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An Overture of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Convention

“To Complete the Study of the Call Already Authorized by the Synod Before Considering Any Proposal to Establish a New Position of ‘Assistant Pastor’”

WHEREAS the Holy Ministry is a divinely instituted office, and its nature is thus an article of faith; and

WHEREAS any innovations in our application of this article must, therefore, be addressed theologically and not simply pragmatically; and

WHEREAS the memorial proposed by the Task Force on Diaconal Ministry “To Establish the Position of ‘Assistant Pastor’ Where Full-Time Pastoral Ministry Cannot be Maintained” introduces a number of innovations in application of the doctrine of the ministry; and

WHEREAS these innovations raise serious theological issues including the following:

- (1.) The provision that an “assistant pastor” retain his position only “provided his work is satisfactory to his district president, supervising pastor, and congregation” as established by an annual review (thus producing a temporary call), severely undermines the biblical relationship between pastor and people, as our synod has long understood (C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, pages 26-28).
- (2.) The requirement that the “assistant pastor” demonstrate only pre-seminary level competence in Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and Christian doctrine before ordination calls into question his ability to rightly administer the Holy Communion, since he is to admit to the Lord’s Table only those who are united in the gospel and all its articles (in accord with Article VII of the Augsburg Confession and Article X of the Formula of Concord), and he himself will not yet have demonstrated his own understanding of all articles of the gospel.
- (3.) Declaring that a man who has been called and ordained may serve only in one location seems to separate the call of the congregation from the call of Christ, suggesting, likewise, that the actions of an individual congregation are not valid for the whole church.

WHEREAS, moreover, the memorial of the Task Force gives only a practical rationale for its proposal and does not address the preceding and other theological concerns; and

WHEREAS the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and others are currently studying the doctrine of the call, a study which could be helpful in resolving these and other issues; and

WHEREAS the synod has available at present various means to serve

congregations in which full-time pastoral ministry cannot be maintained, including the following:

- (1.) lay readers of sermons prepared by pastors trained by the seminaries of the synod;
- (2.) adjusting the times of services so that congregations may be provided the ministry of Word and Sacrament by neighboring pastors;
- (3.) the significantly increasing number of deferred vicars who have completed their theological training at the seminaries of the synod and have demonstrated personal and theological maturity;
- (4.) the expansion and further utilization of Distance Education Leading to Ordination (the program known as DELTO).

WHEREAS, moreover, a change in practice as significant as creating a new position in the synodical roster will quickly become institutionalized and thus be extremely difficult to reverse should it in the future prove unwise or theologically unsound; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the Commission on Theology and Church Relations be encouraged to complete its study of the doctrine of the call as efficiently as possible, taking into consideration the preceding and other theological issues raised by the proposal of the Task Force; and be it further

RESOLVED that the synod take no action to establish the proposed position of "assistant pastor" until this study has been completed; and be it finally

RESOLVED that the church proceed aggressively to use lay readers, adjustments in times of worship, deferred vicars, DELTO, and all other available means to serve congregations in which full-time pastoral ministry cannot be maintained.

The Faculty
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Douglas McC. L. Judisch,
Secretary
19 February 2001

[The preceding overture was discussed by the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in the course of its regular meeting of 19 February 2001. The faculty then resolved, without dissenting vote, to submit this overture to the Sixty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which is scheduled to convene in St. Louis in July of the year of our Lord 2001. D. McC. L. J.]