

Monday, January 29, 2007

What did Jesus institute?

There have been some disappointing posts recently on the ELS ministry discussion list. In some cases it has actually degenerated to name calling. What I have seen too infrequently is the kind of spirit that seeks to understand the argument of the other side, making a careful presentation of its own position.

Some would blame the medium, email. I don't think that's the problem. The problem is our impatient, prideful human nature. Email just facilitates our sin, like pen and ink or photocopiers, only much faster.

One of the participants recently took a break for a whole week. He may have been composing his responses during that time, because they certainly show more forethought than usual. I won't reveal his name, to protect the innocent. However, I will quote a paragraph from his post that shows the reasoning behind his position.

His position is this (and I am willing to be corrected, if this summary is inaccurate): Jesus did not institute an office to be filled by incumbents. Instead, He instituted freedom, so that the Church may create as many different kinds of offices as she may need. He also instituted the use of the Means of Grace. For example, it was His idea that someone should be there to baptize other people from time to time, and that someone (not necessarily the same person) should be there to administer the Lord's Supper from time to time. Likewise, it was His idea that someone should be tapped to teach the Gospel, and (perhaps another person) to preach it on some regular basis. This free public use of the Means of Grace is called "the Ministry." The writer supposes that this is the sum total of what the PMW teaches.

It is not, but maybe I'll demonstrate that another time. For now, see Pastor Jay Webber's [Parsing](#) of the PMW for a fair, "unbiased" understanding of the document.

Here is the writer's carefully-worded defense of his position. Note that he is arguing against the notion that Jesus only instituted the position of "Pastor," whether that means parish pastor or something more generalized.

I have in previous emails mentioned other public servants of Christ that are mentioned in scripture. We are nowhere told that the lists given is intended to be exhaustive, nor are the various lists consistent, nor unchanging. We do read of deacons, which were not the same as pastors, but were specifically mentioned in 1 Timothy. I have also mentioned evangelists as part of the list in Ephesians 4. We are not told in scripture that evangelist was a form of pastor. I have mentioned that St. Paul was not called to baptize (1 Corinthians 1). Though he did baptize a few people, as he mentions, this does not undo what Paul wrote (that he was not called to baptize). Any one of these should be sufficient, but just as the early church had freedom to select seven to serve the church, and these seven were not pastors (though descriptions of their service included ministry of the Word, and this may have been part of their call), the church has freedom to call people into various forms of public ministry; even those that had not previously existed. This doesn't make their service into public ministry any less divinely instituted, just

because scripture doesn't provide all of the details and specify all of the forms that public ministry may take.

As I see it, the reasoning is as follows. First, he claims that any one of the following points is sufficient proof for his argument:

The Bible mentions titles of public servants other than the title "pastor." The Bible is silent about whether lists of such titles is exhaustive.

Deacons are mentioned in 1 Timothy, and are shown to be distinct from pastors.

Evangelists are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, and scripture does not say that Evangelist = Pastor.

St. Paul in 1 Cor. 1 says he was not called (sent) to baptize.

In addition to those "proofs," the following argument is offered.

Premise The early church had freedom to select 7 to serve the church (Acts 6) Premise The 7 were not pastors. Premise Ministry of the Word *may* have been part of their call. Conclusion The church has freedom to call people into various forms of public ministry; even those that had not previously existed.

Finally, the following claim is asserted (in my words):

Though scripture doesn't provide all the details and specify all the forms that public ministry may take, this does not mean that the service of offices created by the church is any less divinely instituted.

OK, there are a few things here, and careful readers of *The Plucked Chicken* may already have identified a few problems. But that hasn't stopped me before, so away we go.

First, I'd like to note that the writer may be arguing against a bit of a straw man. That means he claims that his opponent(s) have said certain things, which they haven't, but the claim provides the writer with something he can argue against more successfully than the real position of his opponents.

Straw man or not, how successfully does the writer make his argument? Let's check the first four proofs, because "Any one of these should be sufficient."

First

The Bible mentions titles of public servants other than the title "pastor." The Bible is silent about whether lists of such titles is exhaustive.

I'll grant the first sentence without seeing biblical proof, because I've seen the titles myself. In the second sentence, the writer claims something that I believe is correct, though I have not personally searched for such a biblical statement to verify that it doesn't exist. Maybe the writer has searched, and apparently not found it.

Let's suppose that the writer is correct. What does it prove? That we can't say whether the list of titles is

exhaustive or not. If the Bible doesn't say it's exhaustive, it must also not say that it's *not* exhaustive, right? So it's an argument from silence, a.k.a. a fallacy.

What about the other titles of public servants? Does that prove that Jesus instituted more than the office of pastor? Maybe, if we are using the exact same vocabulary in our debate that the Bible was using in those titles. But we are not. The writer's opponents have defined what they mean by "pastoral office," and it includes many of the other titles, if not all the ones in question.

Second

Deacons are mentioned in 1 Timothy, and are shown to be distinct from pastors.

This is true. What does it prove? In the context of 1 Timothy and even other places where "deacons" are mentioned, the Bible doesn't say that such men, as *deacons*, were ministers of the Word.

They *are* distinct from pastors, as the writer says, but we also know that Christians were interested in other kinds of service than the ministry of the Word. This point only proves that not every individual in the New Testament was a pastor.

Third

Evangelists are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, and scripture does not say that Evangelist = Pastor.

Yes, they are mentioned, but I smell another argument from silence. Scripture also does not say that Evangelist != Pastor. Anyway, the point (if valid) would be moot, because it's against a straw man. (See above under the first point -- find the words "pastoral office.")

Fourth

St. Paul in 1 Cor. 1 says he was not called (sent) to baptize.

This is true. What was Paul talking about? Was it according to his office as an Apostle of Christ? Or his office as a Missionary, sent by the church in Antioch? Or his office as a Pharisee? Paul doesn't say. Yet from the context, we can safely say that it's the office which brought Paul to Corinth. That's his office as Missionary, commissioned by Christ through the church in Antioch.

So Paul wasn't sent as a Missionary to baptize. What does this prove? It shows that his office as missionary was specialized. It does not prove that Missionary was to be distinguished from the "pastoral office." Indeed, if Paul was sent to preach and teach the Gospel, then it was most certainly part of the "pastoral office."

Another Argument, In Case The Other Ones Aren't Convincing

Premise The early church had freedom to select 7 to serve the church (Acts 6) Premise The 7 were not pastors. Premise Ministry of the Word *may* have been part of their call. Conclusion The church has freedom to call people into various forms of public ministry; even those that had not previously existed.

I grant the first premise. It's right there in Acts 6. I also grant the second premise. The 7 were tapped because the Apostles said "It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables." It shows that the "pastoral office," which includes both the apostles and teaching the Word of God, does not necessarily

include "serving tables," though its incumbents may do so if they wish.

I grant the third premise, but it can't contribute anything toward the conclusion because it's another argument from silence. Ministry of the Word *may* have been part of their call, and then again, it may *not* have been part of their call.

We are left with the first two premises. Do they support the conclusion? Well, yes, if by "public ministry" you mean any service on behalf of others or to a group of people. But if by "public ministry" you mean *the* public ministry of God's Word, then the conclusion is unsupported.

Finally, we have the last statement of the writer's paragraph. It's a claim without support, apparently meant to be self-evident. His point is that a lack of detail in scripture regarding "other" offices does not mean that their work is not divinely instituted. From this statement alone, it would seem that the writers' opponents claim the work is *not* "divinely instituted." The trouble is that I don't know what the writer means by "divinely instituted," though I'm pretty sure he doesn't mean the same thing as his opponents.

I could agree with the writer's statement in the following way. The work of deacons and evangelists, the work of St.~Paul as a Missionary, and the work of others was certainly given by God, each according to his own vocation. In the sense of divine vocation, their work is indeed "divinely instituted." Also, it's clear that God wants some things to be done. In many places, scripture also says *by whom* these things are to be done, but there are also responsibilities that the Church is supposed to manage collectively. In that sense too, it's possible to think of the work as being divinely instituted. But the fact remains that I don't know what the writer means by "divinely instituted."

I *do* know what his opponents mean by "divinely instituted." They mean that something has been established explicitly by God, as recorded in holy scripture. A divine institution involves God's blessing and often a command that we should receive it and observe or keep it as long as He wants to use it.

What did Jesus institute? Well, He did give the Gospel message and the sacraments to His Church. In that way, He instituted the *content* of our preaching and teaching. That seems to be as far as some people want to go, thinking that the responsibility to administer the Gospel belongs only to the Church at large, and not any special office that Jesus instituted in the New Testament.

Did God also institute an *office* to carry out that preaching and teaching? Some would say no, somehow forgetting that when Jesus gave the Keys to His Church, He was doing so with the very first men in a special office for administering the Keys. Were the Keys only for them to use? I didn't say that. I don't think anyone in (or recently out of) our synod has said that either. Yet the apostles were the ones who received the Keys. Coincidence? More like Providence. Or better yet, a "divine institution."

Likewise, when Jesus gave His Church the Great Commission, the immediate context is noteworthy. He *may* have been speaking *in the presence of* many people --- even unbelievers and hypocrites. That's inconclusive. Yet it's clear that Jesus was speaking *to* the same men who held the office for the administration of the Word and Sacraments. That doesn't mean the commission was not also for the Church in general, but it *does* mean that Jesus was establishing a special office within the Church and for the Church: the "pastoral office." The apostles were pastors.

And by the way, the PMW agrees with me, though it could be made more apparent. 8-/

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 09:12

Explaining the PMW Statement: Response to Circuit 8

I've pointed out already that while there is a valid, subservient role for human reason in the household of theology, we must be careful how we use it to support our claims about scriptural doctrine. Another word for "reason" is *logic*. In general, there are two ways to construct a logical proposition. One can use *inductive* logic, which takes a collection of observations and concludes that there are certain trends or probabilities in the context of those observations. One can also use *deductive* logic, which can provide conclusions aimed at truth and falsehood (a binary concept) rather than at probabilities and trends.

Deductive logic follows the pattern: "Since A, B, C, ... and D are true, therefore E must inevitably also be true."

Inductive logic may follow the pattern: "In cases A, B, C, ... and D, we have noticed that proposition E generally applies. Therefore E must also apply for cases F, G, H, etc."

A related, but different, process is the "scientific method," in which someone makes a hypothesis out of pure conjecture, which then may (or may not) be tested to see if it can be disproven. If it can not be tested, the hypothesis doesn't have much value for the scientific method. If it is tested and disproven, then we know it doesn't match reality. If it is tested and not disproven, then we know that it *may* match reality. Nothing is ever *proven* by the scientific method, but some things are eventually accepted as useful. The scientific method is completely inappropriate for theology, because as Martin Luther wrote to Erasmus, "The Holy Ghost is not a skeptic." God deals only in truth, and is not subject to a human standard of usefulness.

The purpose of theology is to repeat what God has revealed in His Word. It ought to be a somewhat boring discipline for those who wish to invent things on their own. The nature of theology is truth, not probability, likelihood, trends, or usefulness.

If you can understand and accept the summary above, then let's apply this to *A Response from the ELS Presidium to Circuit #8 Concerning the Circuit's Memorial to the 2005 Convention*, published on October 11, 2005. This document illustrates the reasoning used in the PMW document, showing how it arrives at its conclusions from the scripture passages it cites. Note that I don't necessarily agree with the main conclusions as summarized in this *Response*, as I have also explained previously.

The following paragraph contains several intermediate arguments meant to support the notion that God has instituted the public ministerial office of Christian day school teachers and the like.

What do passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:5 & 28, Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8 teach?

These passages are now set forth as scriptural proof of the *Response's* point of view.

The 1 Corinthian verses show that God has indicated teachers as one of the offices he has given to the church;

Here is the authors' conclusion from reading 1 Corinthians 12:5 and 28, which say: "There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord." (12:5) and "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second

prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues." (12:28)

the Greek term (DIDASKALOUS) used here appears wider than the expression "pastors," especially when considered with other terms in close proximity, e.g., helpers and leaders.

Here is the authors' support for the conclusion. Is it deductive, inductive, or scientific method? It does not seem deductive to me. The sentence hinges upon the word "appears," which is subjective. It might be appropriate in an inductive argument, but it does not make a valid deductive argument. (I'm not addressing the truth of this observation at this time, though that could also be addressed.)

The passage from Philippians shows that presbyters and deacons are addressed in similar fashion as being the recipients of Paul's letter;

Here's the authors' support for a conclusion based upon the Philippians passage.

this implies strongly that the deacons also were spiritual helpers for the Philippian church.

This is the conclusion. Is the logic deductive and valid? Not with the only support depending on the words "implies strongly." While such words might be useful as secondary support for a deductive conclusion, it is not adequate as the main argument.

In 1 Timothy 3 we find reference made of deacons who were to be tested or examined in order to serve;

Here's the authors' supporting observation from another passage.

this testing appears to have been of a spiritual nature (vv. 9 & 10) in light of the duties they were called to perform.

And here's the intermediate conclusion from that passage. Again, the language shows that it is not a valid deductive argument: "appears to have been." That does not convey the certainty we need in the house of theology.

The 1 Timothy 5:17 reference ascribes double honor to those laboring in connection with Word and teaching,

Here's the supporting observation from 1 Timothy 5.

while implying at the same time that there are other elders with different responsibilities, all part of the one public ministry of the church.

And here is the conclusion *implied* by the observation. Is this implication inevitable? Yes, up to the comma. But what about the last words, "all part of the one public ministry of the church?" That part of the conclusion is not supported at all.

Martin Chemnitz, the chief author of the Formula of Concord, states: "And in 1 Timothy [5]:17 [Paul] mentions two kinds of presbyters, of whom some labored in preaching and teaching, while others had been placed in charge of ecclesiastical discipline. . . This about completes the list of ranks into which we read that the ecclesiastical ministry was divided at the time of the apostles" (Chemnitz, Examen Part 2, p. 684).

The parts of this quotation included in the *Response* have Chemnitz asserting the role of the "other elders" without scriptural support. Maybe Chemnitz was guilty of a little logical laxity here, or maybe he was unfairly quoted.

Do the intermediate conclusions above provide the support of God's Word for the general conclusion that God has instituted the public ministerial office of Christian day school teachers and the like? Unfortunately, the intermediate conclusion can't support anything in the household of theology, because as deductive logic they disintegrate under their own weight.

The adopted statement says with certainty that God allows offices that have a limited public use of the Means of Grace.

This sentence deserves a brief excursus. It is the clearest expression I have found in the *Response* showing what is meant by the so-called divine institution of offices having a limited public use of the Keys. The divine institution is that *He allows them*. This is not the same idea of divine institution used in the *Circuit 8 Revision* to which the *Response* is responding. No wonder there has been so much misunderstanding.

We continue in the next paragraph of the *Response*.

There are indications in Scripture of other offices of public ministry existing than simply that of the office of overseer/bishop/presbyter.

These offices (deacons, teachers, evangelists, etc.) included certain spiritual duties that involved public ministry (e.g., using the Word to minister to souls on behalf of the church; 1 Timothy 3:8f).

Here's another major conclusion. We'll want to be sure that these "indications" are cited and beyond question. We'll also look for unquestionable scriptural evidence that: (1) deacons (as in 1 Timothy 3:8f) were responsible to God's Word to minister to souls, and (2) teachers and evangelists are distinct offices from that of overseer/bishop/presbyter. This is the minimum requirement of deductive logic for the conclusion above.

Ephesians 4 includes a list of offices not confined only to the pastoral office: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers"

Here's the first support, an intermediate conclusion citing an "indication."

We should be careful to understand what is meant by the term "pastoral office." In the *Response*, it must be

used the same way it's used in the [PMW](#) document itself, which says 'The term "pastoral office" has been used historically according to a more restrictive meaning (referring only to those men who are called to the pastorate of a local congregation), and according to a less restrictive meaning (referring to all those men who are called to a ministry of pastoral oversight in local congregations, as well as in other specialized fields of labor). In this document the term is being used according to its less restrictive meaning.'

This agrees completely with the way the [Circuit 8 Revision](#) uses the same term. It explains: 'The office to which God has entrusted the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments is called the pastoral office. Usually the term "pastoral office" refers to the pastorate of the local congregation, but incumbents of this office may be serving in specialized fields of labor in which they do not regularly carry out all the duties of the office. The pastoral office is called the Public Ministry in the Strict Sense because it is specifically instituted by God and is therefore necessary for the church.'

Now, the support offered for the intermediate conclusion above:

Chemnitz gives this interpretation of the Ephesians passage regarding the forms, or ranks, of the public ministry where he describes "pastors as those placed over a certain flock, as Peter shows (I Peter 5:2-3) and who not only taught but administered the sacraments and had the oversight over their hearers." Chemnitz goes on to describe the teachers as "teachers, to whom the chief governance or oversight of the church was not entrusted but who only set the doctrine before the people in a simple manner, such as catechists were later: thus Paul (Rom. 2:20) speaks of "a teacher of children," and the word "teach" is expressly used in this sense in Hebrews 5:12" (Chemnitz, Examen, Part 2, p. 684).

This seems to support the intermediate conclusion adequately. However, one must wonder again whether Chemnitz was being fairly quoted, because the very next sentence on p. 684 reads, 'All these ranks the apostles include under the terms "presbytery" and "episcopacy."' This changes the entire quotation, so that it no longer supports the intermediate conclusion at all, but weighs against it instead. Furthermore, it also weighs against the greater conclusion from the previous paragraph of the *Response*.

[More has been written exegetically](#) about this passage of scripture, showing that the terms "pastors" and "teachers" should be taken grammatically as synonymous, based upon all the other occurrences of this grammatical construction in the Bible. However, our purpose here is only to examine the support in the *Response*.

It is also worthy of note that the Ephesians citation lists "evangelists" as a separate office/form, even if one were to call into question the separate terms of "pastors" and "teachers." Clearly not only the pastoral office is mentioned.

This additional note and the restatement of the intermediate conclusion strangely argue against one another, especially in light of the Chemnitz quotation (properly understood) immediately before. Contrary to what the note asserts, "evangelists" are most definitely *included* in the "pastoral office" as defined in both the PMW and the *Circuit 8 Revision*, as shown above in the explanatory footnotes from each document. Contrary to the restated conclusion, Chemnitz affirms that all of the titles mentioned are part of the office of overseer/bishop/presbyter, here called the pastoral office.

The revision document of Circuit #8 uses the logic that, since God has not commanded such offices with a

limited public use of the keys, therefore none of these "allowed or permitted" offices can be classified as instituted or established by God. This reasoning does not follow.

At this point, we should be able to see the disconnect between the authors of the *Response* and the authors of the *Circuit 8 Revision*. The former consider anything that God allows or permits as being "divinely instituted." The latter consider only what God expressly establishes in His Word as being "divinely instituted." No wonder there has been such lamentable controversy! We did not begin with an agreement upon what constitutes a divine institution! Failing to do our homework was a golden invitation for a separatistic or unionistic spirit to come among us.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 12:35

Saturday, January 20, 2007

Concordia, Second Edition

Ah, they arrived today. I wondered if CPH would remember my order from some time last summer. They did.

Two copies of the second edition of *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*. They are wonderful. Now I have a copy to read at both churches *and* at home.

Now, I thought the first edition was good, and I hope CPH didn't lose track of me as a purchaser. It's possible my copy was part of a group order for members at [Grace](#), so I may have to request that the "update" materials be sent to my new address. But at least I already have the second edition to enjoy.

I've read some of the introductory material. Two thumbs up so far. The timeline will be more fun to read than you might think. I noticed something about the first known batch of scotch made in Scotland. That was included only for reference and interest, I'm sure. It scores both ways.

What I'd really like to do is dive into the 52-week, daily reading schedule. It's really just Monday through Friday, not daily. That leaves me with extra time to write blog posts about the week's readings. I intend to do that on the church blog, [Confession and Life](#) so that the posts might be used in our printed newsletter too. I will welcome comments and cross-blog chatter on these topics. If anyone else would like to join in on the same reading schedule (beginning Monday), it could be the basis for some good doctrinal discussion.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Confessions at 08:43

"Selective Fellowship" Protest

The title of this article is a direct quotation from the synod announcement concerning the three churches and their pastors who have entered a state of confessional protest. See earlier posts for a description of this protest, and an analysis of the initial response.

I'm going to present the sequence of relevant events in a brief form, as I saw them occurring from my own point of view. I believe my point of view is the truth, or else it wouldn't be my point of view. You may certainly disagree about that.

The first event relevant to this announcement was when Pastor Rolf Preus was given an ultimatum by the synod president: either recant/retract/withdraw your paper "[Clarifying the Issues](#)," or you will be expelled from the synod. The showdown meeting began with the president asking that Pastor Preus retract his entire paper, as the only acceptable sign that he is not charging the synod with false doctrine. The request/demand was repeated throughout the meeting. Preus' response was to ask for biblical proof that what he had written was wrong, for without such proof, he believed that his paper was correct and to retract it would be a sin. The meeting ended with no retraction, and no serious attempt to show from the Bible that the paper was wrong.

On January 26, 2006, [the announcement](#) went out that Pastor Preus was henceforth suspended for unintentionally charging the synod with false doctrine. This decision was apparently questioned, because [another document](#) appeared to justify the action. There we learn that retraction of the paper was absolutely necessary because it "was inflammatory and caused many in the synod to assume he was making the charge of false doctrine." Apparently, the reason for the suspension was not set in stone, because it seemed to shift slightly over time.

This is where the problem began that led to the "'selective fellowship' protest" and what has ensued. Even in January, 2006, it seemed obvious to me that a state of selective fellowship had already been declared. The action responsible for selective fellowship was removing Pastor Preus from the synod without a doctrinal reason. Most of the synod's pastors were accustomed to thinking of Pastor Preus as being in our doctrinal fellowship. Many pastors actually *agreed* with most of what he wrote in his paper, *and they still do*. There has indeed been criticism of Preus, even from some close friends, but it was not criticism of his doctrine so much as the confrontational way he sometimes presented it.

[The adopted ELS doctrinal statement](#) says at the very beginning of the article on fellowship:

We confess that Scripture requires that church fellowship be recognized and practiced where there is a mutual confession of and commitment to the pure Marks of the Church, the Word and Sacraments.

Even on January 26, 2006, a great many people in the ELS were still convinced that we shared with Pastor Preus "a mutual confession of and commitment to the pure Marks of the Church," the president's judgment call notwithstanding. Next, it says:

Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church, and He governs and teaches it by His Word, but deviation from the teaching of God's Word is not to be tolerated in the church.

This casts into doubt the authority of one individual by himself to declare a break in fellowship, especially where there is still a mutual confession of and commitment to the pure Marks of the Church. Note that it says "deviation from the teaching of God's Word," not "deviation from our attempts to summarize that doctrine." So it's more important to defend our doctrinal statements with scripture (if we can) than to defend them with administrative acts of dubious authority. If we can't successfully defend them with scripture alone, then something's wrong with them. Next, it says:

We therefore reject unionism, that is, church fellowship with adherents of false doctrine, and ecumenical endeavors which compromise the pure doctrine of God's Word.

What, exactly, was the false doctrine that Preus was charged with teaching? He wasn't charged at all. Rather, *he* was supposed to be unintentionally charging *the synod* with teaching false doctrine. But what did he really intend to do? He intended to question the doctrinal accuracy of our brand spanking new doctrinal statement, [the PMW](#), because he is committed to the pure Marks of the Church. Later, it says:

At the same time we also condemn separatism, i.e., the refusal to acknowledge and practice fellowship when there is agreement in doctrine.

The above sentence from our *adopted* ELS doctrinal statement is our first premise.

Second premise: Pastor Preus had not filed a charge of false doctrine against the synod. He intentionally avoided saying that the PMW document is an unscriptural or "unconfessional" document, but wrote that it teaches some things as articles of faith without scriptural proof. He denied that such claims carry the authority of God's Word.

Third premise: Pastor Preus has not been charged with adhering to false doctrine. Instead, he was charged with unintentionally charging the synod with false doctrine. He was also accused later of sowing seeds of discord among the brethren, which is not the same as disagreement in doctrine.

Inevitable conclusion: refusal of the synod to acknowledge and practice fellowship with Pastor Preus is separatism, which we condemn.

For the sake of completeness, here are the Bible passages provided in support of our *adopted* ELS doctrinal statement quoted above:

See John 8:31-32, 1 Cor. 1:10, Eph. 2:19-20, Matt. 7:15-20, Rom. 16:17, Gal. 1:6-9, 2 John 9-11, Matt. 23:8, 1 Pet. 4:11, 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

So what really happened a year ago, according to our *adopted* ELS doctrinal statement, was separatism. We could just as easily call it "Selective Fellowship" because a part of our synod declared itself to be not in doctrinal fellowship with another "specified portion of our synod."

Why am I pointing this out? Why dig up old bones? Maybe it's because I'm in a "'selective fellowship' protest." That is, I protest against selective fellowship. Since I'm a member of the synod, I automatically participate in its actions, by association at least. I don't want to be a part of selective fellowship. Instead, I want to recognize and practice church fellowship "where there is a mutual confession of and commitment to the pure Marks of the Church, the Word and Sacraments." I want to recognize God's Word as the governing force in

the Church, not administrative decisions about fellowship.

At the same time, I want to acknowledge that Pastor Preus is just as sinful as our synod president, and as myself. There were many steps leading us all into selective fellowship a year ago, and a different approach by either Pastor Preus or the synod president at any point might have forestalled or avoided the present deplorable situation. Sometimes our sinful nature is not as visible in *what* we do as in *how* we do it.

Though he certainly helped to escalate things, it doesn't seem to me that Pastor Preus, in substance alone, wrote anything that should have resulted in a severance of fellowship. You can disagree with me, but then you must somehow explain what we are supposed to do, according to God's Word, when we notice that a freshly adopted doctrinal statement makes claims without scriptural support. What has greater authority: God's Word, or some majority vote at a synod convention?

I do not envy the president his responsibilities, because as a servant of the whole synod, more is expected from him than from the rest of us. A bad decision on his part can cause greater harm to God's Church than a bad decision by Pastor Preus or myself. Still, he has the same sinful flesh that I have, and that Pastor Preus has. That makes it hard for him to be "pastoral" to all of his "flock," including equally sinful pastors.

Thank God that Jesus Christ has obtained forgiveness! He suffered for all of our decisions and actions that contradict His Word, including those of synod presidents. He died for the times when we speak the truth without the tact and consideration that love would demand from us, including such transgressions on weblogs like this and in the writings of Pastor Preus. He died for our tendency to pass judgment in our hearts when it's not our place. Jesus gave His life for sinners who become guilty of separatism through their own pride and obstinance, cutting off fellowship rather than repenting of their own sins against God's Word. God's Son was nailed to a tree also for sinners guilty of unionism because they are so tired of the battle that they will agree to read a doctrinal statement in conflicting ways. Jesus died for all of us, and His precious blood upon the cross has bought our redemption.

May we receive His grace with penitent hearts.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 16:15

Thursday, January 11, 2007

New Edition of "Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions" Is Shipping

See my post on [the church newsletter blog](#) explaining this, and then place your order. It's a good price on a timeless classic.

This volume includes a schedule for reading it through in a year. Maybe we should set up an online discussion group for doing this reading together. Sometimes we need a bit of extra motivation to stick to a schedule like that.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 23:01

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

Should Have Read This in Seminary

I finally finished a little book that's already been more influential upon me and my work than any other non-theological book, and even many theological books. Upon a first look at the cover and name, it may appear to be of the "self-help" variety, a genre which I have not taken seriously for many years. Many self-help books have religious overtones, and even teach a kind of self worship. I despise that kind of thing as the dangerous drivel it is. But this one is different. I wouldn't even call it a self-help book.

The title is *Getting Things Done*. It's a fairly popular book by a "personal productivity guru" named David Allen. I found it while searching the Internet for better ways to use the functionality of the DateBk6 program on my PDA. (That's "Palm Pilot" for the acronymically challenged.)

After reading this book and implementing its techniques in at least part of my life, I'm convinced that it should be a textbook for a third semester class at our seminary. That's the first semester of the second year. Why then? Because any earlier, and the students would not appreciate the difference it makes, and probably wouldn't take it seriously. Any later, and the students would lose too much of the increased potential for learning at seminary once they start using these techniques.

It's standard practice, at least at Bethany Seminary, to have enough homework at any point that it can't all be done. As students we figured this was intentional, a way to help us adjust to the life of a pastor. A course based upon *Getting Things Done* -- even a 3-4 week course, would be so much more effective, produce better organized and more capable pastors, and also help the students to get more out of seminary. If I ever have a vicar who hasn't mastered this aspect of life already, this book will be required reading.

What's so great about it? Allen provides a comprehensive set of viable behavioral patterns that work both individually and cumulatively to handle every demand upon a pastor's attention. With the system in place, the busy pastor doesn't feel so busy any more, because there's nothing left to wrack his brain, and no fear of forgetting important commitments. The idea is to get all that stuff out of your brain, and recorded objectively in such a way that you can trust it will pop up again at the right time.

Another key principle is thinking of every commitment or project in terms of its "next action." This crystallizes the thought so that something can actually be done about it, rather than letting it float around as an amorphous obligation, which is both distracting and depressing. It also forces the person to separate the thought process of dealing with these things from *doing* the thing itself. It not only alleviates stress, but also makes things easier to do.

I wasn't drawn to having higher productivity. For me, it was the allure of an empty head. The productivity is a nice side effect. My friends may tell you that my head has always been fairly empty, but now it's nearly hollow! It's nice not to feel as though I need to remember something all the time. Even better, my brain seems to remember little things more easily now that I'm not pushing it all the time. When I actually work on something, my focus is sharper, and distractions are easier to deal with.

Another nice side effect is that I finally have a file system. That only took 8 years! Ironically, some of the stuff I found and filed lately was from seminary, and one of the papers stated that a good filing system is a basic requirement for every pastor. (But don't get the wrong idea. I haven't been completely disorganized. Most of my organization has been digital. I doubt any other pastor in our synod, or maybe anywhere, is keeping his sermons and bulletins archived in a [subversion](#) repository. But hey, now I *a/so* have a file.)

My goal now is to get my study at home under control. It's a shared space with Erica, in theory. Right now it

needs some finishing touches on the new drywall, a new window, some builtins, maybe new carpet, I'll spare you my list for that project, but you can be sure now that it exists. Anyway, once things are a little neater in here I'll be able to set up an inbox and file at home too, and get most of the rest of my life under control. Erica may be able to sew in here too.

If you can find *Getting Things Done* at your library, check it out!

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 23:04

Saturday, January 6. 2007

The Basis of Unity Within a Synod

What brings churches together to form a synod? This is something that I'm sure everyone in the ELS would agree upon. It's God's Word. We agree on the doctrine, and this is the basis for our cooperation together. Without agreeing on the doctrine, we couldn't have common missions, support a common seminary, or even figure out what our college should teach.

Because of this, the synod as a corporate body has an interest in preserving that unity of doctrine. So one of the tasks of the synod president, and other synod officials, is to help preserve it. How? The same way pastors work in the parish: by speaking and writing God's Word. Pastors and synod officials do this publicly because they have been authorized to do it publicly, each shepherd to his own sheep in the proper context. The authorization may come in a variety of ways, but that's how they have that authority.

Yet the authority of God's Word is independent of the authority that pastors or synod officials have. God's Word has its own authority. If pastors or synod officials speak what is not God's Word, then their words do not have God's authority. Yet if a layman speaks God's Word to his pastor or to a synod official, then it must be heeded as God's Word. To do otherwise is sinful. (cf. the Third Commandment)

What else can pastors and synod officials do to help preserve our unity in God's Word? Individually, they can do nothing else.

Someone may say, "What about Matthew 18?" I say: the first steps of church discipline are indeed done by individuals, but they are still nothing but speaking God's Word. The last step, excommunication, is a corporate speaking of God's Word. It's also *not* the same thing as removing (or suspending) someone from membership.

How is membership established? Corporately, mutually, and voluntarily. How is it terminated? Corporately, and when all is well, mutually and voluntarily. Neither establishing membership nor terminating membership is required by God's Word. Neither one may be enacted by an individual. Membership is not identical with fellowship, though fellowship in doctrine is a prerequisite for membership. To combine the authority of speaking God's Word together with the power to terminate membership unilaterally, either in the office of a parish pastor or synod president is contrary to God's Word. It makes a ruler out of one who only has the authority to speak God's Word. It confuses the ministry of the Gospel with the administration of temporal matters.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 10:04

Thursday, January 4, 2007

The Weighty Matters of God's Word

I love the way you can read parts of the Bible where you don't expect to find anything new, and yet there it appears. It truly brings forth treasures both new and old.

Jesus verbally spanked the scribes and pharisees, saying something really instructive for us: "you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." Matthew 23:23.

Justice, Mercy and Faith. Ponder that for a while, without leaving the rest undone. It's good stuff.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 22:37

Churchliness of Synod: Final Chapter

Synod has a churchly character, but what sort of churchly character is it? At this point, I've concluded (with help) that the synod exists as the cooperative efforts of its member churches to do certain things. I strongly suspect that it's the nature of these efforts that lends the synod its whole churchly character, and not any independent characteristics that the synod may have.

But once I start something, I almost always do my best to finish it. So let's finish our exploration of contrasts between the churchly character of synod and that of congregations, as touching their use of the means of grace, and as touching their context.

The Means of Grace

Congregations use the means of grace to the fullest extent possible. They offer the Lord's Supper as often as it can practically be offered, given the sensibilities of the members. They baptize at every opportunity. They teach God's Word through the Divine Service every Sunday, plus extras throughout the year. They also teach God's Word through Bible studies and other group activities. They offer countless opportunities for private confession and absolution, with the guarantee that the minister has been prepared to handle it. They offer private counseling from God's Word. They coordinate the catechization of the young in the biblical faith. They publish God's Word in newsletters and online. In short, they use the means of grace to the fullest extent possible.

The synod is different. Maybe it's not possible for the synod to offer all that other stuff at once. (If so, why not?) For whatever reason, the synod's use of the means of grace is a small subset of the congregation's use. I'm not counting the missionaries, who are sent primarily by the synod. If you count their work, then the synod does the same thing as the congregations, but they are not the ones we generally mean by the word "synod." Some prominent ways that the synod (minus the missionaries) uses the means of grace are:

Preaching and teaching by invitation at synod-work events.

Counseling from synod officials such as circuit visitors, the missions counselor, the giving counselor, and the

synod president.

Publications in print and online.

"Presiding" by a definition that includes teaching God's Word. This might be included under "counseling."

For a while now, I've thought that time should be blocked out at pastoral conferences for private confession and absolution, but I haven't seen it yet at any of our conferences. I suppose that would be more of an inter-church or inter-pastor activity than a synod activity, anyway. Yet synod officials are also available for this too.

I may be forgetting some important way that the synod uses the means of grace. If so, I'm sure someone will mention it to me. But you should get the picture. The marks of the church are not present as strongly in the synod as they are at a congregation. Or, maybe they are just as strongly present, but the presence is diluted over a much wider area. Either way, it affects my impression of their churchly character relative to one another. It also reinforces my suspicion that the synod's churchly character derives entirely from its existence as the cooperative ministerial efforts of all the congregations.

Context

The context of a congregation is determined spatially or geographically. Those limits are being adjusted by technology, a process which began a long time ago. Yet the main activity of a congregation will always be corporate worship, a gathering around the Means of Grace to receive God's spiritual blessings through the Divine Service.

The context of the synod is quite different. It may be limited geographically (or not), but the limit would be only to the United States. Still, most activities center around the headquarters and major brick-and-mortar institutions like the seminary and college. A growing part exists in cyberspace. While the focal point of a congregation is in the weekly service, the focal point of the synod is not. I think it's shared by the annual synod convention, the meetings of the various boards or committees throughout the year, the Lutheran Sentinel, perhaps missions, and the office at 6 Browns Court. These are the chief elements in the context of the synod's ministry. The first four are clearly the product of cooperative efforts by the churches.

The Mankato office is harder to gauge. Is it the product of cooperative church efforts? Yes, or maybe a byproduct. But these days, it only relies upon those efforts for manpower to slog through the various things that a synod needs to do and coordinate. It doesn't rely upon cooperative church efforts very much for its financial support any more. In that respect, it has become somewhat independent of the congregations. We may sometimes mistakenly believe that the synod office *is* the synod. Hopefully, our annual convention helps to counter that notion.

What is churchly about the context of the synod? Again, I'm left with the impression that it's only the cooperative ministry, the work that the congregations set out to accomplish together, that gives the synod any churchly character at all. If we want to think of the synod as something like church, then, we need to realize that this relies completely upon the character of the congregations and the work they endeavor to do together. It means that the authority of the synod, and its officials, is limited to that work. But since we still believe that congregations undertake this voluntarily, without any necessity imposed by the Gospel, then the authority of our synod to do its work likewise comes collectively from the congregations. Just as the pastor at congregation A can assume no authority to minister to the people of congregation B, nor even to its pastor, so also the synod pastors can assume no authority to minister to the people of its member congregations, nor even to their pastors. The synod isn't a great big multi-point parish.

Yet the work that the churches share *does* fall under the jurisdiction of the synod's pastors, like the synod president. He can determine which individuals will participate in that work, and how. He can give them their synod-work assignments, and follow up on them. He can apply God's Word to the many circumstances that may arise in the course of that shared work, but only as far as the shared work goes. He has the role of facilitating in the synod's decisions to include or exclude churches or pastors as its members. He doesn't have any authority to preach or teach God's Word, or to "preside" (if that's what it means) *within* congregations, including their pastors, because that is not part of the cooperative work, i.e. the synod.

Here's a thought question for you: What do we mean by "para-church" and does that term also apply to the synod? How about "inter-church?"

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 14:04

Churchliness of Synod Continued

I was going to address how synod and congregation differ regarding their use of the means of grace and regarding their context, but we need to finish something else first, namely, how they differ regarding their shepherds.

Based upon feedback, I need to clarify something. I appreciate the thoughtful email responses I receive to these posts, but since they are private communications, I don't think I should publish who the sender is. He wanted to explain what the Treatise says in association with AC XVIII, in response to what I wrote here:

So if presiding is pastoral ministry, then the president must be a shepherd to someone else. Is it the pastors of the synod or missionaries? No, because a formal relationship like that would violate Treatise paragraphs 7 and following, with the accompanying scriptural passages.

My email responder distinguishes the authority to set up the synod president as the pastors' pastor from his authority *to act* as the minister of the synod's pastors. The first authority is acknowledged to be done by human right, and the latter by divine right. This distinction echoes what's written in the PMW: "But it is by divine right that one exercises that work on behalf of the Christians through whom the call has come." (That's written about the wider sense of "public ministry.") By making this distinction, it is supposed that *having* a synod president as the pastors' pastor does not violate Treatise 7ff, because we *have* a synod president by human right. But when he "supervises" his "flock" by teaching them (that is, correcting their doctrine, and presumably suspending those who disagree with what he teaches), he does this by divine right.

This would mean that a suspension from the ELS is an exercise of the binding key. Since it removes the "offender" from our synod body and fellowship, it would be tantamount to excommunication. That doesn't seem right, for several reasons. Unfortunately, it goes beyond the scope of this post to list them.

It would also mean that a synod holds authority over its congregations and pastors by divine right, authority to teach God's Word, and even exercise the binding key. If the synod *doesn't* hold such authority over congregations and pastors by divine right, then what's the use of saying that its president teaches *by divine right*? (Is it the same as merely saying that God wants His Word to be taught publicly?) But wouldn't that mean that it's sinful for a congregation *not* to join a synod, just as it's sinful for an individual Christian to remain aloof from every congregation of believers when there is no other impediment to fellowship? Yet we also hold that the synod is a voluntary association of congregations, and that the synod is only advisory.

Here's an accepted translation of what the Treatise says in paragraph 7, which introduces the subsequent paragraphs in the Treatise:

In the first place, therefore, let us show from the holy Gospel that the Roman bishop cannot arrogate to himself any supremacy whatever over other bishops and pastors.

In that quotation, I have intentionally used only one of the two English translations that appears in the *Triglotta*, because it provides some insight to what is meant by the other way it's translated:

In the first place, therefore, let us show from the Gospel that the Roman bishop is not by divine right above other bishops and pastors.

What does it mean to have supremacy? Paragraph 8 shows that it means lordship over the others, as the "vicar of Christ." In other words, supremacy means that when he teaches God's Word to the other pastors or "presides" over their doctrine, the other pastors should regard his interpretation and teaching as authoritative because of his status as their pastor. That's supremacy.

It has been acknowledged that our arrangement of synod president (that the president is the pastors' pastor) exists by human right and authority, with the caveat that he *carries out* the duty of "presiding" by divine right, because it's an essential part of the [indispensable presiding](#) office that he holds. He "presides" by divine right, because he holds the office of presiding. But we must say that he *holds* that office by *human* right, in order not to violate Treatise 7ff.

This means that the president's "presiding" has supremacy over the other pastors and missionaries of the synod, though his office itself does not. This is slightly different from what Treatise 7ff argues against. The Treatise denies that *the Roman bishop* is by divine right above other bishops and pastors. In our synod arrangement, the president *himself* is seen as above the other pastors only by human right, but his *presiding* is above them by divine right.

So tell me. Is that splitting hairs, or is it straining gnats? I'm fine with either. I just want to avoid swallowing the Roman camel, but I'm not convinced that we haven't already. If nothing else, such fine hairsplitting means we have to carefully, oh so carefully, explain the difference between what God has established and the human traditions that we establish. How much of the the synod president's authority exists by necessity, according to God's Word? How much of that authority is a matter of our own tradition, voluntarily accepted, but only for convenience and order?

One more difference in respect to shepherds: our practice concerning the Call of the shepherds is very different in the synod's case. It would be scandalous in a congregation to call a pastor the way we elect a synod president, particularly for a limited term. I'm not sure what this proves, if anything, but it's a serious contrast.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 01:04

Just what and where is the synod?

I apologize for not providing any earth-shaking conclusions in the last post. My conclusion about the office of synod president: "It depends." Probably not satisfying to most readers. But if two out of the three of you can accept it, we'll move on.

I actually received an email from a reader about this post. I won't divulge the author without permission, but he made a good point. My question, "Just what and where is the synod?" was unfair in presenting only those two, briefly stated alternatives. In fact, it looks a lot like a false dilemma, though he was too polite to write that out loud.

After thinking a bit about this email response while working on various parts of our house this New Year's Day, I have concluded that the question deserves a lot more attention: **Just what and where is the synod?**

Here's part of what my responder wrote:

I would say that neither of the options you present is a fully accurate description of a "synod" (even though each of the options you present contains a part of the answer). A "synod," properly speaking, is not so much the congregations that walk together, but it is *the walking together of the congregations*. It is a *verbal noun*, as it were. The synod is the cooperative efforts of the congregations, and by extension the institutions that exist for the purpose of such cooperation.

I can see how this could be true. The synod is not only a collection of congregations but is also their *acting* together as a body. Thus, the home and foreign mission endeavors, the seminary, the administration, the various boards and committees, and even the college may be understood "verbally," as ongoing cooperative acts of all the ELS churches.

That would mean that the synod is manifested by the cooperative works of the congregations. The synod *is* the working together. But does it bring us closer to answering our question? *Just what and where is the synod?* It may. In fact, I think it does. But like so many things, it leads to more questions.

Here's a complicated one. Is synod church? So far, I've come up with two ways to answer this: Yes, and no.

As much as the synod exists to confess the Gospel in the world, it has a sort of churchly character. But what sort, exactly? A congregation is gathered by the means of grace and manifested as church by its use of the means of grace, God's Word and sacraments. These are the marks of the Church. So say our confessions, and so say we all. But what does this mean? We're talking about the Holy Christian Church, the oft-called "invisible" Church, "the congregation [or collection] of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered" (AC VII). So the synod also has a churchly character because it teaches the Gospel. Or perhaps more accurately, because the synod *is* the cooperative Gospel-teaching of its member churches.

But like our congregations, the synod is not entirely invisible. It's organized and administered, from a temporal point of view, in temporal ways. It has temporal assets. While it may be acknowledged that the synod has a sort of churchly character, but it is not The Church. Of course, neither are the congregations. Both are organizations existing in the world, associations made by human beings.

It's profitable for us to compare and contrast synod and congregation in terms of their churchly character, because this should help us figure out how to regard the authority of the synod and its administration, over against the authority of each congregation and pastor. What is churchly character? That's hard to say, and inevitably will be a bit subjective. I'm going to say it involves a flock and shepherd, gathered around the means of grace in some regular, identifiable context. Here are a few points of comparison, in no particular order.

In respect to the flock

The Smalcald Articles III, XII states, "For, thank God, [to-day] a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd." The "believers and lambs" are the Shepherd's flock. The Shepherd is Christ.

Wherever the Word is rightly taught, we may be sure that the Church is there, that is, the Holy Christian Church. Does that always mean that an instance of "visible" church is also present? Not necessarily.

But how are we to define an instance of "visible" church? We might define it such that every Christian family that prays and hears God's Word around the dinner table is an instance of "visible" church. I don't know of any biblical reason not to define it so, but we are not accustomed to that. For some reason, we have reserved our recognition of "visible" church to those assemblies which have a public minister to preach God's Word, and preferably also to administer the sacraments. We have also said that a person can be a member of only one Christian flock at a time. Without scriptural support, it all seems a bit arbitrary, but there it is. I should look at Pieper again when I get the chance.

The surest path is to stick with the explicit commands and promises of our Lord. He told His Church to "do this" when He instituted the Lord's Supper. He told His Church to baptize and to teach His doctrine. In the same breath, He promised (by those means) to be present with His Church. So then, what's so special about congregations? Is it that this is our best example of $\mu\alpha\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$, the regular meeting of Christians around the maximum use of the means of grace, including both the sacrament of initiation and the sacrament of, well, communion? That seems completely reasonable to me, yet still somewhat arbitrary.

In any case, a congregation's flock is identified fairly easily. They receive the means of grace as part of that church on some regular basis.

Does the same criterion identify a flock of the synod? I don't see it happening, unless you're willing to overlap the synod's flock with a congregation's flock. You *can* say that the synod's missionaries are pastors, and those who receive their ministry are the synod's flock. Missions is a major synod activity, but really only one of many. Do you also find the synod's flock on Brown's Court in Mankato? At convention, conferences, board and committee meetings in Minneapolis? At mission rallies and evangelism workshops? In every case, the people there are already members of a congregational flock.

Maybe someone can identify the synod's flock more clearly than I can, but it seems evident that wherever it may be, it's a different *sort* of thing from the flock at a local congregation.

In respect to the shepherds

The Shepherd of the Church is Christ. He has also sent shepherds under Him to watch over and feed specific parts of His flock. They are easily identified in local congregations. They preach, teach, and administer the sacraments. The PMW says this much rather clearly.

Who are the under-shepherds of the synod? You could say that these are the missionaries, because they do regularly preach, teach, and administer the sacraments, as the case may be. It's their purpose. But it's not the purpose of the synod administration. Is it? That's not a rhetorical question. That I know of, it's not the purpose of the synod administration. The administration includes the officers and board members. Their purpose includes *facilitating* the preaching, teaching, and administering of the sacraments by missionaries and in congregations.

The president, vice president, secretary, giving counselor, mission counselor, or circuit visitors will preach as such from time to time in various places, with a special invitation. Does that make them shepherds of the synod? Not most of the time, because they often preach to local congregations, not in the context of inter-congregational synod work. But sometimes they do preach in the context of inter-congregational synod work. It would seem that during the moments when they are doing that preaching or teaching of God's Word --- in the context of inter-congregational synod work --- they are shepherds of the synod.

The president also "presides" over inter-congregational synod work. This presiding requires the use of sanctified Christian judgment and the application of love, yet it's mostly administration of the synod's guidelines and resolutions of the synod convention. That doesn't seem particularly shepherd-like. Who receives his presiding? Good question. Even the president doesn't have the right to minister to members of a pastor's flock without his invitation and full knowledge. So if presiding is pastoral ministry, then the president must be a shepherd to someone else. Is it the pastors of the synod or missionaries? No, because a formal relationship like that would violate [Treatise](#) paragraphs 7 and following, with the accompanying scriptural passages.

Sometimes pastors and others may voluntarily ask the synod president to be their father confessor. In that case, he must speak the Gospel in the role of a shepherd, just as [the catechism](#) says. But that's unrelated to his role as synod president.

The most obvious example of inter-congregational work is at the annual synod convention. There we have devotions, worship services, and even the Lord's Supper. Yet the flock receiving this ministry all belong to other flocks. Many of the ministers there are also regularly called to other flocks. Strangely, the synod officers who would most easily qualify as the synod's "pastors" don't usually participate in the administration of the means of grace. That is, they don't usually preach or administer the Lord's Supper. I don't know of any baptisms that take place in that context. (Is that a key fact?)

Not that I have much of an answer here, but it's evident that the synod, as "visible" church, differs from congregations in respect to its shepherds. Are you beginning to think that the churchly character of the synod depends entirely upon the churchly purpose of the congregations as they set out to cooperate in some of their work? So am I.

Since this is getting a bit long, I'll post later about comparing synod to congregations in respect to the use of the means of grace and in respect to context. Hopefully this isn't way too long already. I welcome comments on this subject, because this seems to be hard soil, so it bears tilling more than once.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 00:04