

Organizational Structure of LCMS Churches



Vocation In The Royal Priesthood Part 1 of a Leadership Series

The content of this presentation is Missouri Synod polity, and we recognize that other valid polities exist among Lutherans, but they are not covered here

Questions We Might Ask

- ✦ What reference documents are available to help us on this topic?
- ✦ What principles should we know to help keep us on track?
- ✦ How do we apply these principles in our own environment?
- ✦ Is the result Biblical and in agreement with the Lutheran Confessions?

References

- ✦ *Book of Concord or Concordia*
- ✦ *Government in the Missouri Synod*, Carl S. Munding
- ✦ *Zion on the Mississippi*, Walter O. Forster
- ✦ *God's Plan for Church Leadership*, Nnofel Staton
- ✦ *A Lay Person's Guide to Good Church Government*, Gene White
- ✦ *The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH

The Principles of Organizational Structure

✦ Jesus is *always* the *head* of our church, our organization is *Christian* in tone and follows the *mandates* of *Holy Scripture & the Lutheran Confessions*

◆ Martin Luther wrote *extensively* on church government (Primarily on the abuses of Rome)

✦ Lutheran immigrants to the USA, lacking any state-church structures, were forced to devise their own polity for congregations, and broader organizations

The Problems of the Saxons

✦ Our form of government was *influenced* by the *failures* of autocratic leadership involved with the Saxon immigration to Missouri in 1839

◆ The immigration was led by Rev. Martin Stephan and a committee of 5 clergy and 5 laymen (all of the upper or privileged class)

◆ *Stephan* created an organizational structure with rules for religious and secular activities

◆ He implemented his structure in an autocratic fashion

The Problems of the Saxons

◆ Rev. Stephan had essentially *appointed himself* bishop *over* the other five pastors and candidates

◆ The *general laity* were uninformed, powerless and misled by their leaders

◆ Their money was held in a *community trust* and was *misappropriated* by Stephan and his favored associates

The Problems of the Saxons

- ◆ Stephan lived in “grand” *style*, and the ensuing “*moment of truth*” proved to be *chaotic* for all concerned
- ◆ Stephan was *excommunicated* and *banned* from the community for *adultery*
- ◆ *Complicating* matters was the fact the *Trust* was now nearly *empty*
- ◆ C. F. W. Walther, the *youngest* of the clergy, emerged as the spiritual leader of the group and *assumed* the difficult task of *bringing order* from the existing chaos

The Problems of the Saxons

- ✦ It is an intriguing story, worthy of a movie or two
 - ◆ Read about it in *Government in the Missouri Synod* and *Zion on the Mississippi* (CPH)
- ✦ The chaos of the Saxons directly influenced their new form of church government (polity)
- ✦ American politics was not the *primary* influence

From Perry County to the Missouri Synod

- ✦ Walther and the Missouri congregations discovered that there were Lutherans in other states with their same zeal for Confessional Lutheran Doctrine
 - ◆ Out of these relationships the *Missouri Synod* was *founded* April 1847, in *Chicago, IL*

From Perry County to the Missouri Synod

- ✦ The basic *polity* of Missouri Synod congregations has remained *largely unchanged*
 - ◆ One *clergy* and one *lay* delegate elected for conventions
 - ◆ Voters' Assemblies make the *administrative* decisions in the congregation
 - ◆ Clergy *receive* their Divine Call *through* the congregation

Foundational Principles

- ✦ *Any* position of leadership is under a *single* higher authority-Jesus
 - ◆ Your individual *parish* is a recognizable congregation of believers representing a *portion* of the whole church (the body of Christ) here on earth
 - ◆ The structure, defined by your *Constitution* and *Bylaws* is similar to, but *independent* of, other congregations in the Synod

Foundational Principles

- ✦ At the *local level* your congregation is *governed* by a body of people known as the *corporate entity*
 - ◆ defined in your *constitution*
 - ◆ That *body* is the Voters' Assembly
 - ◆ It is this *body*, acting in the *name* of the church on earth, that elects, calls, appoints or commissions its leaders, sets the authorized budget, and *delegates* specific *tasks or duties* to those *it* so designates within the congregation

Foundational Principles

✳ All leadership positions in the congregation are *authorized* by the incorporating documents of the individual church, i.e., your *constitution* and *bylaws*

- ◆ State incorporation (Optional, required or prohibited)
- ◆ Legal “rules” apply in either case
- ◆ The officers of the congregation have fiduciary responsibility for the finances of the church
- ◆ Individual or Synod tax ID number

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Foundational Principles

✳ Thus *all* leadership positions are defined by the assigned *scope* or *purpose* of the office established in *your* constitution and bylaws

- ◆ The *duties* of an office determine its *scope*
- ◆ The non-delegated responsibilities *remain* the purview of the *Voters’ Assembly*

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Foundational Principles

✳ The leader’s *individual* gifts, talents and vocational skills are *used* in carrying out the duties (As part of the whole body)

- ◆ How *well* is this point *communicated* by your call committee, nominating committee, etc?
- ◆ Provides *justification* for matching gifts, talents and vocational expertise of individuals to the *duties* and *responsibilities* of the position

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Foundational Principles

✦ Leadership positions can be loosely divided into *two* domains, which helps in determining the *primary* focus

- ◆ Spiritual
- ◆ Administrative/Legal

Foundational Principles

✦ Spiritual: Pastors, some Commissioned Ministers, Elders

- ◆ In the New Testament the word “Elder” refers to pastors
- ◆ In common LCMS usage, “elders” are not equal to pastors
- ◆ This presentation uses the term “elder” to refer to laymen, not pastors

Foundational Principles

✦ A Christian congregation must include the Office of Public Ministry

- ◆ God, through the congregation, *calls* men to fill this office
- ◆ Calling, by the congregation, is one of the *unique* principles of our polity
 - This important topic is dealt with in greater detail in Part 3 of this series

Foundational Principles

✦ A Christian congregation must include the Office of Public Ministry (cont.)

- ◆ The *called* pastor and the elders work together to care for the *spiritual* needs of the congregation (see Lutheran Cyclopedia)
- ◆ The pastor is ultimately responsible to God for the care of the souls placed under him by God

Foundational Principles

✦ A Christian congregation must include the Office of Public Ministry (cont.)

- ◆ The duties of the elders help support the pastor in taking care of the spiritual needs of the congregation
- ◆ The elders also help provide a line of defense against false teaching in the church (1 Thess. 5:21 & Romans 5:2)

✦ Administrative/Legal: Some Commissioned Ministers and everybody else

Foundational Principles

✦ Other *facets* in our polity structure are democratic elections, and the proper exercise of *vocation* among *clergy* and *laity*

- ◆ The *voice* of the laity in the running of their *congregations* predated Synod as it was *restored* in 1841
- ◆ *Existed* in Synod from its beginning in 1847
- ◆ This *assumes* and *requires* pastors and laity to *be well versed* in Lutheran *theology*

Foundational Principles

- ◆ The clergy are *set apart* to be spiritual overseers, but not lords over the laity (two domains)
- ◆ *No individual*, officer, clergy, board, council or committee *has* the right to ignore, or change, a Voters' Assembly decision in temporal matters
- ◆ *No individual*, officer, pastor, commissioned minister, board, council or committee *has the right* to spend money that has not been *authorized* by the currently adopted budget

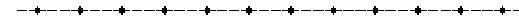
Summary

- * Summary of ensuing principles:
 - ◆ Each congregation is *independent*
 - ◆ God, through the congregation *calls* a pastor or shepherd to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments
 - ◆ The Voters' Assembly is the *highest* administrative (temporal) decision making body in the *congregation*, not the pastor
 - ◆ All believers are *members* of the *Royal Priesthood*

Workshop Session

- * Each table will receive a worksheet with questions to be discussed and the results reported
- * Elect a recorder to report your conclusions to the main body
- * 20 minutes to complete your activity
- * Following this we will reconvene and hear reports from each group and briefly discuss the results.

Q1. What one word best describes the form of government basic to our congregations?



Q2. What one person do you think was the most influential in determining the final outcome of our congregational form of government?

Q3. If you had to illustrate the relationship between all members of the Royal Priesthood how would you do it?

Q4. How were disputes settled initially? Is it different today?

Q5. List and discuss the impacts that could be experienced if a temporal decision of the Voters' Assembly was ignored or changed?
