

THE AUGUSTANA MINISTERIUM

STATEMENT ON THE HOLY MINISTRY

21 September 2005

[This statement is not a new confession, but a summary of the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the Office of the Holy Ministry and our reason for existence (Constitution, Article II).]

For the purposes of mutual edification and support, the undersigned hereby join together in the formation of a Lutheran ministerium. This ministerium is to be understood as a professional association of ordained Lutheran pastors. We are dedicated to promoting and preserving a Lutheran understanding of the Holy Office of the Ministry which was instituted for the preaching and teaching of the pure Gospel and a right administration of the Sacraments as confessed in the Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In an age when the Office is being attacked and compromised by hostile elements within Lutheranism, we joyfully and unanimously affirm the scriptural and confessional understanding of it which we, by our ordination vows, have sworn to uphold and practice.

In accordance with the Lutheran Confessions, we confess that the Office of the Ministry (the Preaching Office) has been established and mandated by Christ in His Word. As a unique servant office, it entails both a position of spiritual oversight in the Church and authorized tasks and duties which are sacramental in nature. The Lord governs and serves his Church through the preaching of His Gospel and the administration of His sacraments. Pastors exercise spiritual power in the Church—the power of order and the power of jurisdiction—only through their faithful preaching and teaching of the Gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Church discipline through the binding and loosing of sins (the jurisdiction of the Keys, AC XXVIII 20 22, Apol XXVIII 13, Tr 31, 60 61). Those who hold the Office hold it equally by divine right, regardless of what human distinctions may be made among them (Tr 63). The Church has the responsibility to submit to pastors who properly administer their office. Obedience is prohibited when their ministry is contrary to the Gospel (Heb. 13:17, Gal. 1:8, Apol VII & VIII 47, XXVIII 20 21).

The Church in every place has both the divine right and the responsibility to see that qualified men are placed into the Office of the Ministry (Tr 66 67, 72). Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the Church unless he has been placed into the Office. “Lay Ministry” is thus contrary to Holy Scripture and the Confessions of Christ’s Church. Instead, that saving faith may be established (AC V), Christ confers the Office of the Ministry upon qualified men through His Church, involving an established order of examination, call, and ordination (*rite vocatus*, lit., “called according to the rite,” AC XIV). The traditional forms, while not specifically mandated (Apol XV 1), ought to be maintained (AC Conclusion 5, Apol XXIV 1).

1 On the basis of this Statement, the undersigned do hereby join themselves to this Augustana
2 Ministerium. We do so as servants of Christ duly ordained to proclaim the Holy Gospel of our
3 Lord and to administer His blessed Sacraments. Since it is only by this Gospel that eternal
4 salvation is gained, we understand that the ministry, that is, the preaching office to which our
5 Lord has called us, is of critical necessity to the salvation of mankind. Therefore, the Office of
6 the Ministry is not ours to tamper with or alter according to human whim or changing cultural
7 circumstance. As such, we cannot recognize as ministers of the Gospel those who are not
8 ordained, nor again, those women who would claim ordination, since according to the
9 Scriptures any setting of a woman into this office is illegitimate and void (1 Tim. 2:12), and we
10 consider it a confusion of terms when others so misapply the terms “minister,” “ministry,” and
11 the like, betraying a secular understanding of such terms in place of the understanding of the
12 Lutheran Symbols.

13
14 Nor do we take lightly our own ordination vows. It is indeed for this reason that we have
15 determined to enter this ministerium, with the sad acknowledgment that faithful ministers who
16 have taken their stand against sacrilege and heresy have been subjected to repeated and
17 continual diabolical attacks on their ministry, attacks which have gone unchecked, even in our
18 own midst. The integrity of men of God is assaulted day after day and year after year, and
19 although Christian history is replete with such assaults, we lament in particular the failure to
20 defend them by the very men charged with their defense. We do not refer here to that
21 occasional scoundrel whose ungodly behavior has earned him rebuke, but to the many men of
22 integrity who are routinely assailed with the charge of stubbornness for not yielding to
23 falsehood; of lacking ‘people skills’ because they persistently adhere to the truth; of being
24 loveless when their actions demonstrate that they are bound in love to the charge of their Lord
25 truly to shepherd the flock over which He has made them overseers rather than bound to serve
26 their own bellies or itching ears or those of their hearers. Indeed we count such pastors who
27 rule well to be worthy of double honor, who labor in the word and doctrine of our Lord Jesus
28 Christ, and we are therefore compelled to bind ourselves to their support.

29
30 Some of these men have seen their flocks wrongfully removed from them, leaving them
31 without wages and their families without support. Some have ecclesiastical supervisors who,
32 rather than coming to their aid, prefer to join with those who slander and defame them, joining
33 the company of those who muzzle them while they tread out the grain of God’s harvest. But
34 God is not mocked. So, we have mourned with them. We have prayed for them. And herewith
35 we have chosen to band with them. If the duty of defending these innocent men will not be
36 carried out by those to whom the task is expressly assigned by existing polities, synodical
37 organizations, or other churchly apparatus, then let us defend them—as indeed, God’s Word
38 teaches that we must, in the Seventh and Eighth Commandments. Let it be known that we
39 choose now to defend them with our names, our reputations, and our honor. If our neighbor
40 must stand trial before unjust judges, we choose to stand at his side, to defend him and to speak
41 well of him. For indeed this task is always assigned to Christian people, and made incumbent
42 upon us by our Lord’s words, I was hungry and you fed me, etc.

43

1 We are Lutheran pastors only because we believe, and claim as our own, the Lutheran
2 Confessions. But for too long, these Confessions have been given no more than lip service by
3 others who claim the same faith as we; others, that is, whose practice belies their confession,
4 whose disdain for faithful ministers is evident in their eagerness to destroy the reputations of
5 those ministers, whose worship is marked by a blasphemous replacement of the holy liturgy
6 with popular song, whose Christianity is soiled by emotion centered, market driven, self
7 oriented leadership. Therefore we wish to be marked, over against such folly, as an
8 Evangelical-Lutheran ministerium. We do not presume hereby to condemn anyone who is not
9 part of The Augustana Ministerium; we only wish that our own stance be known among all.

10

11 To these purposes we add our constant prayers for the mercy of Almighty God, that all people
12 may benefit from vibrant and faithful servants of God in the Office of the Holy Ministry.

13

14 Desiring to be obedient in service to our Lord, for the benefit of those who are also under these
15 most holy orders and, thereby, for the benefit of God's flock among whom they serve Christ,
16 we establish The Augustana Ministerium and by our signatures subject our membership and
17 participation herein to the Constitution and Bylaws thereof.

18

19 Adopted: 21 September 2005

20

21

22 [The following statement was unanimously adopted at the 2006 Plenary Session
23 of The Augustana Ministerium to be appended to this document]

24

25 It has been asserted by some that the third paragraph of our Statement on the Holy Ministry teaches
26 "that saving faith comes by means of rightly putting a man into the office rather than by means of the
27 preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments," thereby erasing the distinction
28 between the office itself and its transmission.

29

30 We do not believe that such a reading is in accord with the grammar of the statement, but understand
31 the concern of those who have so read, so that we wish to state clearly that our unanimous
32 understanding of this paragraph, and of the particular portion thereof that has been questioned (lines
33 38-40), is that it is not the right putting of a man into the Office that brings about faith unto salvation,
34 but the Gospel and Sacraments. The final clause of the sentence simply states the way in which Christ
35 confers the Office through His Church, with no indication that salvation is conditioned upon this, and
36 the final sentence of the paragraph makes this even clearer by its assertion that, while we ought to
37 maintain the traditional forms, this is not by divine mandate—which, of course, it would be were the
38 keeping of these forms the means of our obtaining saving faith.