

State of The Augustana Ministerium—May 12, 2009 A.D.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kansas City, MO
Pastor Bruce G. Ley, Superintendent

Greetings, and God's peace to you as you continue to rejoice in the crucified and resurrected Christ, outside of whom there is no salvation.

Preface

Last year's plenary session left me holding the reins, so to speak, of the superintendency of The Augustana Ministerium. It all happened while we were in the midst of a family medical crisis. In my absence from the home while attending last year's meeting, my wife was scheduled to undergo her first radiation treatment in a last ditch attempt to stop the cancer from metastasizing to other parts of the body. That treatment—which began under the watchful eye of a dear elder's wife in my absence—continued daily under my watchful eye for two months upon my return to Oregon. As most of you know, we lost that battle to breast cancer on August 23rd as God, in His gracious mercy, called her soul into His presence; and shortly thereafter we placed her body into the dust of the earth from which it was made until that day of our Lord's return when all flesh will be reunited to the soul from which it was torn on account of the wages of sin.

Thanksgiving

Now please understand, my purpose in beginning this State of The Augustana Ministerium address in this manner is not to call attention to myself or to the struggles of the past five years, but to give thanks to God for the faithful ones whom He placed beside me and around me ... both at home in the “theological wasteland” known as the Northwest District of the LC-MS, and especially here in The Augustana Ministerium during that struggle!

Truly, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do not doubt for a minute that this Ministerium is “in good hands!” That is to say, it has been my distinct privilege as Superintendent to watch these men—whom God has entrusted with the work of “curer of souls” in their own congregations—as they have carried on the work of their offices within the Augustana for the past year. During that time they have demonstrated that by the grace of God they walk with *Christ* as their focal lens; they speak with *truth* as their guide; they listen with *compassion* as their way; and they serve with *integrity* as their goal. I do not exaggerate as I tell you from the bottom of my heart that words escape me as to how I might express my appreciation for them and their labors this past year as I often had to watch them carry on in their work with little to no input from me. Now, that is not to say that everyone is in full agreement on every jot and tittle of our labors, but there is little doubt in my mind that there is more “koinonia” among the Administrative Council today than is being expressed and practiced by any of the major synods in our immediate time and area. Now please understand, that does not mean we are sharing Holy Communion together—though I pray that will be the case one day—but that at least as it relates to the work we are charged to do in TAM, we are one in our efforts to carry on with them. Each will be giving their individual reports to you in a few minutes, and I will not belabor this point, but I do want you to know that from the perspective of your newly elected Superintendent—who neither sought nor desired the office—there is much to give thanks for and little to express concern over at the moment as far as the state of The Augustana Ministerium is concerned.

Still, in the work God has laid upon us, there is always need for concern. For the truth is the Evil foe, though defeated at the cross of Christ, continues his labors as he teams up with the world and our flesh to carry out his evil intentions in, around, and among us. There will be time for your questions at the end, but for now let me separate the remainder of this report into two main parts: **Previous Actions** and **Current Opportunities, Concerns, and Cautions**.

Previous Actions

At the Plenary session in 2008, six resolutions were set before the membership, and all six of them passed. Through the year the Administrative Council has discussed possible actions on all of them. In my first email to the Council, this is the way I summarized them from my notes (please excuse my grammatical errors).

The purpose of this note is to summarize what action we took according to my notes as a way of reminding us of what lays ahead. If the Recording Secretary (or others) see need of correcting what I have written, please do not hesitate. My notes are far from complete. According to my count we took official action on six items.

- 1) MSP ... Future elections to close on a deadline date to be set by the Admin Council.
- 2) MSP ... Compile verified accounts of ministerial abuse and use for informing the public and helping to raise funds. (Friendly Amendment: Legally reviewed before posting.)
- 3) MSP ... Admin Council to set a budget for the coming year.
- 4) MSP ... Pastor Heiser to prepare a means of tracking laity who move to new area and notify nearest ministerium pastor.
- 5) MSP ... Admin Council to look into liability insurance in case we are sued.
- 6) MSP ... Within 60 days from this date (5-20-08) the Admin Council will have a plan for "dismemberment" in place, including a date the dues are to be paid.

Of the six, here is the current status:

- 1) Future elections has been tabled until 2010.
- 2) Verified accounts of ministerial abuse was deemed unworkable by the Council without significant restrictions which go beyond our desired exposure at this time.
- 3) Spending guidelines (in lieu of a budget) have been established for 2009. In toto, the guidelines are \$53,500, of which \$30,000 is for pastoral care, and \$20,000 is for missions.
- 4) A means of tracking laity has been established and is ready for testing.
- 5) Liability insurance for the Administrative Council is in the process of receiving bids.
- 6) A plan for "dismemberment" is in place and running.

Current Opportunities, Concerns, and Cautions

In the fashion of The Symbols that have guided orthodox Lutherans since the days of Luther, Chemnitz, and the like, I will discuss these **opportunities, concerns and cautions** in terms of that which is within the fence, and that which is from outside.

From within I see **three opportunities** and **two dangers or concerns**. From without I see **four winds of caution**, which, for lack of a better term, I will equate to the four directions of the earth. Time does not permit a thorough fleshing of these matters, but we will at least make a beginning. First, let us preview the opportunities, which flow quite naturally out of the Purpose statement from TAM's Constitution, and give context to all that follows.

The Augustana Ministerium exists to defend, encourage, and admonish its members; to uphold the Office of the Holy Ministry, to foster missionary activity; and to promote the raising up of qualified men into this holy office.¹

There are endless opportunities for **defending, encouraging, and admonishing our members**. So much so that I consider these as daily responsibilities that fall to all who hold the holy Office of Pastor. Which is to say that all of us are to carry on our vocations within the context in which we are privileged to serve, ever cognizant of the Office we hold and how it relates and interacts with peers, superiors, and most especially the recipients of its services. Thus, when the need arises to defend, encourage, and/or admonish one another, let none be reticent in stepping forward for the sake and honor of Christ and His Church.

With those daily responsibilities guiding us, let us look more closely at those areas of opportunity in need of special concentration for the rest of 2009 and beyond:

¹ Article III of The Constitution

1. **Opportunity #1: to uphold the Office of the Holy Ministry.** To uphold means to “confirm or support (something that has been questioned).”² I rather doubt that many in our ranks today are surprised to hear that few vocations have suffered greater degradation in our lifetimes than has the Office of Pastor. Whether we look to the LCMS, ELS, WELS, or ELCA, the havoc wreaked against Christ's holy Office of Pastor is well documented and needs no repeating here. And the sad state of affairs is that the evidence is mounting—and in some cases, is overwhelming—that neither Scripture nor The Confessions are being taken seriously in matters relating to the Office of the Holy Ministry today. Indeed, the questioning and erosion continues around us, and reality teaches us that Pastors who hold to their ordination vows today are in many congregations suffering great loss in attempting to carry out their office according to Scripture and The Confessions. And all this is happening because *much is lacking in the key areas of seminary education, faithful supervision, mutual edification in regard to casuistry, and (perhaps most damaging of all) the improper delineation of responsibilities between undershepherd and sheep.* No doubt the Dean of Pastoral Care could fill us in on many particulars that would make us all wonder how we have fallen so far so fast. While it is he who deals most closely with our hurting pastoral brethren, the entire Administrative Council would be most appreciative in hearing from any of you who have thoughts on how we might carry on and promote the upholding of this holy Office in a time and place where the Office, and those who hold it, are treated with disdain.

2. **Opportunity #2: to foster missionary activity.** To “foster means to encourage or promote the development of (something, typically something regarded as good).”³ The Dean of Missions is our primary resource in this area of encouraging and promoting the development of missionary activity. He can

2 New Oxford American Dictionary (Apple).

3 *ibid.*

speak for himself, but I suspect there are few Deans who look out into the future and wonder, “now just how am I going to get my arms around this vast opportunity in such a way as to actually begin to see some progress.” No, it is not that we are in the game of numbers—anything but, in fact. Nonetheless, the reality is that *the scattered nature of those Lutherans—and would be Lutherans—desiring confessional, orthodox, liturgical worship and teaching* make this opportunity also one which the entire Administrative Council is again open to hearing from you on just how we can best serve those who hunger and thirst for the true things of Christ in a world that grows increasingly hostile to the name and ways of those who follow Him.

3. **Opportunity #3: to promote the raising up of qualified men into this holy office.** To promote means to “further the progress of (something, esp. a cause, venture, or aim).”⁴ Here is an opportunity *rich with rewards, and yet, the very nature of the labors are such that it often take years to develop meaningful results.* The Dean of Pastoral Recruitment is most certainly open to hearing from any of you who have potential prospects in this area, but so too is the entire Administrative Council open to your wisdom, for this is a joint effort with many overlapping concerns.

Speaking of concerns, that brings me to the two dangers or concerns which I noted above. Again, I remind you that these are from within, that is, from within the organization. There is much more to be said about these than I will say here today, but this is not intended to be comprehensive as much as it is informative.

1. **Concern #1: confusion of relationships.** That is to say, that the membership of TAM is such that it is made up of pastors in various places and circumstances. There are some who are currently not serving any

4 *ibid.*

congregation at all. Others among us are serving Lutheran congregations that are independent, LCMS, ELDoNA, ACLC, LCC, and perhaps even some I am not aware of. What's the point? We must be ever cognizant that TAM is “an association.” That is to say, it is like a “guild” or “union” consisting of members who have agreed to a common “Confession of Faith”⁵ that binds us together and guides us in our work as The Augustana Ministerium. Even so, at the present time our individual and public circumstances are such that we are unable to give public expression of that common “Confession of Faith” in the way of the historic, Apostolic Church, without giving a false witness and impression to the world, not to mention the confusion we would bring to the members of the congregations we serve. Remembering, as noted above, that we live “in a world that grows increasingly hostile to the name and ways of those who follow [Christ],” it is doubly important that the members of The Augustana Ministerium and The Confraternity be ever mindful of this concern, this danger of **confusion of relationships**.

2. Concern #2: forgetfulness of who we are. I often remind people within the congregation as well as the world in which I live that as I deal with them I keep two things in the forefront of my mind. First, I am son of Adam. Second, they too are a son of Adam. That means both of us are capable of doing everything that Jesus says comes out of the heart—and there should be no need of my having to remind any of you what that means. Still, that is not the only thing we are in need of not forgetting as we work together as members of TAM. For not only are we sons of the first Adam, but we are privileged to have been graced with being named sons of the second Adam. That means that although we are unable to give full public expression of that oneness we do indeed share in being common sons of the King of Righteousness, we need

5 Article II of The Constitution.

to be ever mindful of that oneness as we labor together in carrying out the work of The Augustana Ministerium.

And that brings me to the final four points of the State of the Augustana Ministerium address for 2009. These I have chosen to identify as the **four winds of caution**. Of necessity, each will be very brief.

1. Caution #1: **beware the north wind of idolatry**. God's chosen people were often warned of the dangers from the north. Behind the warning was their demonstrated propensity for idolatry. Luther reminds us in the Large Catechism that the heart is what determines our idols. The world in which we live, the inclination of the flesh which we share, and the common enemy which daily attacks us in his effort to get us to forsake Christ, give all of us plenty of opportunities to place idols between us and the Triune God we seek to serve. Thus the caution: **beware the north wind of idolatry**.
2. Caution #2: **beware the east wind of tradition**. All too many times in the past few years have we witnessed fellow Lutheran pastors—some of whom were close and dear friends of ours—shift their allegiance from Scripture and The Lutheran Confessions to the traditions, liturgical heritage, forms, and polity of both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Clearly the dangers here for pastors are very real, and accounts of the several who have already fallen—and some who barely survived the threat and are thankfully still with us—tell me that we as pastors must heed the caution: **beware the east wind of tradition**.
3. Caution #3: **beware the south wind of change**. It is probably no surprise to learn that this caution has to do with growing societal pressure to change everything from the way we view marriage, to the way treat and raise our

offspring—assuming we even let them fill their lungs with air in the first place—to the way we confess and worship God. I see no need of belaboring this caution here today—for it is like preaching to the choir—but I do believe confessional pastors especially will be receiving increasing pressure from government, society, and the church visible to back off in these areas, and thus I say: **beware the south wind of change.**

4. Caution #4: **beware the west wind of despair.** The reason I am currently on sabbatical is because there is need in my life to refocus some things since God in His grace has chosen to remove my lifelong partner of 42+ years. But the truth is, my dear fellow pastors, that I should have taken this sabbatical, or one like it, about five years ago. It was the now sainted Professor Kurt Marquart who once reminded us in class about the need of a refresher in the teachings of the Small and Large Catechism about every seven years. I cannot help but wonder just how much good and benefit would come to the congregation and the pastor, if, after every seven years of serving them, they spent a month or two apart. A pipe dream? Perhaps, but in light of the danger of depression, discouragement, disheartenment, and perhaps a dozen more, I cannot help but sound the warning: **beware the west wind of despair.**

Conclusion

In the Epistle from St. James this past Sunday, the Apostle teaches his hearers that *“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). As we consider that which has gone by us this past year, and anticipate that which lies before us in the year of our Lord 2009 and 2010—that is, should our Lord delay in bringing us the *“good ... and ... perfect gift”* of Himself in the consummation of all things—may it be said of each and every one of us that we continued daily to heed the Apostle's admonition which comes a few verses

later in that same chapter: *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”* (1:21).

The Augustana Ministerium exists **“to defend, encourage, and admonish its members”**—that is, **“to defend, encourage, and admonish”** those who hold the office that Christ instituted to proclaim that *“implanted word.”* For it is that *“implanted word”* which shines light upon and works to accomplish all the salvific things that the Triune God has in store for a world that unwittingly lives without hope in the twisted and dark shadows of *“filthiness and overflow of wickedness.”* And though it may be true that we are living in a post-synodical age, may it also be true that we who are privileged to rejoice and live in *“the good ... and perfect gift”* who comes down from *“the Father of lights in whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”* ever continue steadfast in turning this way and that in order to carry that message of illumination to the next generation.

On behalf of The Augustana Ministerium, I thank you for your support this past year—indeed, these past four years—and I know I speak for the entire Administrative Council when I ask that you continue to lend us a hand in this important work in these trying and difficult days. On behalf of myself and my family, I thank you for your personal and corporate prayers this past year.

God's richest blessings to you, and yours, this day, and always.

In Christ's service and therefore yours,
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