

Our Call as Brothers

Introduction

Christ's Love, Our Calling. Our synod in convention met under that theme last summer.¹ Today you and I do the same. *Christ's Love, Our Calling* summarizes the motivation for our lives and the purpose of our synod, district, and congregations. It is a theme taken from the Great Objective Justification Chapter of Scripture, 2 Corinthians 5.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

Yet, you no doubt have noticed that in our district convention we have used that rather general theme to discuss something rather specific, the Divine Call. Such a sharpening of our focus is proper for it is true to the text: 1) *Ministers of Christ* is a good general theme that summarizes all of 2 Corinthians.² 2) In chapter five Paul specifically talks about called servants. With the “us” in “Christ’s love compels us”, the Spirit-inspired apostle refers to himself and his brothers in the Ministry as he talks about their proper Christ-inspired motivation for ministry.³ A little later in that chapter, Paul again clarifies that he is talking about called servants, when he says, “We are therefore *Christ’s ambassadors* as if God were making His appeal through us.”⁴

Ambassador of Christ. Is there any more beautiful descriptive title given to the called worker in Scripture? What an underserved privilege; we represent the King of Salvation! The very title He gives to our office reminds us that we represent not ourselves. Rather, in all we say and do, in whatever place to which the King has dispatched us, we represent Him! Entrusted with the King’s unchanging message, ambassadors have neither permission nor power to alter the message or negotiate with the recipients. As ambassadors, we are called simply to proclaim all that Christ the King has done and now declares.

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² Prof. J.P. Meyer has summarized 2 Corinthians well by entitling his book *Ministers of Christ*.

³ Christ’s love as specifically shown in His sacrificial death for all people and the new life that the believer finds only in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:14 & 15

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:20

So far at our convention we have had a general discussion of the Divine Call⁵ as well as the specific Call of the Circuit Pastor.⁶ Now we turn our attention to how you and I in our offices as pastors, teachers, staff ministers or congregational leaders⁷ relate to our fellow servants. We look at those special aspects of the office of Gospel Ministry that require us to love as brothers.

Brothers

First, we simply note that we gather here today as brothers. What binds us together as brothers? We are brothers *in Christ*. We are brothers⁸ because we share one Lord, one faith, one baptism – one God and Father.⁹ This brotherhood is one of the many blessings of faith created and sustained by the Spirit with His Word. Still, God has also made us brothers in another way; we are also brothers in the Ministry.¹⁰

Someone might look at WELS pastors as a sort of band of brothers for external reasons. After all, most of us graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, resulting in shared training and experiences, not to mention that we all now serve in similar capacities. Add to that the vast majority of our teachers who graduated from New Ulm and the significant number of our called workers who attended our prep schools and you end up with what can look like a rather tight band of brothers. Others in the Ministry may feel a strong brotherhood with those with whom they share ministerial strengths and passions. They feel a real kindred spirit because of their shared interests.

All such ties are blessings. No one would deny that such shared experiences and interests create bonds, but that is not the tie that binds. Ultimately, we are kindred spirits because the Spirit by His Word has made us brothers in Christ and brothers in the Ministry. In our ministerial education system, it is the Spirit, by in depth study of His Word, who creates the tie that binds.

⁵ Presentation on the Divine Call by District President Prahl

⁶ Presentation on the Call of the Circuit Pastor by 1st Vice President Lindner

⁷ Congregational delegates, most of you serve on your church council or a board. While your position is not a full-time Call to Gospel Ministry like the pastors, teachers or staff ministers, there is a strong possibility that your position at your congregation is far more than just a “keep the lights on and the grass cut” post. Most likely, in one way or another you, along with your called workers, oversee the proclamation of the Gospel at your congregation or school. Today you represent your entire congregation as a delegate at our convention. Your attendance here is all about Gospel Ministry. We welcome you as our brothers, brothers in Christ and brothers in this Ministry.

⁸ In this presentation we do not use the term “brother” or “brotherhood” to exclude our sisters in the faith and Ministry. Rather, we use “brother” 1) in the same way the Spirit does in His Word, namely to the inclusion of our sisters in the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:5) and 2) also recognizing that we who gather today to lead by service are all men.

⁹ Ephesians 4:5,6

¹⁰ In Ephesians 4:11ff, just after the section that talks about our unity or brotherhood in the faith, Paul goes on to distinguish the Holy Ministry from the Universal Priesthood of all believers. As a baptized child of God, you and I are brothers in the Universal Priesthood. As called servants of the Word, we also enjoy a another and distinct brotherhood, which is yet another undeserved privilege.

In our entire Ministerium of pastors, teachers and staff ministers, *by the Spirit's power* each has bound himself to the Word of God and to each other by virtue of our common confession of that Word. We have pledged to God and each other that we will take every thought and make it captive to Christ and His Word. We have made the Lutheran Confessions our own and in our installations have sworn to uphold them because they are faithful expositions of the Word of God. While our ministerial brotherhood may enjoy many mutual benefits and bonds, we note again today that it is founded solely upon God's Word and granted to each of us by the Divine Call.

Our Brother's Keeper

Like all relationships, being brothers comes with responsibilities. Some of those responsibilities are specified by our very Calls. Other responsibilities simply flow out of the truth that Christian love does make us our brother's keeper in a most positive way.

Other responsibilities flow from our relationship as brothers in circuits, conferences, our district and synod. God has given these responsibilities through His rule over all time for the Church's good and by the specific Divine Call He has given you. He has placed us at this time, in our particular place with these particular brothers. Yes, Christ has made us gifts and blessings to each other. Part of our service to Christ is to serve each other.

Still other certain responsibilities come from the vows we took to be watchmen in the Kingdom. We vowed to encourage with sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.¹¹ Even more responsibilities are found in synodical membership. Our congregations and all pastors, male teachers and male staff ministers are members of constitutional synod. To be sure, that membership comes with certain rights, but for a servant of the Word it is more important that this membership also comes with certain responsibilities, among which are the responsibilities to encourage with the Word at all times and to correct and rebuke with the Word when necessary. We do so because we are brothers.

Councilmen, you are being brothers when you lovingly insist that your pastor begin the meeting with the Word. Elders, in keeping with your position, you are expressing true biblical love when you periodically ask your pastor what he is doing for personal Bible study. You show brotherly concern when you make sure your pastor has made it a ministerial priority to get to circuit and conference meetings. You are being a brother when your council makes sure to contact and discuss with other congregations in your circuit any innovative idea for your ministry that may impact theirs. Board of Education members, you are exercising proper loving leadership, brotherly leadership, when you make it a general requirement that your principal and teachers attend their conferences.

¹¹ Titus 1:9 *The overseer* must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Pastors and principals, God has called us to shepherd the called workers on our faculties. As we lead our faculties with the Word and into the Word, may these words of Paul be on our hearts and guide our words and action as brothers:

We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. . . For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”¹²

Circuit pastors, you are being brothers when you check in from time to time on the brothers you serve. It does not matter if that is a formal meeting or a drop-by visit. Furthermore, you are being a true brother when you reach out to that pastor in the circuit who seems to be drifting away from the other brothers. Such a drift can be a sign of trouble, and brotherly love calls for discussion.

And, yes, all of us are being brothers to each other when we see a concern in a brother and use the Word of God to address it in brotherly love. It does not matter if it is a concern in speech, conduct, teaching, preaching, ministry, or whatever. We love each other as brothers, and we are concerned for each other’s souls as well as for the souls served by our brothers.¹³ But we do so as gently, humbly, and lovingly as possible, recognizing that we too have our own problems.¹⁴

Our brotherhood, founded upon God’s Word, is also fostered with that same Word. We have responsibilities to love each other by encouraging each other with the Word and encouraging each other to be in the Word. We have responsibilities to use that Word to teach, correct, rebuke and encourage each other.¹⁵ This is part of our calling as brothers. As brothers in Christ and in the Ministry we know of no other way to love each other than with a biblical love.¹⁶ Such a love neither ignores nor lives in denial. Such a love addresses concerns with the source for healing and helping, the Spirit’s Word.

When the matter is truly private, we use Christ’s own divine plan for discussion in Matthew 18.¹⁷ We do so with the goal of restoring our brother as privately and gently as

¹² 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 & 10

¹³ 1 Timothy 4:16 “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Preserver in them, because if you do you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

¹⁴ 1 Peter 3:8 “All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is God-breathed all is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness.”

¹⁶ 1 John 5:2ff “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”

2 John 5 “This is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”

¹⁷ Matthew 18:14ff “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every

possible. When the matter involves our *public* ministry of sermons, worship, papers, web postings, ministration, conduct, etc., we are not in the realm of the private anymore. This is the *Public Ministry*.

In reality, as Gospel servants we need to remember that we willingly chose to present ourselves for a Divine Call and then willingly accepted that Divine Call. In doing so, we also willingly took most aspects of our lives out of the private realm. We are not 9 to 5, time-clock clergy. We are called servants all the time no matter where we are. If a time comes when a brother approaches any of us with some ministerial concerns, may we receive them in love, not misapplying Matthew 18 in order to avoid an honest, brotherly conversation. Christ has given Matthew 18 as a comfort, not as a cover.

Rather, may what we are be evident to all,¹⁸ as with the Spirit's strength we clay vessels strive to remain faithful and qualified to serve in the Public Ministry.¹⁹ What we do publicly is a matter of public record and open to public scrutiny. Still, let us also remember that no matter how public a matter may be, a brother still looks for the most brotherly forum for discussion and makes love the tone of the conversation.²⁰

Love – Not An Easy Task

At first glance, the topic of loving each other as brothers might seem a little light for a district convention. Of course as called servants we are to love all people, especially the members of our congregations as well as our brothers and sisters in the Ministry.²¹ Nevertheless, as simple as it may sound, there is nothing simple about the fulfillment of Christ's commandment: "Love one another." Having an old Adam makes the simple hard.

Serving together in the Ministry does not change that. Remember to whom Christ first gave that command to love one another.²² It was the original New Testament called workers, workers who in an earlier setting had tossed aside the idea of sacrificial service in favor of jawing and jockeying for power and position.²³ Being an apostle did not make love easier.

matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:11 "What we are is plain to God, and I hope is also plain to your conscience."

¹⁹ God gives His own Spirit-worked qualification for the Ministry in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

²⁰ 2 Timothy 4:24, 25 "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

²¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more."

²² John 13:34, 35

²³ Luke 22:24 "a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Being on church council, having your own classroom, or putting a “Rev” in front of your name does not make love any easier. A pastor is not immune to paranoia and its unique temptations. The same fears that paralyze the people in the pews grip the heart of the school board member. The doubts that drive indecision and wrong decision plague a principal. Underneath the title stills lies a very human heart, a heart easily hurt, a heart often looking for healing at the expense of others. Inside the called worker still lives a soul easily led away from self-sacrificing love down the natural and much more familiar path of self-preservation. No, a Call, a position, does not make true, Christ-like, biblical love any easier.

Nor does the fact that we serve together as pastors, teachers, staff ministers and councilmen mean that we will naturally have a stronger bond of love between us. The hauntings of the heart do not stop just because people work together. Whoever first said, “Familiarity breeds contempt”, knew something about human nature. All the fears, doubts, and hurts still find their way into these relationships that should be among the closest. Those insecurities make us want to cry out, “What about me? Where’s my recognition?” They make us tear down, “Yeah, but do you know what he did?” Such fears foster the search for specks.²⁴ Often our own insecurities silence, when we ought to be the first to offer godly congrats or encouragement or lead others in prayers of thanks to the Holy Spirit for how He is blessing the ministry of a co-worker, neighboring congregation, or brother in our circuit.

Brothers in the Ministry know that working side by side often means getting elbowed, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes intentionally. Such repeated ribbing makes us naturally move away from each other as we crave the comfort that distance and isolation falsely promise. Ah, but once again this is just the utter perversity of the human heart emerging in a new but still just as twisted way! For if familiarity breeds contempt, then separation spawns suspicion and distance, distrust.

Love – Empowered by Christ

Our hearts with their hurts would drive us away from each other. Still, Christ’s love would woo us, first back to Him as He heals the heart with His acceptance and His worth. Then, healed by His love, that same love compels you and me back into joyful ministry with and encouragement of each other. Our Brother Christ’s love, moves us to a brotherly love, a love which is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, a love that does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, a love that always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.²⁵

To make direct application to our joint service in Christ’s Kingdom, insert the unique situation of your ministry into the Great Love Chapter. Remember that the love described there is unique to God and the power for us to do it even imperfectly comes from Him. It is His *agape* love, a love that loves simply because it chooses to love and not because the objects of that love are loveable. It is an active, doing love, not a feeling. It is a love of the will, not of the

²⁴ Matthew 7:3-5

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

emotions. In other words, it may not feel like the thing to do, but it is still the proper, loving choice and action. As we go through it, use actual names of individuals if you find it helpful.

With Christ's love empowering our love we confess (and strive to live out):

- Christ's love makes me patient with my associate and kind to our teachers.
- Jesus' love keeps me from envying the growing and thriving ministry of my neighbor.
- The love of God moves me not to boast when things are going well in my congregation or school.
- Love reminds me not to be proud, as if any good was accomplished by me apart from God's blessing.
- True love stops me from being rude to my fellow councilmen, even when we passionately disagree about something not settled by God's Word.
- Christ's love guides me away from an "it's all about me" attitude.
- Love stops me from being easily angered with my co-workers.
- In love, I am not keeping track of what my fellow teachers have done wrong to me.
- In love there is no place for *Schadenfreud*; I take no delight when I hear of trouble at another congregation or with a brother.
- Christ's love has made me rejoice in His Word of truth and in all confessions of that truth.
- Christ's love moves me to always protect the good names of my brothers, to always trust that God knew exactly what he was doing when he gave me this associate or that neighboring pastor.
- Christ's love always gives me the sure and certain hope that God is working all for the good of His Church.
- Christ's persevering love moves me to persevere in love despite the frustration, hurt and sadness that I may have experienced by the words or actions of a brother.

Yes, these words have special application for our service in Christ's Kingdom and our loving service to each other. For you can preach or teach like an angel, but without love you will clang away with no one listening. You can fathom all the mysteries revealed in Scripture, but without love, you still have not grasped a thing. Without love, you can sacrifice worldly wealth and physical health for the Ministry and still have missed the point.²⁶

Stress on the Family

Not only is love difficult, but one could argue that the times in which we live bring unique stresses to the family. These unique stressors require an even greater commitment for brothers in the Ministry to love each other. There no doubt are and will be challenges for us to maintain our unity of doctrine and practice.²⁷ For while some of the stressors of our time are unique to this

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:1-3

²⁷ The intimate bond between doctrine and practice is what allows us to confess that we are united in doctrine and practice. For when we say that we are united in doctrine and practice, we are not saying that we all do everything the same way. Rather, we are saying that with God's help we do not just say all the right things (doctrine), but

time, this general truth should come as no surprise: each generation has to embrace the sacred task of contending for the truth, making its clear confession of all of God's Word.

Tensions of Technology

Mobile membership and ever-changing technology have made the congregations throughout our synod connected like never before. What a blessing! What a call to love!

The days of doing your own little thing in your own little corner of the Kingdom are gone. As people see things done differently in a Western Wisconsin District congregation, it can raise questions in a WELS congregation on the other side of the U.S. What a WELS congregation in any state posts on its webpage can instantly impact your congregation. In our day and age your congregation and school may no longer be judged only by what's going on there or down the road, but also by what's going on throughout the entire synod. Travel and technology mean that today's WELS pastor's style is compared not just with that of his predecessor or neighbor, but also with countless others.

To be sure, much, if not most, of the differences and points of comparison could fall into the areas of different gifts and Christian liberty. Different congregations, schools and Gospel ministers do strive to proclaim Christ faithfully in their unique situations with their unique gifts. Still, Christian liberty never walks alone, but always walks hand-in-hand with Christian love. This close relationship between Christian love and Christian liberty is of no surprise. They are brothers, both having been born of the same Gospel.

When a brother exercises Christian liberty, in Christian love he will always be concerned about how his practice might affect another's ministry. In Christian love, he will talk with his brothers in the circuit, expressing concern for how a new practice might affect his neighbors. In these days of mass communication and intimate technological connection, it might also serve Christian love well to have discussion at the conference level or even to pick up the phone and call your district president. A brother will anxiously look for a time and forum to let iron sharpen iron,²⁸ a time for brothers to reassure each other that practice is flowing out of sound doctrine, a time for liberty and love to communicate.

No, as brothers in our synod, we do not walk in lockstep, but we do walk together. Our time of technological advancement presents a unique challenge with the temptation to degenerate into a WELS era of the Judges.²⁹ Yet with Christ's love motivating and His Word guiding, it really is a time in which you and I need to love even more as brothers.

It is a time for me to deny myself all the more, for you to look beyond your corner of the Kingdom, and for all of us to appreciate anew the blessing of our brotherly fellowship. It is a time to remember that we all have different gifts and not one of us has all the gifts. Some

actually strive to make faithful application of God's Word in all we do (practice). We are united in God's Word and the Spirit-born conviction that all we do proceeds from and proclaims doctrine.

²⁸ Proverbs 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

²⁹ Judges 17:6 "In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes." KJV

have the gifts of innovation and creativity. Some have the gift of doctrinal discernment. Others are peacemakers, etc. It is time for brothers to communicate in love for the building of the body.³⁰

No, we do not walk in lockstep, but we do walk together in a time where we technologically touch each other daily. What a blessings! What a time to dig into the Word! What a time to love as we put a greater emphasis on, and give even more attention to, our relationship as brothers in Christ!

Our Turn for Beautiful Balance

Many who served in the WELS Ministerium of the 50's and 60's would describe that era as a time in which we needed to emphasize and hold before each other the biblical principles of Christian Fellowship. As those of us who are younger listen to those who fought the good fight of faith in those days, it becomes quite evident that in that time of stress great brotherly love was needed and exercised.

Coming out the 60's and 70's, some would point out that the necessary emphasis on fellowship principles may have given us an unintended result, a tendency to look inward at the expense of outreach. The result was a wonderful time in which brothers went to the Word, sought a balance between holding onto the Word and holding out that Word of life. The result was a greater emphasis on evangelism and missions.

These eras of WELS "rebalance" are not unique within Christianity. The history of Christendom is replete with examples of proper, needed emphasis followed by a need to rebalance. For the apostles, evangelism fervor for the gentiles led to balancing what God had to say about salvation in Christ alone with all that God has to say about Christian liberty and Christian love. For Luther, his proper emphasis on faith in Christ over against Rome's work-righteousness still later needed biblical clarification and balance because of where the Enthusiasts ran with the notion of faith alone.

To what unique time of rebalance have we been brought as we seek to live out all of God's Word? With what are we wrestling these days? Is it non-member enrollment policies, different worship styles, etc.? We have lived through a wonderful time of proper evangelism emphasis. Are we now in a time of reassessment and rebalance? After all, isn't that what we have been doing on a synodical level over the last several years as we have sought to faithfully and equally balance worker training and mission work? Coming out of a time when evangelism was often the first question and concern, is it now time for us as brothers to make sure that practices that came out of proper passion are also doctrinally sound and balanced?

We are sinful human beings. Some of us struggle to balance a checkbook. Some of us struggle to find a balanced diet or schedule. Balancing anything is a challenge. Brothers, never is balance more difficult than when it comes time for a sinner to take God's Word and rightly apply all it says to a particular situation.. Biblical balance can elude the best of

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 12

theologians. Even Peter had to be brought back to biblical balance by Paul.³¹ Still, as difficult as it is, that is Christ's call to faithfulness. He calls us to be faithful to His Word and with His Word, to be faithful in applying all of it in all situations.

Such discussions are difficult. My flesh as well as yours remains unconverted and the sinful human heart hates introspection and runs away from the difficult. Such discussions are difficult because you and I are still *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time saint and sinner, at the same time brothers and self-centered adversaries.

Without His love compelling ours, we could quickly drive each other into opposite corners. Without Christ's love motivating us, we could easily avoid honest conversations by assigning each other labels like *progressive, conservative, traditionalist, outreach-minded, institutional*, etc. By God's grace, none of us desires that. *Brothers*. That is the only name we want to call each other.

Ask again those who have lived through the 50's and 60's, they know. They know that such discussions require love, a love rooted in Christ and His Word, a love expressed in patience, kindness, etc. May Christ, who alone is the source of such love, grant it for the sake of love, peace and unity.

Conclusion

Christ's Love, Our Calling. Christ love compels us. Because of His death for all, we regard no one from a worldly point of view.³² Because we have been made alive in Christ we definitely do not view each other from a worldly point of view. We view each other as brothers, brothers in Christ and brothers in the Ministry. We treat each other as brothers. We know of no other way to love each other but with the Word. We use the very Word that makes us brothers to maintain our brotherhood by mutual encouragement and correction. Christ has made us brothers. May we live and love as such.

³¹ Galatians 2:9ff

³² 2 Corinthians 5:14-16 "Christ love compels us because we are convinced that One died for all and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."