

Idaho Circuit Rider Program

Date: May 17, 1999

To: Chairman of the Education Committee
The Idaho Circuit Rider Program

Dear Chairman,

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16).

Reference is made to the Thursday session of the recent South Idaho Pastors' Conference; specifically, the Question and Answer session concerning the educational requirements for the local men who will be involved in the Word and Sacrament Ministry of the Idaho Circuit Rider Program. Following that session you spoke with me about my concerns and we agreed that, rather than inviting me to give my opinion on these matters, you would solicit my counsel. Therefore, what follows is my counsel.

The First Question

You indicated that the Education Committee was tackling the issue of what education and instruction would be required for those local men who were identified and assigned by the Circuit Rider to be in Word and Sacrament Ministry. The question I raised was essentially this: "On what Scriptural or confessional basis are we able to say that these local men will not be pastors?"

Even a quick search of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions indicates that a qualified man is the pastor of a congregation when 1.) he has been called by the Church to preach and teach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, 2.) he has accepted that call, and 3.) he exercises that call by preaching and teaching the Word and by administering the Sacraments.

This Scripture-based truth is summarized in *The Augsburg Confession*, Article xiv. Order in the Church -- "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."

The First Answer

On what Scriptural or confessional basis are we able to say that local men in Word and Sacrament Ministry in the Idaho Circuit Rider Program will not be pastors? The answer is: ***We have no basis. None.*** They will be pastors in the Office of the Holy Ministry of the Word.

The Reactions to the First Answer

Most of the following reactions were voiced at the conference:

1. But they are lay ministers, lay elders, lay pastors, deacons. They're not pastors.
2. But they will not be ordained.

3. But they will not be synodically certified.
4. But they won't have a Diploma of Vocation.
5. We don't know what a regular call is.
6. They will be working under an overseeing pastor who has the Call.

Response

These are fog-factor type responses put forth to side-track the issue and offered to get around or short-circuit the truth of both Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call. If someone is placed in the Word and Sacrament Ministry in a local congregation, then that man is the pastor. As a result, the following Scriptural passages now apply to that pastor, just as they do to all pastors.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 -- This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

Titus 1:7-9 -- For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.

Luke 12:48 -- Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

James 3:1 -- Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.

Hebrews 13:17 -- Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.

[Space does not permit a discussion of the sobering Ezekiel 33 text and its application to New Testament apostles and contemporary pastors (see Acts 18:6 & Acts 20:25-28).]

The Second Question

Is it a loving, Christian, pastoral act to place a man into a congregation as pastor when he is

- a.) not aware that he is being placed into that office?
- b.) not aware of the responsibilities that come with occupying the Office of the Public Ministry of the Word?
- c.) neither given the opportunity nor the time nor the education sufficient for him to know what it means to be a Christian pastor, for him to develop and possess the basic tools to be a Lutheran pastor, and for him to develop the confidence and courage to be one of Christ's undershepherds?

The Second Answer

No.

The Expected Reactions to the Second Answer

1. But these men will not be pastors.
2. But we don't have the time necessary for the men to get the education.
3. But we are able to have the circuit rider provide any needed education.
4. But we don't have the money to do all this.
5. This traditional type of thinking is why we have a shortage of pastors.
6. Mission work needs to be done today, not ten years from now.
7. It won't work.

Response

These are fog-factor type responses put forth to side-track the question and are proffered to get around or short-circuit the application of the truth of both Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The Lord has given the best for His Church. The Father has given His Son. The Son has given His holy, precious Blood and His holy, innocent Life. The Holy Spirit has given us His Holy Writ and faith which trusts such Word of God. The Lord continues to expect the best for His Church. Our task ought to include identifying men in local preaching stations whom we think might be able to become pastors and then provide them with the opportunity for the best training and education available.

Recommendations

1. As the called servant of the Word, the circuit rider is the pastor who is to teach, preach and/or administer the sacraments at all places on his circuit. No one else has the call to do this. This is the way many of the congregations were established in Southern Idaho at, and just after, the turn of the century. Pastors traveled from place to place on horseback or in horse and buggy preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, teaching the Word, catechizing the youth and encouraging and admonishing the people of God. These were seminary educated men of confessional integrity and pastoral fortitude who remained steadfast in the Word and work of the Lord. Today we have RVs and the same opportunities and responsibilities. Here at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Emmett, the congregation and I are still benefiting from the God-driven dedication and Christ-given pastoral work of the first circuit riders in this area, men like Pastor Koppelman, Pastor Kraus and Pastor Kahle. So, if the Idaho Circuit Rider is not done the same way as years before, it's not because it isn't possible. It's because those involved have neither the heart nor the will to do it that way.
2. As the called servant of the Word, the circuit rider should begin identifying local men who might be candidates for becoming pastors. This would probably take 2-5 years to identify such men. The Scriptural basis, precedent and directive for such a waiting period and identification are written in the pastoral epistles.
3. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod should (and does) provide a tuition free seminary education for the men so that they may, in 4-8 years, become called servants of the Word, returning to their local congregations in the circuit or being assigned to other places. Once again, if the Idaho Circuit Rider Program does not promote the local men going this route, it's not because it's not possible. It's because those involved don't want to do it this way.

4. The Education Committee for the Idaho Circuit Rider Program as well as the other committees should take a step back and look at the big picture. At the South Idaho Pastors' Conference there were a number of times when, in response to a question, the reply was something along the line of, "We hadn't even thought about that." (In fact, it was on the basis of a number of such questions and replies that you solicited my counsel.) The reason that such topics of discussion had not been brought up, is that those involved in promoting the program either hadn't thought about these issues themselves, or, didn't want to discuss them.

5. We should never be afraid to discuss what we believe, teach, confess and practice. Our synodical president has encouraged us first to get the Word straight and then to get the Word out. It appears to me the Idaho Circuit Rider Program is attempting to get the Word out before getting the Word straight.

A Couple Questions

It must not be thought that anything has been said or introduced out of hatred or for the purpose of injuring anybody, but we have related only matters which we have considered it necessary to adduce and mention in order that it may be made very clear that we have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church. For it is manifest and evident (to speak without boasting) that we have diligently and with God's help prevented any new and godless teaching from creeping into our churches and gaining the upper hand in them.

These are the words at the end of *The Augsburg Confession* of 1530. Every member of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, especially congregations and pastors, have unconditionally subscribed to this paragraph, *The Augsburg Confession*, and the other writings in *The Lutheran Confessions*.

Those involved in the Idaho Circuit Rider Program, both individually and corporately, should be willing and able to answer the following questions:

1.) Is there anything about the doctrine or practice in the Idaho Circuit Rider Program that you are introducing, "either in doctrine or ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church"?

2.) Are you and have you "diligently and with God's help prevented any new and godless teaching from creeping into our churches and gaining the upper hand in them"?

A Personal Courtesy

If the Idaho Circuit Rider Education Committee elects to continue with its plan to place local men without a seminary education and without synodical certification into Word and Sacrament ministry would you please put that in writing in a letter to me?

A Final Comment

Since the discussion and presentation took place as part of the South Idaho Pastors' Conference, I am sending a copy of this letter to every pastor in the conference and to those Northwest District officials who attended the conference. I trust that, as the chairman of the Education Committee of the

Idaho Circuit Rider Program, you will provide copies of this letter to other committee members who would not be included in the foregoing sentence.

I might well be incorrect, inaccurate or wrong in one or more of the doctrinal declarations or with the Scriptural and/or Confessional bases for such declarations. If so I stand in need of correction and reproof. Therefore, I am sending a copy of this letter to the district president of the Northwest District, to the presidents of our two seminaries and to the president of our synod. If I am in error, I wish to be admonished and corrected that I may repent and be assured of the forgiveness that our Redeemer has earned for me in His sin-atoning Death and assured in His holy Resurrection. I will, via written letter, notify you of any correction I receive.

In His Hands,

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

copy:

Pastors in the South Idaho Pastors' Conference
Chairman & Elders, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Emmett, Idaho
Rev. Lee Wendland, Northwest District Office
Rev. David Hoover, Northwest District Office
Rev. Warren Schumacher, District President of the Northwest District
Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne
Rev. Dr. John F. Johnson, President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
Rev. Dr. Alvin L. Barry, President of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod