and people. This relationship is of his making and therefore a precious relationship that is to be characterized by love resulting in harmony and unity as Paul says to the Corinthians: "I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1:10). To the Romans he says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment....just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body" (12:3,4). And again to the Philippians: "If you have any encouragement in being united to Christ...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (2:1-5). There is only one priesthood and it has its servants, the pastors. This means that pastors carry out their responsibilities not on their own authority but on the authority of Christ for the whole community of God's people. Pastors, unlike the priesthood of believers, do not act as individuals but in the name of God on behalf of the community of priests. In his book *Freedom for Ministry* Neuhaus writes: "One hastens to add that the authority for ministry, while it is personal, it is not individualistic. Again, the ministry is the ministry of the Church, and therefore there must be means by which the 'inner call' to ministry is ratified and celebrated by the 'external call' of the community." [6]

In this relationship the priesthood is to honor and obey its pastors as servants of Christ insofar as they serve with the Word. Paul emphasizes this truth in his first letter to the Thessalonians: "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other" (5:12,13). Pastors are to be honored not because they have a likable personality, although that is always nice. But they are to honor the pastor because of his office, because of his work. The people are to obey the pastor as they would Christ: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb. 13:17).

This harmony is the result of a mutual love, which acknowledges the equal standing of all and also the different functions. Equality and function are not to be in opposition. This harmony is destroyed whenever the pastor or the people try to "rule" the other. The parts of a human body were designed by God to work in a naturally harmonious relationship. For a body part to work against another body part would be the result of the harmful effects of disease. And so it is with the Body of Christ, the pastor and the people. For a body part of Christ to work against another body part would be the harmful results of sin, as Paul says in the fifth chapter of Galatians: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each

other" (v.15).

The Scriptures use several images to picture this harmonious and close relationship between the pastor and the people. There are some obvious and not unexpected overlapping in the images.

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1. September 1997 issue of The Reporter. This meeting resulted in this publication of "Church and Ministry", (CPH) the collected papers of the 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

2. Ibid.

3. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the New International Version.

4. James Pragman, Traditions of Ministry, (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, Mo., 1983), 16,17.

5. Pragman, 17.

6. Richard John Neuhaus, Freedom for Ministry (William B. Eerdmans Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1992), 66.

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