

ELCA Ordination at 2000: A Proposal

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Common Acronyms:

AC—Augsburg Confession

ALC—American Lutheran Church

DGD—Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline

ELCA—Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

SSC—A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions

VE—Visions and Expectations

Introduction:

My mother picked me up on the last day of a Lutheran Leadership Training School in Beaver, Alaska when I was fourteen. I had been there a week. As I climbed into the red Chevy pick-up, I said to her "Mom, I'm going to be a bishop." She said something characteristically motherly and non-committal and we drove home. My fascination with the ministry has not diminished.

The formative stories of Christianity rely upon a group of people set apart to lead, commune, sacrifice and facilitate worship. The prescriptions set upon this class of people illustrate the cultural norms and societal trends of the different biblical epochs. I argue that this trend has continued past the second century and into the twenty-first.

There have been seminal moments in the course of the formative Christian story at which prophets have radically re-defined the role of the ministry in society and its selection process. Jesus of Nazareth sacrificed himself, and, in doing so, made the sacrifices of the Hebrew priests obsolete. With Jesus' emphasis on compassion and love-ethic, the interpreters of the Law lost their jobs. The leaders of the new church were servants and workers. They tried to follow the life of Jesus to live and work humbly. This humility would not be the norm for Christianity, and within a hundred years, Saul of Tarsus began the process of regulating the ministry in response to the abuse of authority in the early church.

Paul's vision for priesthood is the priesthood with which Martin Luther came in contact in the 15th century. Paul's vision for the priesthood flirted with formula and law, but by Luther's time, they were lovers. Peasants did not understand the language of the church, and the church hierarchy did not understand its people. The church selected its priest from the academic upper-crust (read—literate), and the monastic lifestyle spoke more to internal affairs than to outside

service. Luther wrote volumes in response to this system. His understanding of the Scriptures ran counter to the understanding the clergy had of the Scriptures. Luther also outlined criteria that he felt important to the calling of ministers—a minister must have a job to do and a place to do it. The authors of the Book of Concord built upon these criteria in the same reformation spirit but more systematically. Luther's writings and the Augsburg confession serve the same function to the Catholic priesthood that Jesus' sermons did to the priesthood in the first century CE.ⁱ

It should be noted that most of Luther's writing with regard to the monastic orders came from his personal experience. Luther tried to be the holy monk and failed. He made himself sick and not a little crazy in his attempt to reach the church's unattainable brass ring. From this experience came his conclusion that there can be no human enterprise that would aid in the saving of a soul. Justification before God must be through faith alone.ⁱⁱ

Heir to this tradition, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is one of the largest Lutheran denominations in the world in the most powerful country in the world. The ELCA relies upon Scripture and the Lutheran confessional writings when developing its church policy. These two factors make an exploration of its policies with regard to the ministry the logical step in a string of reforms spanning 2000 years. A person will find within the ELCA indicators from the early church, Luther and the confessions. By and large, the ELCA remains consistent with the common criteria and threads in the last 2000 years; however, some of the ELCA most current statements with regard to the pastorate are not in keeping with its reformation heritage. It is these latter policies that this paper will call into question. The tradition from which the ELCA springs is rich in that it relies upon the grace of God for all things, and the texts from which the ELCA derives its church theology support this stance. The ELCA tends to shrink from its reformation

heritage when societal pressures threaten. Luther called the church to sin boldly. This is here where the ELCA needs to be held accountable.

The theology most suitable for this critique is liberation theology. Indeed, theologies developed by and through the experiences of heterosexual male intellectuals serve as a bulwark to the sexual hegemony in the church.ⁱⁱⁱ While this paper will not explicitly call upon that theology's resources when supporting its arguments, liberation theology's presence in my understanding and reading of Lutheran confessional writings will be evident to the reader in my reading of Luther and Scripture. Its suitability stems from liberation theology's live-giving/affirming message to people in pain. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff illustrate this nicely: "Liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor."^{iv} This paper understands "poor" to mean those people within the church intentionally not allowed full communion by church doctrine. While the oppression liberation theology addresses is most often economic and cultural, the sexual oppression experienced by Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgendered people in the ELCA is comparable in urgency and the institutions that cause it are analogous to the structures limiting the lives of non-western peoples.

Chapter 1: The Early Church and Some Definitions

The early church is a fitting place to begin looking at the roots of the ordination process and the subsequent criteria for ordination. There are certain problems in an endeavor such as this. Scholars are divided in their understanding of the early church movements and their practices. This division extends to the value that historical reconstructions have in the modern church community. Some scholars—for instance the Jesus seminar—contend that the core beliefs of the early movement are those that most differ from the practices of the modern church. This method ignores centuries of church tradition and, centuries of church theologies. A modern liberation theologian would argue that the kernel of relevance toward the poor and oppressed in the Gospels must be highlighted for the purpose of ending modern oppressions. Karen Jo Torjeson articulates her understanding of the life of any doctrine, and it is from this stance that I will begin this chapter and from where this paper will understand the relevance of the ordination process in the early church:

Let me talk about what I call the life cycle of a doctrine. An image begins by being born out of a profound religious experience. Then it gets articulated by a community and perhaps synthesized by an individual in a creative process. Then it becomes an image with which a community can really resonate; it takes root, as it were, in much broader circles, it begins to function normatively; it begins to establish boundaries and to define power relations. Eventually, when an image is in its last stage of the life cycle and about to die, it then becomes very authoritarian, formal, and rigid, loosed from its context in life, where it originated. Finally, it collapses under its own weight. But at that stage we're

dealing with power relations. Because an image functions to cement power relations, there is resistance to change.^v

The process of ordination in the early church follows Torjeson's model. Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the profound religious experience that was later synthesized by St. Paul, Timothy and the church fathers—most notably Ignatius, Clement and Augustine. As the developed changed from a quasi- Jewish cult to a full-blown religion with history, ritual and tradition, it began to establish its boundaries. Christianity, and the process of choosing leaders and elders, started to become auto-defining as it moved away from its originating religious experience. The Reformation was an event that tried to reconnect Christianity with its originating religious event instead of allowing it to continue toward the collapse that Torjeson outlines. Luther and his contemporaries released some of the steam that had been building while the church was losing its context in life. The task now is to find the kernels in both the early church and the reformation writings that allowed to church to avoid the final phase of Torjeson's doctrinal life-span.

Let me take a moment to define the doctrine of ordination on the early church. 'Doctrine' may be an incorrect term in that it implies a formula. St. Paul's letters react to very specific questions and problems in certain early church communities. Its reactionary tendencies do not allow for a comprehensive doctrine for the calling of persons to church leadership, but there are commonalities in the manner the early churches elected leaders. For instance, most of the early churches dealt with the Hebrew tradition of a council of elders to fulfil the church's administrative needs. It is this Hebrew model that Paul was attempting to amalgamate with Jesus' commissioning of his disciples, and the resulting ad hoc formula is what I am referring to

when I use 'doctrine.'^{vi}

I would contend that the modern church is still dealing with the last stage of Torjeson's outline of a movement. Torjeson issued this statement at a conference on the early church, and while she did not discuss particularly the priesthood of the early church, her insight applies broadly to every aspect of the church's life. Her doctrinal progression knows no hierarchical boundaries, and this movement has traditionally affected the leadership of the church more noticeably than the lay community. The church today has become "authoritarian, formal, and rigid." It is lacking relevance for the social problems today. When the early Jewish Christians were fighting for the right to worship as they saw fit, the movement had an everyday relevance that cemented the community. As early as St. Paul, however, the bickering among factions who did not agree on the function of the church, they began to require a strong authoritarian presence to keep the Jesus movement consistent. While the early church leaders were more egalitarian than their later counterparts^{vii}, they began to stray from Jesus' teachings and Paul felt he had to impose restrictions for a particular time and place. In the last 2000 years, these have become canon. This is of vital significance when attempting to understand the development of the church and its ordination processes from its originating religious experience to the present day.

The question Torjeson was asked by one of her colleagues to which she provided the above answer was "Given such a rich and varied set of images of Christ and Jesus, why do you think the Church is so resistant to some of the claims and directions of postmodernism, which functions as a way of relativizing all images?" This question and answer illustrate nicely the resistance to endeavors such as this paper which try to understand how the early Christian struggles might be applicable to modern problems. Torjeson is not alone in her ability to see the necessity of a postmodern approach. She is joined by a number of people with a deeply rooted

commitment to social justice and a desire to change the world.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins^{viii} illustrates the necessity of the academic community bringing to bear every resource at its disposal to understand more fully the early church movements. Gospel language favors men; as a feminist theologian, she argues that the misogynist nuances of early Christian writings must not be interpreted in terms that are harmful to modern women:

Western androcentric languages and discourses do not just marginalize women or eliminate them from the historical cultural-religious record; they also construct the meaning of "women" differently. What it means to be female/woman/feminine...does not so much depend on one's sex but rather on one's location in the symbolic-social-symbolic kyriarchal system of multiform oppressions.^{ix}

Again, this paper is forced to come at the problem of oppression within the ordination process by relying upon sources already in place to end the oppression of women and the poor. In other words, theologies of liberation do not specifically address the oppressions inherent in the selection of the pastorate by the church, but that theology's methodology is well-suited to this paper's enterprise. There is not the same breadth of information available in queer theory or scholarship for use in academic endeavors, so I am borrowing freely from those sources that most closely mirror the struggles of GLBT peoples. While restructuring the role of women in NT writings is not specifically the goal of this paper, Fiorenza's work provides some and invites other alternative interpretations of those biblical texts detrimental to members of modern society, and by extension, to evaluate the role of the early church with regard to the ordination process

according to the same hermeneutical agenda.

I outlined that hermeneutical agenda in the introduction; so, the following statement will come as no surprise. The Bible in a Reformation church is helpful only as long as it affirms the dignity of the church's members, as opposed to helping keep the top of the pyramid firmly in power. People have used the Bible as a weapon to perpetuate injustices and cause harm. There are passages that have been used for all kinds of mischief: to support apartheid and segregation, to buttress anti-Jewish attitudes (Matthew 27:25; John 8:44,45), to condone the subordination of women (1 Corinthians 14: 34-36; Ephesians 6:5-8; 1 Timothy 2: 9-14; Peter 2:18-21), to enforce slavery (Ephesians 6:5-8); 1 Timothy 6: 1-2; 1Peter 2:18-21), and to condemn gay and lesbian persons (Romans 1:26-27 etc.).^x Because I question any gospel which keeps people subordinate, I turn for assistance to those scholars whose work reflects a commitment to addressing sticky social problems through an ethic of care with the gospel message as an articulation of that ethic. This approach is largely unacceptable in the academy, though:

If historical scholarship would take seriously the mystifying strategies of kyriocentric so-called generic language [read: any aspect of biblical exegesis that continues oppression]...it would need to develop methods that allow one to read historical source-texts "against the grain."^{xi}

While it is unclear if the "dominant grain" is in the biblical text itself, or in its exegesis, the result is that the dominant, acceptable scholarly enterprise takes those ideas from the biblical text that most benefit the established order. To this end, it is appropriate to use Fiorenza's method and its adherents when confronting an issue of discrimination in the modern church. Specifically,

the ordination criteria are notoriously slanted toward those with power and in the interest of keeping that power centralized.

Fiorenza also highlights the power of biblical language to mystify modern scholars. This issue will also play into the discussion of ministers in the early church, and will require a number of definitions. The methodology will become apparent later in the paper, but that is a cart before the horse proposition. The first order of business is the definition of terms.

There are manifold confusions in the understandings of "minister" by biblical scholars and the laity alike. In modern English vernacular, the terms bishop, priest, pastor, deacon and minister are slight variations that tend to run down Christian denominational lines. The clearest articulation of this tricky concept is in an article by the Bishop of Oxford, H. H. Carpenter—a New Testament scholar and Anglican priest. In his dense article he explains that the OT prophets had ceased to exist (except possibly John the Baptist) by the time of Christ.^{xii} The Hebrews confined the priests to sacrificial worship at the temples. The synagogue invited members, like Jesus and Paul, to preach to contemporaries. The office of the scribe was responsible for the administrative and interpretive aspects of synagogue life. The judicial branch of the early synagogue was in the hands of a council of elders (*presbyteroi*). As the Law became less important in early Christian communities, the role of the scribe evaporated, as there was no body of information to interpret. Similarly, as Christ fulfilled the sacrificial function of the Jewish priests, their office, too, became obsolete.

This change in office promoted a situational egalitarianism, as Christ's death and resurrection made the Jewish hierarchy unsuitable for the new theology. This egalitarianism was not the product of a group of people different in their inclinations from the modern counterparts. Rather, the undefined structure—coupled with threats to the new cult from secular

authorities—of the first century church lent itself to an equality in its members. In other words, no one knew what was going on, and the unsure future of the new sect, out of necessity, demanded that all converts participate in the organizing and governing of the community. This quality of structure is the first that Torjeson speaks to in her cycle of a doctrine. Later contributors to the early church formulations (e.g. Paul) would hone in on what was to be the larger understanding of later Christianity.

Later NT authors use priestly language and stories to describe the entire Church—a trend that Luther took and ran with 1500 years later. This egalitarianism is evident in the Greek rendering of the descriptive terms for 'ministers.' *Diakoneia*, from which deacon derives, is 'to serve,' and specifically 'to wait at table.' Similarly, *episcopēin* means 'to have oversight' (as in overseer of a flock of livestock) and from here we derive bishop. Also, *poimainein* (shepherd, pastor) is a caretaker of livestock. These terms illustrate a critically different understanding of the role of the priesthood in the early church from that of modern definitions. Carpenter points out that, while these four terms occur throughout the New Testament, only *episkopos* (bishop) and *diakonos* (deacon/ess) became official titles in modern Christianity. It is ironic that the conceptualization of early Christian leaders tended toward the service role, while the societal trend toward hierarchy manifested itself relatively shortly after the death of Christ. Some scholars hypothesize that the monarchical structure reared its head at the behest of divisions within the early sects and divergent beliefs. In this light, the modern incarnations of the priestly office appear consistent with the church's 2000-year history.^{xiii}

As the service terms slowly fell out of vogue, or they lost their original meanings, the rigidity and formula for the church evidenced itself. Understanding the trend in the first centuries of church life allows one to apply these formulas to the gradual changes in the structure of the

Christian priesthood. The priesthood is an element of the personality of the early church, but, as stated in the introduction, it is a powerful litmus test for the accompanying trends in the social orders and the rest of the church structure.

While the above outline of the church's development of ever-higher levels of organization is helpful in understanding the role of early church leaders, the specific vocational process is more elusive. It begins with the Lord's commissioning of the disciples after his Resurrection in the synoptic Gospels:

Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover. ^{xiv}

There is not a whole lot in this commissioning that would recommend the disciples to service roles. In fact, it may seem that the sorcery that Jesus asks his followers to perform is inconsistent with the majority of Jesus' teachings of compassion, humility etc.. The reason for this might be as follows. The commissioning of the disciples before the Ascension takes place in the lengthened ending of the gospel of Mark. In the shorter ending, the passage is as follows:

And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable

proclamation of eternal salvation^{xv}

This version of the accounts of Jesus' commissioning fits better with the early church understanding of the role and vocation of the priesthood. It is also more consistent with the terms employed by early Christians to label those peoples chosen by God to be leaders of a Christian community. It lacks the magic of the longer ending which "is missing from the earliest, most reliable Greek manuscripts and seems to mix motifs from the other Gospels"^{xvi}

So, it seems that Jesus had two faces when dealing with appointing successors to his ministry. On the one hand is a group of itinerant mystics whose duties include those similar to the miracles Jesus himself performed. The other option is one wherein adherents to the gospel message are commissioned by Jesus to preach the ultimately important message of their salvation from death and freedom from sin. These may have been two of the motifs floating around when Paul was attempting to clarify the new church's understanding of the role of the minister.

Paul's emphasis on the miracles Jesus' disciples performed began the early church's emphasis on the spiritual gifts of its leaders (*charismata*)^{xvii}. In his letters, Paul writes about the necessity of all peoples to be part of the church using an analogy to the body of Christ^{xviii}; some scholars, however, produce evidence of a hierarchy that developed shortly after the old Hebrew priestly offices were abolished by the early Christians-with those spiritual gifts at the top, and the service gifts (as appointed by the community) at the bottom.

The gradual transition from apostolic leadership and a variety of charismatic and non-charismatic ministries to that stronger Church order that provides a focus from unity if partly visible to the historian^{xix}

And:

St. Paul is not here enumerating ecclesiastical offices, but is describing the variety of functions and kinds of service in the one body and all contribute to its corporate life and arise from the diverse operation of the one Spirit within it.^{xx}

St. Paul further defines the spiritual gifts as those pertaining to 'apostles, prophets and teachers,' though it should be noted that he does not refer to them as offices in the church. Herein is the difficulty in understanding Paul and the New Testament understanding of the call process. It seems that this division may be related to the two persons making up the apostle Paul. Saul of Tarsus, Pharisee, would understand a highly regimented priestly order and see the need for its organization for the smooth running of any human institution. Naturally, in any such organization, those with gifts that appear to come directly from God would be placed by Saul at the top of the power pyramid. Paul the Apostle, however, would recognize and campaign for the equality and appropriate holiness of all people to fulfil the priestly office, as Jesus has taught.

I have distinguished among the Hebrew hierarchical priesthood, the transitional pseudo-egalitarian pastorate shortly followed by the return to a hierarchy because of divisions and in the interest of good order. Where are the prophets? Carpenter contends that early church prophecy is not that of the Hebrew Scriptures. St. Paul describes the content of prophecy as 'edification, comfort, and consolation'.^{xxi} In fact this could be labeled 'inspired preaching' rather than prophecy. The point here is that prophecy is another of the components of early Christian ministry that is usually misconstrued in contemporary circles. It is not an elitist office requiring many years' study or some sort of approval of an established order. Actually, prophecy has a long history of being unpopular. Modern Christians should not allow this rabble-rousing gift to

be regulated. In fact, "It appears to be assumed by both St. Paul and Acts that any Christian might be expected to perform prophecy from time to time."^{xxii} Another scholar writes that the prophets in the early church were a class unto themselves: "Prophets along with apostles and teachers held a spiritual office in the Christian Community till about the end of the second century they exercised their ministry within the Church." (182 O.S. Rankin) These two views are not necessarily out of phase with each other. Like those who are called specifically to be leaders in the early church when all are capable of that office; so to are all early Christians capable of prophecy, though for some it is a special and intense gift.

It is interesting that the debate over the role, service and selection of the early priesthood has not been resolved in modern times. Some pastors today are in possession of expensive educations in matters theological and the endorsement of their respective church bodies. In contrast, there are also the itinerant preachers called by God to preach revival. Both types have a long history, but their common thread is the necessity of the priestly office to avoid becoming crippled by the social tensions in the church. If the prophets had accepted the established order of their respective times, they would not have been able to warn Israel. If Jesus had agreed with the rules of his day, the Gospel message of compassion for the meek would have been lost in miles of red tape. This is not to say that these examples were not well versed in the lore of the day, but rather they took what was traditionally accepted and brought it back into its relevance for a community and reattached it to life.

This tension is a fruitful one when exploring the issues of who is permitted to be ordained precisely because it raises the question of where the call to the ministry originates. The early church was in a poor position to answer that question because of its reliance on St. Paul and the modern church is in no better place, though the body of constitutional rhetoric on

the topic is immense.

Chapter 2: Luther, Priests and the Pastorate

The vehemence of the polemic battle that Martin Luther waged against the Church peppers his writings. To fully understand the strength of Luther's reproaches, one must have a solid context in which to place his writings. The following brief history of Luther's theological struggles is intended to allow the reader to understand Luther from a prophetic standpoint not unlike that of Jesus. His railing against the establishment—the priests of the Church—is seen by this paper as a hot machine letting off steam to return to its normal temperature. This release is similar to that of first century Christianity to the Hebrew priesthood.

Luther's most noted foray against the church was in the 95 theses nailed to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. These theses dealt primarily with the sale of indulgences granted by Leo X to raise funds to build St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Within 14 days, the theses were being read all over Europe. While the content of these was not radical—in that there were many folks who believed what Luther wrote—owing to the manifold views on the subject, Luther's clear stance elicited an overwhelming response from the clergy. In the years previous to his theses, Luther had departed from the Nominalist belief that a person may, in some small part, take the initiative in her own salvation. By 1515, Luther had firmly embraced the idea that justification is an act of God through man (*coram Deo*).^{xxiii} His thoughts on the priesthood reflect this move away from the human participation in justification: "For it is God's will that nothing be done as a result of one's own choice or decision, but everything as a consequence of a command or a call"^{xxiv}

Luther's theses brought about a number of debates, and eventually led to a trial at which he was not present. This course of events may help a reader understand why Luther seized many opportunities to redefine the current understanding of the role of the priest and that of the

priesthood. His arguments will in turn help a reader understand why Luther found considerable favor circles that looked for reform in the church and why I turn to him to shed light on the reforms I am proposing.

As Luther will make clear, and as I hope to demonstrate, the issue of personal purity in the clergy is one overturned by the Reformation. That we still cite it as an object of contention in the church is proof that our church system is beginning the process toward a more authoritarian model after the reformation experience. Luther's translating of the Bible into vernacular German began the process of making the Word of God—the Scriptures—accessible to the peasants for whom Latin was incomprehensible. By this action, Luther illustrates the universality of the Gospel message to the community of believers. Luther also championed the peasants when he berates the clergy for their self-interested involvement in the lives of the poor. Both his translations and his sermons point to Luther's understanding that the Gospel is applicable to the majority of people and should be unfettered from the Catholic Church.

Luther incisively restructures the role of the priesthood in most of his collected works. One of the most complete examples is as follows:

...But Christ is a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Therefore let Aaron yield, and let the worship under the Law give way as a shadow gives way to the body.

Thus he (the author of Genesis 6-14) concludes most emphatically that the priesthood under the Law must come to an end, because there is a promised a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Before him Abraham, the father of Levi, humbled himself, and to him he gave tithes when Levi was still in his loins.

But the let the studious reader learn these matters from the author himself....^{xxv}

Luther is saying that the priesthood should have been abolished and replaced with one with Christ (the Priest) at its head; he is not subtle in drawing a parallel from this Genesis exegesis to the Roman Catholic Church. In this instance, Aaron is the founder of the old order whose time is past. To embrace the radical tradition of Jesus, Luther calls for Aaron to yield and let go of the Law, which has served its purpose. Insofar as the church clings to the Law, Christ's sacrifice becomes a half measure; the boldness of the Christian message is rendered inadequate for salvation by the self-interested church establishment. This half-measure is insulting to God's new covenant with God's people in Christ. This is solid reformation footing on which to begin re-examining the priesthood in over time.

In a sermon delivered on Saturday, May 29, 1535 on a text from the book of Psalms, Luther furthers his argument on the necessity of reconstituting the existing priesthood. Luther claims that the Psalmists "speaks of a new and different generation of priests or priesthood"^{xxvi} This theme of a new priesthood throughout Luther's works. Luther sees the present order of priests as hangers on and inheritors to the priestly tradition of polemic and human justification. Though Luther concentrates on the way the priests of God could live and, more often, on the priesthood of all believers, he devotes a significant amount of material to the admonition of the current establishment. Here is a sample of part of Luther's thoughts regarding the mislead nature of his contemporaries:

I have had to say these things about the sneaks and false preachers-of
whom there are now all too many-in order to warn moth pastors and rulers. They

should exhort and command their people to be on their guard against these vagabonds and knaves and to avoid as sure emissaries of the devil... xxvii

And:

You are a holy priest, yet I ignore your magnificent works. But a serving girl who washes pots is serving Me not matter dirty they may appear in your eyes. And the angels themselves look at this service to Me, and rejoice... Thus some go more willingly into the garden and take care of the plants; if they are permitted to do what they wish, they are good. He (the Holy Spirit) does not say: "Do this or that," but "in everything act faithfully.

And again:

Thus when he observes chastity, poverty and obedience, he is a dying man, because he must say: "I do not know whether [this is pleasing] to God." Here all vows are impure because they are all devoid of faith. He is not persuaded that they are pleasing to God... Therefor no monk is able to say: "This life of religion is pleasing to God,... xxviii

All three passages in Luther's writings help round out his larger argument that the priesthood should not be as it is—the priesthood is deriving its authority from its ability to make visible signs of its purity. More importantly, the priesthood is not pleasing to God in its current form.

It is not a matter of God's pleasure or displeasure, but rather it is a matter of God's right to call whom God chooses. In fact, for Luther, this emphasis on the outward signs of purity is in keeping with the devil's agenda. God is pleased by faith in God alone.

Luther also hints at an internal rightness to the priesthood. By this I mean that the spark, or call, or whatever it is that is recognizable as a vocation to the priesthood by a church community is not governed by those doing the selecting. There is a force or impulse that makes the gardener garden, and a similar force that leads a person to preach God's Word. Just as the body of Christ is made of different parts with different function—all being equal—so Luther draws on that equality to dethrone and humble the priesthood of his day. He did not go far enough.

Luther acknowledges the sovereign nature of God's spirit in those called to ministry. It is a small step from acknowledging God's call in someone and acknowledging God's call in certain persons. For Luther, the gardener's impulse to garden is good and from God. There is not a church injunction against gardening without the proper behavioral credentials. The extension is that a priest should have a similar feeling of rightness in her office if she is to be pleasing in the eyes of God. In Luther's analogy, the church is conspicuously absent in the gardener's selection process. He stresses the confirmation of God's call, not the administration thereof. While the gardener is an apt illustration of the priest's realization of the call, it is also speaking to everyone. What if this person really does want to be in the garden; what are they in the eyes of God?

To answer that question requires delving into Luther's notion of the 'priesthood of all believers.' While there is a need for the office of the priest, Luther write, at the spiritual level, we are all made priests by the sacrifice of Christ. This proposition is as prevalent in his writings as that of the restructuring of the priesthood of his time. Christ is the Priest—the only one

necessary between humans and God. For, "[I]n His own person, Christ is indeed the only High Priest between God and us all....In the same way, He is an eternal Priest, who makes us all into priests." ^{xxix}

When formulating these thoughts, Luther called heavily on St. Jerome, who developed a four-tiered typology of priests. 1)those called by God through Christ; 2) those called by God through man; 3) those called by man through men ;4) and those called by themselves. Luther finds that most of the priests of his day fall into the third and fourth categories. In fact, Luther allows that Christ should be the chief temporal authority on Earth. The sovereign of the world is Christ: "Therefore let Him be our dear King and Priest, who represents us before God forever...Amen."^{xxx} Luther sees his priesthood prepared for the coming of Christ throughout the Old Testament. When tackling Jeremiah, Luther writes:

[F]or to each will be given the authority to teach and preach, neither through man nor by man but divinely by God. There will not be some order-as there was in that old people-of those who alone had the power of priestly function. Instead, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh. All will be teachers and priests of God^{xxxi}

These writings rail against the authority of the Catholic priesthood and provide a more egalitarian interpretation for the best nature of the church. By egalitarian, I mean that Luther emphasizes God's complete discretion in the selection of the priestly office. God should be the only chooser for the church. The church should not forget this by attempting to regulate God's authority.

Luther was particularly interested in the rituals and purity rites that made the priest fit

for his office in the eyes of the church—not necessarily in the eyes of God. The issue of purity, which is often cited by those who oppose is critical to Luther. He writes in a lovely paragraph his interpretation of the verse “And the pots in the house of the Lord shall be as bowls before the altar.”^{xxxii} He takes this idea of God's purifying presence and grafts it into his 'priesthood of believers' proposal.

In the Old Testament only those vessels were sacred which were consecrated and dedicated to the altar and the worship of God. But in the New Testament all the kettles or pots in the entire house of the Lord are to be as sacred as the bowls of the altar that had been formerly. That is, in the New Testament all Christians that worship God shall be sacred, consecrated, and fit for the priestly office, so that henceforth there will be no difference between the consecrated and the unconsecrated, because they all have been consecrated with the Spirit of Christ...The old priesthood with its sacredness shall be over and at an end. For the new priesthood makes everyone that believes sacred and consecrated. Therefore whoever wished to sacrifice, that, preach and serve God, takes whatever Christian he will; and the latter can teach him and boil him so that he is prepared and sacrificed to God according to the old man.^{xxxiii}

While this is ostensibly an exegetical commentary on Isaiah, Luther's interpretation suggest that the whippings, ablutions, chastity, purity and any number of other formulaic purity rituals used by the priests of Luther's time were void. With his careful reading of and reliance on Scripture, Luther denies the special holiness of the priesthood. Instead, every Christian has the same

holiness necessary to teach and preach. Every member of the Body of Christ is equal and to each is assigned a role—none greater than any other.

But who gets to be the head? As I have mentioned, Luther was not interested in abolishing the office of the priest, only in reforming the manner in which they practiced that office. He concedes, as does Paul, from whom his most radical proposals derive—that there must be a pastor, a person responsible for the administration of the word and the sacraments. Every person is a priest, but not all are pastors.

...For to be a pastor one must be not only a Christian, and a priest must have an office and a field of work committed to him. This call and command make pastors and preachers. A burgher or layman may be a learned man; but this does not make him a lecturer and entitle him to teach publicly in the schools or to assume the teaching office, unless he is called to it.^{xxxiv}

Luther here is recognizing here the need for an educated clergyperson, but clearly this is not the most important asset they might possess. The person who gets the call gets to be the priest.

This passage both cites the necessity of a nominal head of a local church, as well defines the role that the next generation of priest/pastors should have. They are to have a place and a job committed to them. More importantly, they are to serve primarily as teachers. Luther differentiates this type of teaching with that of a secular calling. Even the learned among his contemporaries may not have both the office that God's pastor has. Luther makes clear that it

will be God's decision whom to call and that the days of purity are over.

A called preacher needs only "bring good evidence that they are called and commanded to do this work in that specific place."^{xxxv} Also, as Christ is to be the new Head Priest, then all pastors of Luther's next generation must "shine forth...according to the example of Christ, namely that he should be merciful to the people and faithful to God for the people" (W, LVII-3, 135, 136). In other words, Christ should be the model for the new priesthood, and a person would be hard-pressed to find, in the life of Jesus, reasons to exclude those who desire to share the Good News.

Chapter 3: Luther on Sexual Purity

So: Luther is convinced of the readiness of all believers for the priesthood. Remarkably, Luther takes a special interest in homosexual sex in two passages: one each from Genesis and Romans. In the Genesis exegesis, he begins with the caveat that Germany is not ready to talk about homosexuality. The sexual act was evidently unknown in Germany until its introduction by Carthusian monks from Italy. This is where I think Luther abandons his belief in the readiness of all believers for the pastorate and bows to the inclination to single out some sins particularly loathsome.

Luther proceeds to use phrases like "sensual need," and "frenzy," to avoid explicit language. In the Genesis account, Luther seems to see the greater part of the sin as being that those who are surrounding Lot's house are the city's rich citizens (so, presumably they should know better than to disturb a guest) and that they participated "freely and without shame in adultery, fornication, effeminacy and even incest..."^{xxxvi}

Understanding this, one hastens to point out Luther's mistreatment of the Jewish population and of women in his writings. Both mistreatments stem from the same cultural trends and should not be a valid form of cultural theology. In addition, as Luther is not a systematic theologian, he is not held to the same scrutiny by scholars, nor is he interested in tightly weaving the agency of God in our world. Because of this lax treatment of relevant social issues, Luther is allowed to flow with the trends established by the majority—a trend that the Gospels rail against. In both the Romans and Genesis accounts, homosexual union is closely linked with effeminacy. This misogynist attitude is typical of Augustine and his adherents. Any responsible interpretation of Luther must take into account the societal motivators behind his writings.

Luther is working at the Scriptures in an hermunitical manner consistent with his day. In the same manner, the interpreter of Luther must look at the overwhelming evidence of the nil acceptance of committed homosexual union in this society. Luther was a concerned with church reform, but he certainly showed his bias when confronted with which humans he would champion.

Opponents to the ordination of GLBT persons today will undoubtedly reject the idea that this issue is a humanist one. They will cite personal purity and the right of a church to administrate God's call as it sees fit. I have demonstrated that this sort of reasoning is consistent with the Jewish reticence toward Jesus ministry in Chapter 1; I hope to show that it is equally invalid in Luther's time. I think he'll back me up. While I use Luther here in a manner in which he would probably not approve, I reject the idea that the issue is one of purity. Here is an example of the kind of framework in which the opposition is working:

The partisans of the theological legitimization of homosexuality make much of the putative "findings" of "science" which "prove" that homosexuality is innate and not a matter of choice. To this claim we respond that the datum of theology is divine revelation, not empirical phenomena.^{xxxvii}

The opposition to a proposal such as this one are perfectly happy to ignore any argument based on reason. This is tantamount to excommunicating Galileo for being observant. I confess that there has been little divine revelation of the "God in my room" variety involved in the writing of this paper, but observing what creation reveals in the everyday is a powerful motif.

Opponents to the ordination of GLBT peoples would discredit any use of Luther, because it is clear from his writings that he rejects any sort of homosexual relationship as Godly. I have contended that Luther must sometimes be taken with a grain of salt^{xxxviii}, and I would contend that his priesthood of all believers is sufficient to cover the issue of homosexuality in the church. The ELCA tries to negate this powerful reformation concept with its various proposals and statements regarding sexuality:

heterosexual monogamy is the required state for ordination of sexually active human beings. The priesthood of all believers is potentially the subversion of this hierarchy. The priesthood of all believers is a theological rejection of the bipolar opposition of priest and people.^{xxxix}

So, I see that a responsible use of Luther is indeed appropriate for this issue of GLBT ordination. In fact, it may even make the ELCA look up and see that this wisdom of its elders is priceless in addressing most of its sticky problems.

A modern interpretation of Luther's writings will produce a dramatic change in the societal understanding of GLBT peoples that needs be addressed. Luther's penchant for returning to cultural norms is echoed in his exegesis of Romans 1:25. "The uncleanness, or effeminacy, is every intentional and individual pollution that can be brought about in various ways..."^{xl} Luther does not feel it is his obligation to amalgamate the cleansing nature of Christ and the inherently unclean nature of the homosexual. He lumps the homosexual with all other sexual deviants, Jews and women in his time. He also quotes 1Cor. 6:9 : "Do not be deceived; neither the immoral,...nor the adulterers, nor the effeminate, not homosexuals, etc. will inherit the kingdom of God."^{xli}

Luther's primary focus was on the reformation of the Church, and his primary scapegoat was the office of the priesthood—those who presented the Church's face to the common people. The ELCA's policies are similar to those of the 14th century Catholic Church in that there is a percentage of the population who are denied God's Word and God's office because of their station in a socially uneducated Western society. Bigotry against queerfolk is in this manner no different that discrimination of illiterate people's in Luther's time. At a time when the social institutions were behind the needs of the people, Luther called the priests to bridge that gap. Similarly, in the West, there is a lack of civil rights institutions that are able to meet the needs of the least of society--specifically the GLBT community. Like Luther, I propose that the clergy should be the office that is able to bridge that gap.

Where there is no same-sex partnership benefits or common law marriages, the Church should be the humanist example to the state. It should boldly take on the responsibility of reform. If the ELCA were to publicly accept GLBT people into its fold, calling on its tradition of the sinful nature of all its clergy, then society might follow, as in the Reformation.

Chapter 4: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

As a corporation, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) relies on Scripture, its Confessions and various church documents when creating policy.^{xlii} It also cites its Reformation heritage as a focus for the directions its policies take, though this last part is a tenuous link to a past that is little respected by the church's modern incarnation. While the ELCA recognizes the necessity of a hierarchy for making decisions and creating policy at the behest of 'good order,' the result of this stray from its reforming ethic is a church whose membership is without proper instruction in the creeds, confessions and Scriptures that lay the foundation for ELCA policy. The most recent policies in the ELCA "are about a deeply human fear of moral chaos and social disintegration, and a fear of what responses to these might bring."^{xliii} As one of said members, it is interesting to this author to discover the discrepancies between the foundation and the edifice.

While the majority of the ELCA constitution is devoted to the legislative processes in that church, a few key articles echo its Reformation heritage and reliance on Scripture. These passages exhibit a rich appreciation of Luther's insights into justification, the role of ordination in the church, and the responsibility of the church in the world at large. The ELCA constitution outlines the move away from the reformation to legislation in fear in greater detail:

Chapter 2.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

2.05. This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

2.06. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

2.0.7 Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

3.0 The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgement and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

4.0 The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Though them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

These are the foundation upon which the ELCA builds its understanding of justification. The above is indicative of Luther in two ways. The first is in the language "for the salvation of all who believe." "In this way we are all priests, clothed and adorned with the same holiness as Christ, whom we receive through faith, much more beautiful than all the irghteousness of the Old Covenant and the papacy.^{xliv}

This is clearly an allusion to Luther's formulation of the priesthood of believers with Christ at its head. It also speaks to the notion that belief in God is the only justification possible for the salvation of the world. For the ELCA, Christ is the Word who was present at the moment

of creation—the Logos—and through that Word is the preparation and fullness of God's new salvation for humanity through God's Son. The following articles in the ELCA constitution also speak Luther's notion of the priesthood of all believers and the opening of the Gospel of John:

3.01. All the power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of the church are to be carried out under his rule and authority.

And:

4.02. To participate in God's mission, this church shall:

a. Proclaim God's saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scriptures, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.

So, Luther is the seminal mind behind the creation of Lutheran's understanding of a Christ-centered cosmology and justification. The syntax here is exactly that of Luther's writings—"justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone." I drive home the issue of justification and the church's reliance upon Luther's understanding of justification because it is the essential component when the church describes the readiness of a person waiting to be called by God. An observer needs a keen understanding of the moral location of all human souls when deciding those that may be ready for the ministry—what folks have met the church's criteria and what folks have not. For Luther, and for the church which builds its working understanding of justification upon Luther, the salvation of a person is possible ONLY through the faith that the person has in God.

The Constitution cited above proves the ELCA's stance within the church tradition that sprang from the Jesus movement. The syntax and development of these opening chapters of the ELCA constitution places the ELCA firmly within a linear progression from God's Word at creation, to Jesus, to the Reformation, to the present. It is from this location within a reforming progression that the ELCA considers the matter of ordination. The early church and Luther both expressed the necessity for a priesthood separate from the general community of belief. "The Lord has branded us with this office."^{xiv} Similarly, the early church and Luther both agree that the criteria for a minister are a call from God and a place to minister. Relying on this textual bedrock, the ELCA outlines its understand of call and the responsibilities of the minister in Chapter 7 of its constitution:

Chapter 7.

MINISTRY

2.07. ORDAINED MINISTRY

2.08. An ordained minister of this church shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness in the faith, aptness to preach, teach, and witness, and educational qualifications have been examined and approved in the manner prescribed in the documents of this church; who has been properly called and ordained; who accepts and adheres to the Confessions of Faith of this Church; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry; and whose life and conduct are above reproach. An ordained minister shall comply with the constitution of this church.

Later in its statement of purpose the ELCA vows to "Lift its voice in concord and work in concert with forces for good, to serve humanity, cooperating with church and other groups, participating in activities that promote justice, relieve misery, and reconcile the estranged."^{xlvi}

While these are Gospel-consistent goals, there is hardly a marginalized group of people whose 'life and conduct are above reproach.' Women, slaves, non-Christians, and Jews have all been on the list of people whose life is estranged, miserable and unjust. If the ELCA pledges to combat the forces that promulgate the estranged nature of God's people, then it must ignore all those who do not think, worship, or behave as does ELCA. The morally inferior are most often victims of scapegoatism that stems from an inherent defensive posture displayed by the major Christian powers in the world. This power is ill gotten and inconsistent with the message of the Scriptures that promotes the least of these.

The Constitution also states that the ELCA will "assure faithfulness to this church's confessional position and provide for resolution of disputes;" however, I content that the emphasis on moral superiority demanded of the ELCA clergy causes the very disputes in need of resolution. The ordination of women and minorities was a steamy and divisive debate to the point that the when reconstituting the ALC in 1980, a number of branch Lutherans would not come together. Because these groups had been denied the basic right to recognize and have recognized their calls to ministry from God, the Church was forced into a hard and long argument. If the ELCA were to remain loyal to its "confessional position" and boldly trust that "He is the eternal priest, who makes us all priests"^{xlvii} the derisive nature of the "who's a worse sinner" mentality would evaporate.

Though the Constitution goes on to flush out in greater detail the duties of a minister, the core of its message is in the above article. A pastor shall be called, ordained, fluent in and

accepting of the confessions, and faithful. "It is the office of the priests to teach, to pray and to sacrifice."^{xlviii} The former is consistent with the Reformation tradition to which the ELCA ascribes; however, neither Luther nor the Confessions of the church mention a person in existence 'whose life and conduct are above reproach.' In other words, the sinful nature of all humanity and the subsequent need for Divine grace are central to Luther's cosmological understanding, but the ELCA places emphasis on the moral unassailability of its ministers. In this instance, the ELCA leaves its rich heritage and endorses a system similar to that against which Luther preached. In particular, Luther was concerned with those priests who sought salvation through the monastic life, ritual cleansing, self-flagellation, and indulgences. I am not proposing that the state of the ministry is in a place where reliance upon grace is a foreign concept. I simply contend that a personal purity clause that is to be judged by an unknown leaves the ELCA a convenient loophole for disciplining those ministers who fail to meet the ambiguous standards of "moral conduct above reproach."

The Constitution is unclear above whose reproach a pastor's life must be. There are a number of references to 'discipline;' again, whose discipline is left to for the reader to decide. Most of the power for the calling and the de-calling of ordained ministers are left in the hands of the Synod, and more specifically, the Bishop of that Synod. The reason this issue of reproach is important is that it is the only part of the initial formulation that is outside of the tradition from which the ELCA springs. Finding no answer to who the disciplinarian might be in the Constitution, it may be prudent to turn to the confessions to flush out that answer. It is important to note that the Augsburg Confession is set up as a definition of the Protestant Churches in opposition to the Catholic Church. In light of this, the polemic the Confession employs is applicable to an academic endeavor that proposes changes to a current establishment.

While the confessional writings of the Book of Concord are viewed by the ELCA as a valid interpretation of the faith, only the Augsburg Confession is billed as an inspired document:

Chapter 2.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

4.05.1 This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

4.05.2 This church accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatises, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.

In terms of ordination, the Augsburg Confession is consistent with Luther and the Jesus movement regarding the role of the minister in the community. "Undoubtedly, according to the Gospel...no power belongs to the bishops as bishops, that is, to those to whom is committed the ministration of the Word and sacraments."^{xlix} According to the Augsburg Confession, the bishops of the church are not holy but through grace-exactly as the rest of humanity is saved. The AC's attack on monasticism echoes Luther's vehement opposition toward the self-salvation tendencies present in the clergy; "They [monastic vows] were represented as equal to baptism, and as a method of deserving pardon and justification before God, yea, as being not only a meritorious righteousness, but also the fulfillment of the commands and counsels of the Gospel."^l The AC, like Luther, throws the ELCA's pastor "whose life and conduct are above reproach," into serious

question.

The issue of personal purity in the minister forms a dialectic with the idea that the minister is somehow the 'prime citizen,' or more holy than her flock. A congregation then gives power and authority to a minister that is disproportionate to the sinful nature of all people. By this I mean that the office of the minister preaches and teaches the Word and administers the sacraments, but through no doing of the minister's own are these elements holy. This observation should be central to any Reformation doctrine, but the ELCA, in practice, fails to embrace it by continuing to cite the upright nature of its ministers. In fact, "bishops have no power to decree and ordain anything against the Gospels"¹¹—and legislation that goes contrary to the teachings in the Gospels is subject to debate. The AC reinforces the idea that the minister is the called messenger of the Gospels to a certain place and a certain people. Power resides in the timelessness of the Gospel message and should not be dependent upon the mouth that speaks it.

Power should also not be proportional to the good works of a minister. Any action that is designed by the priest to better herself in the eyes of God or her congregation is a false action. The pursuit of good works as an end to becoming parish-ready is counter to the teachings of the Confessions and to Luther's insights into salvation by grace alone. Both Luther and the Confessions examine this notion by combating the archetypal priests of the Roman Catholic Church. The Augsburg Confessions illustrates this with particular clarity and reference to the Scriptures. This is a forceful statement that directly opposes any priest's life that is "above reproach."

For all Divine service, instituted and enacted without God's will and command, thereby to obtain and merit justification and Divine grace, is contrary to God, to

the Gospel, and the Divine precepts, as Christ also says, Matt. xv.: "In vain they worship me with the commandments of men."^{lii}

While the issue for Luther was particularly the Roman Catholic priesthood, the Augsburg Confession pays close attention to the issue of celibacy. This is the historical issue that most closely mirrors that of the current debate regarding the sexual purity of ELCA pastors. The Confession cites the debilitating affect this debate has upon the pastor and the anxiety that is inherent in forcing oneself away from the good impulses God has instilled for the sake of human laws:

First, we teach that those who are not constituted to lead a life of celibacy, have the power and right to marry; for vows cannot have the effect to annul the commands and regulations of God...Vows and duty may be ever so much extolled, they may be burnished ever so bright, still they are of no avail to annul God's commands. But how little an endless chastity is in the power and control of a human being, is self-evident. Very few males or females are to be found, who, of their own free will, willingly and with forethought, entered into the monastic vows; but it will be found that they were generally persuaded thereto before they came to riper years of discretion; sometimes also they were urged and forced thereto.^{liii}

AND:

And experience has abundantly proved how vain is the attempt to alter the nature or meliorate the character of God's creatures by mere human purposes or vows without a particular gift or grace of God. It is notorious that the effort has been prejudiced to purity of morals; and in how many cases it has occasioned distress of mind and the most terrific apprehensions of conscience, is known by the confessions of numerous individuals. Since, then, the word and law of God cannot be altered by human vows or enactments, the priests for this and other reasons have entered into the conjugal state.^{liv}

These passages also speak to the idea that any sort of forced compliance on the part of the church is inauthentic. Those forced into the monastic vows, regardless of the nature of those vows, are going contrary to the will of God. The ability of the ELCA to force compliance with a set of purity standards for the sake of 'good order' stands firmly in the same category. Forced compliance is a type of emotional prison that is convenient for the church leaders when confronted with an uncomfortable issue, like the issue of celibacy or marriage in the 16th century. The ELCA needs realize that "vows were invented, in order that the evil might be remedied as it were by a species of incarceration."^{lv} By boxing the diversity of those called to service in the ELCA, Churchwide lends itself more authority than the Scriptures or Confessions would support. This leads one to believe that the impetus behind the ELCA's puritanical sanctions stems from the same place and should be fought with the same alacrity as those of Luther's time. History would indicate that the human condition is one that is slow to understand the abundance of God's grace and quick to apply temporal authority to supply a sense of security. This security, this incarceration, is loathsome in the eyes of God.

The ELCA continues in its quest for security by periodically publishing messages on "pressing matters of concern to this church and society" (HSS 1). 'Sexuality: Some Common Convictions' was adopted by the Church Council of the ELCA in 1996. In the preface, the authors outline the function of this document:

Messages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, adopted by the Church Council, are intended to focus attention and action on timely, pressing matters of concern to this church and society. They do not establish new policy for this church, but build upon previously adopted policy positions, especially from social statements.

This is what the statement says of itself, though conversations within the church has added a different spin:

Sexuality statments today are about sexuality only insofar as sex issues are always litmus and Rorschach tests in the culture wars. We accurately guage the response from the ELCA drafts when we recognize they are about a deeply human fear of moral chaos and social disintegration, and a fear of what responses to these might bring.^{lvi}

This document is helpful in realizing that the ELCA is trying to deal with modern issues of sexual purity in the church, but it is also illustrative of the half-measure and mistrust of God's grace that

the church exhibits.

[The ELCA] insists upon a firmly grounded moral life in a world that adds up.

[The ELCA] will, in fact, support most anything that offers moral security, meaning, and order in an often capricious world, and do. This includes a thousand bizarre spiritualities as well as the National Rifle Association.^{lvii}

As with the Constitution, the majority of SSCC is consistent with the confessions and Scripture; however, like the Constitution, this message does not rely upon trust. The ELCA takes God's grace up to a point, but then its reliance upon internal order creeps in. For instance, "as sexual beings, we are called to a life of responsibility freedom in God's new creation, while still struggling with how our sexuality is captive to sin."^{lviii} While this statements reflects a moderate view that is pleasing to the majority of socialized American Lutherans, our Reformation heritage calls for nothing less than audacity.

"The HS document seems consistent with a longstanding belief in the church that all sexuality since the Fall is lust, and that lust is any erotic movement which the body cannot control--but especially the movement of the penis. Lust is body, love is will, list is needing, love is giving, lust is dependant, love is in control, lust is female, love is divine. Yet, even St. Augustine's involuntary erections are insufficient to explain ecclesian fixuiation on genitals^{lix}

There is nothing that is still 'captive to sin.' This half-measure seriously limits the power of the

Christ to fulfil his office of Head Priest of the priesthood of believers. Trust in this salvation needs be more emphasized.

Chapter 4: "Visions and Expectations"

While the NT early church, Luther, and the Book of Concord are static documents, and the ELCA constitution is limited in its openness to revision based on its monolithic implications, the peripheral documents of the ELCA are manifold and dynamic-needing further introduction and explanation. The document in which this paper is particularly interested is the ELCA's 1990 "Visions and Expectations." (Hereafter VE) This document's purpose is to "inform congregations, ordained ministers, candidacy committees, and seminaries regarding this church's understanding of the person and role of the ordained minister."^{ix} To this end, Chapter 4 will outline the inception, nature and players involved in the ELCA's "Visions and Expectations" document, and call into serious question its validity as a statement of this church. At first blush, the VE seems to be a document consistent with the tenants prescribed in the preface of the ELCA constitution; however, further analysis will show that this consistency is superficial. VE will prove itself to be a primarily 'works' based document drawing heavily upon those references in Lutheran history that lend themselves to limited understandings of the Gospel message.

It is ironic that the Early Church, Luther and the ELCA constitution all serve as bulwarks for the frame of VE, but the earlier portions of this paper have successfully demonstrated that these more strongly support an ethic of care. This indeed is the thread that binds them and the church together. Both The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America had documents on ordained ministry similar to "Visions and Expectations." One of the early tasks of the ELCA Division for Ministry, therefore, was understood as development of such a document for the ELCA. To fulfill that task, staff members in the Division for Ministry developed the initial text that was reviewed by others and then discussed by the Conference of Bishops and the board of the Division for Ministry prior to submission to the Church Council.

Chapters 1-3 (hopefully) illustrated the progression of criteria for ordination from Jesus to the present. At first glance, VE echoes the common themes of location, Word and Sacrament and call:

Ordained ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are called to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Together with the whole people of God they are part of the ministry of the baptized. Ordained ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Confessions of this church, respectful of the people of God, and responsive to the needs of a changing world. They are called to give leadership to the congregations and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.^{xi}

The Church Council of the ELCA adopted "Visions and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" as a binding statement of the church. The drafting of this document was in response to public talks on the role of the clergy and in particular the growing controversy around the ordination of openly GLBT ministers. The document was prepared by a committee under the auspices of the Division of Congregational Ministries (DCM) made up of both ministers and lay persons and ratified in the October 1990 Church Council meeting. As a document, it outlines a code of conduct appropriate for ordained ELCA ministers. Within this code is a plethora of 'dos' and don'ts including : environmentalism, sexuality, spousal abuse and embezzlement. It gives concise Scriptural and Confessional proofs for why any of the above behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable. VE is not to be confused with the similarly

oblique document "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline" (DGD).

The DGD is the 'what if' document dealing with the lifestyle of the ELCA clergy. As noted earlier, the contents of the Constitution dealing with discipline are vague. DGD is a way to flush out a weak text. First drafted under similar circumstances as the VE, the DGD was approved a year before the VE, but was revised three years after the VE to take into account the new ministerial expectations. An interesting insight to the nature of the DGD is as follows:

The society in which the church ministers has placed a high premium upon the role of law in regulating the rights and duties of individuals to promote the common good.^{lxii}

This is quintessential Lutheran propaganda of oppression for the sake of good order. In fancy language, the church has stated that is necessary to highlight the law for the sake of uniformity. This is no different from Paul's revisionist writings to his new flocks whose worship was outside Paul's comfort zone. The ELCA has chosen here to embrace the parts of its church history that keep the treehouse well above ground and none too crowded.

The revised DGD also sets the stage for a minister's disregard for documents (such as the VE), regardless of the grounds (moral, Scriptural, ethical, epistemological etc.) upon which a minister objects:

8c. Willfully disregarding or violating the functions and standards established by this church for the office of Word and sacrament is grounds for discipline of ordained ministers. Such functions and standards established by this church are found in Section

7.02 through 7.47.01 of this church's constitution, bylaws and continuing resolutions.

8d. Willful disregard of the constitution or bylaws of this church is grounds for discipline of ordained ministers.

With this type of situation, the ELCA would have disciplined Jesus, Paul, Luther and pretty much any other interesting figure in church history. These guidelines are focused in a manner that allows the modern church hierarchy to interpret the criteria for ordination to which the ELCA ascribes. If a minister refuses to play by the rules as the ELCA sees fit, they are subject to discipline by that same body. This stance does not allow for conscientious objection, informed disobedience or a personal reading of the Scriptures inconsistent with official church beliefs when the constitution of this same church grants that ministers are called to preach from inspiration upon the Word and perform the sacraments. One might presume that the preaching on the Gospels is inspired by the source from which the gospels spring, but it would appear that the inspiration comes from the church hierarchy and needs be followed explicitly. Again, the DGD is the penalty box for breaking the rules of the VE that I argue are inconsistent with the reformation tradition to which this church belongs.

From the beginning, the light in which the VE places the ordained ministry is slightly different from the previous understandings outlined in Chapters 1-3. The use of the word privilege here is alarming:

"Visions and Expectations" emphasizes that ordained ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church and that those who serve in this ministry are accountable to the Word of God for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.^{lxiii}

The ELCA has set its document up like a club with a special handshake. If a person learns the shake and plays by the rules, the status, privilege and right to name oneself apart from the lay person accompanies that obedience. The treehouse is awfully high and the steps require a certain attention to detail, but once a person finds this church in the sky, the view down into the uninitiated masses is breathtaking.

VE commandeers the same sources this paper has found vital to understanding the progression of ordination of ministers throughout church history. The ELCA "believes that the Holy Spirit (though when the Holy Spirit started attending council meetings and publishing binding documents, I have no idea, I'm sure) 'calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.'"

^{lxiv}Herein, Luther places the job of maintaining the ministry firmly in the hand of God. VE continues to say that the selection is up to God, and the administration of the church is the responsibility of the ordained ministers: "The church confesses that the office of ordained ministry 'the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments'^{lxv} has been instituted by God. So, the foundation upon which the VE builds its first chapter "The Call to Ordained Ministry," is the same foundation that it ignores later in the chapter. "The ELCA prepares and approves candidates for the ordained ministry by setting standards...and evaluating a persons qualifications for service by a Candidacy Committee." The shift from the Holy Spirit's maintenance and the church's is illogical and counter to the Confessions cited.

As a little background into the issues that VE raises, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession clearly illustrates that the battle between Church authority and sexuality is none too current:

But they are not serious in their defense of celibacy. They know good and well how few practice chastity, but they use religion as a pretext to maintain their authority, which they think celibacy enhances....All they are actually fighting for is their own authority; they imagine that this is in danger and they are trying to fortify it with a wicked pretense of godliness.^{lxvi}

The Apologist could be speaking to the ELCA today with regard to this VE's message to the clergy. This is a clear indicator that we have left the reformation heritage when our very documents chastise us on the same grounds as the Church of Rome.

Similarly, Chapter 2 of the VE cites the Pauline understanding of the ministry (remember that Paul's vision of the church became regimented shortly after some churches under his jurisdiction were worshipping in a manner inconsistent with Paul's vision). Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus 4:3-6: The church is called to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace...and witness to the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Leaving folks at the bottom of the treehouse would rule out "unity," and a "bond of peace," but VE uses these passages to defend its doctrinal position. Again, the sentiment of the source is taken out of context to flesh out a benedict-like rule that saves the power for the few with the resources, lifestyle, and energy similar to those the church wants. VE also cites Paul's letter to the Philipians to describe the specifics of a minister's lifestyle. Ministers are called with all Christians to lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ, but there is no gospel in the VE.

Conclusion:

I still want to be a pastor, though there are overwhelming reasons why this may be a hazardous enterprise. It is not likely that I will be asked to whip myself or fast, but the present climate within the ELCA is such that these are not propositions entirely out of the question. The failsafes that the Reformation sought to establish against the encroachment of an authoritarian church government in which the spirit of Christ is stifled are slowly being eroded by a climate of fear and bigotry. This is an unconscionable state of affairs to me. As a member, I have a few modest proposals.

First, I have demonstrated that the priesthood during and just after the time of Christ was in a confusing disarray. From this confusion, I suggest the ELCA learn three lessons. 1) Jesus cared for the underside of society, and from here he selected his disciples. The ELCA needs to look at those most feared, hated and despicable in its pews and from here divine God's intent. People of color in the ELCA is at an abysmal 2% while the church is unwilling to legislate any comprehensive mandatory accessibility project for differently-abled persons. 2) It's dollars and cents people. The Saducees had the money in the first century and the rich old white folks have it in the ELCA. Follow the money to the power and a person will find the reason for lots and lots of stairs with no elevators. Persons of color make considerably less than their white counterparts and GLBT folks are so distasteful and misunderstood that it is a matter of the financial life of some churches to risk offending the sensibilities of their comfortable and affluent persons by welcoming them as full members. 3) Sin bodily. Jesus did. Talk to the Samaritan even when she's a lesbian and don't kick the gay pastor out because there is a very good chance that this person will bring with him the same sort of Spirit that Jesus surrounded himself with. Jesus wouldn't like what we're doing.

Secondly, Luther is a resource to understanding the Gospel unparalleled in the Reformation experience. I have clearly stated his position with regard to the selection, duties and hierarchy of Luther's vision for the priesthood. Luther's gospel is written on every cloud, tree, blade of grass etc.. Take his writings with a little salt, but rely on the power of faith. Rely on Christ, the Head Priest. Rely on the uselessness of our participation in justification before God. Rely upon God's ability to select those slated to serve in the church. Most of all, rely on humanity's ability to over-regulate, be skeptical, be cowardly, be scared of ecumenism and full communion. Trust humanity to dis-trust Christ's saving grace as outlined by Luther and rail against this tendency even as Luther railed against that tendency in his day. At the same time, understand that Luther was human and as such susceptible to societal pressures and norms in 14th century Germany. Learn from him and try to not let society's bigotry influence or mitigate the power of the priesthood of all believers.

Thirdly, the ELCA echoes the confusion of the early priesthood and the seeming contradictions in its policy making. Use the controversy regarding the ordination of GLBT persons as a crucible for separating the gold of ELCA policy from the slag. Understand the liberating message the modern scholarship has allowed the Gospel and use this as a litmus test to determine the life-affirming or degrading nature of specific policy. Do not hide behind euphamism and rhetoric to keep people out of the Church. If the ELCA is willing to be intentionally discriminatory...name it. Perhaps if we can get the prejudice out in the open, we can then talk about it instead of skirting it with fancy talk. Know that the most powerful parts of ELCA policy are backed by a lot of smart people, a lot of talk, and a lot of God. Know also, that those parts of ELCA policy that limit the Christian experience to a select portion of the population are mostly backed by opponents of reason, slaves to fear and the people with the money.

Finally, in the interests of naming the elephant in the livingroom (thank you Dr. Paul), ordain GLBT persons. The reasons for not doing this immediately have everything to do with human nature and nothing to do with God in Christ. We fear those different from the norm, and we absolutely hate anything that throws a cog in our nicely running mechanism. The ELCA needs a little rabble-rousing in the manner of the fine tradition from which it springs. One of the pains-in-the-ass of democracy is that it's not the government—it's us. The same can be said for belonging to the body of Christ as expressed by the ELCA. It is also our greatest asset. With this understanding of God's plan for humanity comes the responsibility to preach loudly against avoidable evils. Let us use our reason, or prayer, our examples in history and the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Kant believes in the 'eternal return.' So do I, but I would hope that this time we could do a little bit better.

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- xxxvii Charles Lutz, pg. 242
- xxxviii Indeed, there is ample reason to discredit Luther's public policy, if not his cosmology: for instance, "Of course, we can present this in a less flattering way. We can speak of the extreme dependence of Luther and his friends on the princes. Some would speak not only of compromise but even of betrayal of early Reformation intentions. All this is true in part: the Reformation was no more the golden age than was the apostolic generation. Lutz, Charles P. A Reforming Church... Gift and Task. Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1995. Pg. 67
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