

THE CALL OF THE CIRCUIT PASTOR

I. A Historical Perspective of this Office

A. In the Lutheran Church

- All the way back to the Reformation (1527)
- Visitation of the congregations sorely needed
- Luther and Melancthon's short guide as a doctrinal foundation for these visitations = Articles of Visitation
- These church visitors found deplorable and appalling conditions in the churches

B. In the WELS

- Early years of our synod had similar problems.
- A recognized need for some type of visitation system of our congregations
- First it was the synod president, then assistants to the president, then conference visitors (1870-1880) "little success in maintaining an organized visitation program." (Koehler)
- Synod growth, more new conferences, some divided into circuits, "conference visitor" evolves into "visiting elder" for each circuit. (1940's – 1960's)
- COP approves committee to prepare a handbook for "visiting elders" and changes the name of this office to "circuit pastor," (1970's until now)
- 2009 Convention – revised handbook. No more than 8 congregations for circuit pastor to care for, further training of those circuit pastors with an emphasis on being pro-active versus reactive.

II. The Circuit Pastor – the Man (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9)

- A. He is a **humble** servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his fellow servants of Christ.

***"This is the one I esteem: he who is humble
and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my Word."***

- He recognizes and confesses his own sinfulness, failures, and weaknesses.
- He recognizes and confesses that he doesn't deserve to be entrusted with such a high office.
- He recognizes and realizes from his own ministry that many of the same problems and challenges will confront his fellow servants of Christ.

- B. He is a **confident** servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his fellow servants of Christ.

***“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God.
Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves
but our competence comes from God.
He has made us competent as ministers of a new
covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit;
for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.***

- By God’s grace, he belongs to his Savior, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed him from all sin, from death, and from the devil’s power.
- By God’s grace, his Savior, Jesus Christ, makes him strong through Word and Sacrament, and has prepared him for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

- C. The person and attitude of the circuit pastor, as he faithfully goes about his work, can be summed up in Paul’s inspired words to Timothy:

***Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in faith
and in purity...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture,
to preaching and to teaching...Be diligent in these matters;
give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see
your progress. Persevere in them, because if you do,
you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:12-16)***

III. The Circuit Pastor and His Calling

- A. He has a “divine call” from Christ to serve him.

- That “divine call” comes from Christ to him through the congregations of his circuit at our District Conventions.
- The representatives of those congregations are: the pastors, the male teachers, and the male lay delegates of those congregations in his circuit.

- B. He serves Christ by serving his District President.

- In the supervision of doctrine and practice

***“The Conference of Presidents shall be responsible for
supervising, maintaining, and strengthening
synodical unity of doctrine and practice”
(Article IX – Section 2 District Constitution & Bylaws)***

***“The district shall exercise supervision over its members
in matters of doctrine and practice through circuit pastors...”
(Article IX – Section 2 District Constitution)***

A **very important part** of every circuit pastor’s call in order for the church to fulfill her mission. If our message becomes polluted or false, it endangers Christian faith and life!

Some practical Biblical application of this service (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9)

- In the calling process
 - brotherly concern for those within his circuit who have received a call.
 - brotherly concern for the congregations within his circuit that have a vacancy.
 - brotherly concern for new called workers who have entered his circuit.
- As the district president's representative, the circuit pastor may also be delegated to conduct call meetings.

- In supporting the synod's mission and ministry

"The Conference of Presidents shall be responsible...for promoting the synod's Mission and Ministry in the districts of the synod."

Some practical Biblical application of this service (Romans 15:25-31, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, & 2 Corinthians 8:6-15)

- In being the **evangelical** communicator and liaison between the local congregations and their called workers in his circuit and those responsible for planning the synod's ministry.

C. He serves Christ by serving all the pastors in his circuit – "the pastor's pastor"

- In faithfully and regularly visiting his fellow pastors (as well as their families) in his circuit
- Brotherly, evangelical concern for all of them (mutual trust, confidentiality, encouragement, admonition if necessary, attention to any needs, "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn")
- ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)***

Unity of the Holy Spirit is a gift of grace. The Holy Spirit creates this blessing through Word and Sacrament. The circuit pastor will want to be the **cultivator of this gift** of the Spirit among the pastors of his circuit.

That means opportunities to come together to study the Word and participate in the Sacrament. "We will grow apart if we do not grow together."

- Our brothers in the pastoral ministry (and their families) are truly blessed by Jesus when their circuit pastor is a blessing from Jesus to them!

D. He serves Christ by serving all the congregations in his circuit.

- In faithfully and regularly visiting all the congregations in his circuit.
- Brotherly, evangelical concern for all of them (mutual trust, confidentiality, encouragement, admonition if necessary, attention to any needs, "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn")
- Our congregations are truly blessed by Jesus when their circuit pastor is a blessing from Jesus to them.

- E. He serves Christ by serving all the teachers and staff ministers (as well as their families) in his circuit.
- Since they have a pastor/shepherd this may be expressed in a more indirect way, yet still faithfully and regularly visiting with them too.
 - Brotherly, evangelical concern for all of them (mutual trust, confidentiality, encouragement, admonition if necessary, attention to any needs, “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”)
 - Our teachers and staff ministers are truly blessed by Jesus when their circuit pastor is a blessing from Jesus to them!
- F. It also bears saying that our Lord and Savior who gives us such a blessing requires all of the called workers and their families to give to their circuit pastor the same respect and love that they would hope to receive from members of their own congregations! In the same way Jesus requires all of the congregations to give the same love and respect to their circuit pastors that they would hope and expect to receive from him!
- G. In view of his extra and time-consuming work away from his congregation, it is also important that the CP have the approval, understanding and support of his own congregation.

IV. What a High Calling the Office of Circuit Pastor Is!

- A. Pray for them!
- B. Encourage them in their work!

May their faithful service to us bring glory to the Savior’s name! May the precious Word of God they bring to us also strengthen them daily! May they all be blessed tools in Jesus’ hands to build up his kingdom!